

Feminization, Construction and Re-Construction of Madness:
Intertextuality between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

The thesis/project titled “Feminization, Construction and Re-Construction of Madness: Intertextuality between Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea” Submitted by Jamila Jalali (16303011) of fall, 2019 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English on 18th December 2019.

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Abstract

Even though men did suffer from mental illness theirs was considered a disease that required to be cured while madness or deviant behavior in women was considered something demonized, wicked and dangerous. The aim of my dissertation is to critically examine *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, focusing on the depiction of madness as form of revolt against the patriarchal oppression, with particular emphasis on the textual construction of female madness in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and re-construction of it by the Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the introduction, I will offer a brief history about madness, where female madness shall be emphasized; in the following chapters I shall look closely into the novels, exploring the depiction of madness in both the novels, focusing on the protagonist, whose madness is not hereditary, rather constructed and imposed upon her. I therefore argue, that the protagonist, nonetheless, is labeled as a stereotypical madwoman, who is supposedly wild and dangerous as a result of being cast aside by her husband who she was deeply in love with. In my concluding chapters I shall highlight how the author bends language in order to re-construct the image, which was previously established in *Jane Eyre* regarding the madwoman, the use of metaphors for madness, vocabularies and the storyline, where the oppressed is allowed to narrate the story and in doing so she provides a voice for those marginalized and neglected women labeled insane.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Female Madness in History

For various centuries, madness has been perceived as a feminine illness and it continues to be so in recent times. It is these works of art and literature that portray the depiction of women in history creating an image of them being weak, vulnerable; emotionally unstable as well as dangerous indicating that they require containment. A very lengthy history exists when it comes to the construct of women as deviant, untypical and different, they have, indeed, been viewed to be uncontrollable in the world's major religious traditions and therefore, creating a link and interconnectedness between concepts of femininity, gender and the cultural construction of madness. Ancient Greece and Rome is a place known for the origin of dramas, and it was in these dramas that madness was used as a medium to comment on the human condition, also metaphorically indicating the disruption and collapse of the cultural and social norms, indicating the society's ill (Little5) . However, madness then was associated with divinity and the reason of it offered an explanation for misfortune, and a punishment for sins. Madness in these dramas was portrayed through fever, reckless and uncontrollable behavior, hallucinations, delusions, irrational speech, murderous intentions or any sort of deviant behavior. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher and Hippocrates, the Greek physician, hypothesized the basis of depression and insanity, they made various assumptions and speculation regarding this subject. The cause was not clearly defined, but hysteria was considered to be a disease of the womb. However, later on, during the Middle Ages, at the time of war and plague, when there was extreme destruction and deaths, which did not have any scientific explanation, under the rule of the church, it was assumed to be the results of evil spirits. The church claimed that a group of dissidents in Germany were communicating with the evil spirits and with their help casting spells in order to destroy crops and deaths of infants. The Pope, who was in power then, urged and advised to hunt and kill those who were involved in such crimes related to witchcraft. Mostly Europe and North America were

considered as common places where witch trials would take place resulting in torture, sufferings and deaths of many women. Witches were considered dangerous, and were blamed for causing death, illness and famine. Women during those times were considered as second-class citizens in comparison to the men, and so they were targeted and used as scapegoats. Additionally, women who were depressed, melancholic and lonely, were accused of witchcraft and also those who had some sort of psychotic symptoms or distinctive behavior in any way from the societal norms. Sometimes, women were accused of such crime as a result of revenge or any sort of enmity. They were tortured in various ways, raped, publicly shamed, brutally tested and in the end proven guilty and sentenced to death either by burning them alive or hanging them. However, as time passed in the mid seventeenth century, the colonial period, the colony's admitted the witch trials were a mistake and the women accused of witchcraft were not corrupted by the demons or evil spirits rather they were suffering from mental illness. Hence, this laid steps for gendering madness as female. Eventually the label of "witch" imposed upon the women shifted to mad or hysteric. (Little 7).

The speculation made by the Greek physicians and philosophers regarding female madness persisted into the Victorian era. Major works of literature clearly explained a link between sexual abuse and the psychological trauma and distress (Woods 5). The famous Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud's theories regarding hysteria was highly influenced by the beliefs shared by the Greek physicians. He carried out various case studies which led him to the conclusions that the stems of hysterical symptoms were sexual problems or psychological distress. These studies led him to his development theories which incorporated the Oedipus complex and his penis envy theory. His development theory suggested that personality occurred in various steps and stages and if the stages were not completed properly it would eventually result in hysteria later in life. Even though today many of Freud's theories are not taken into account yet remain an influence.

Through works of literature we find that sexual repression was a dominant characteristic of the Victorian era. An era, where the ultimate lifelong goal of a woman was marriage and those who chose to remain unmarried and independent were mocked and ridiculed by all. Success for women was being identified as a wife and mother, placing higher value on virginity and chastity in perspective of being a wife. Hence, works of literature provides an opportunity for us to understand the experiences, sufferings and difficulties these women in the past faced and still do in the patriarchal societies trying to explore such issues. Due to the patriarchal nature of the Victorian societies, the psychiatrists and physicians who dealt with the madwomen were men, the voices of the women were therefore repressed. The doctors dealt and consulted with the husbands or fathers, who had control over the lives of the women brought to the asylums. These women were not necessarily ill and did not require medication rather were just required to be locked up as per the male family member's convenience, mainly in order to get rid of them. The women in asylums were not just in physical pain but rather depressed, broken down due to lack of hope, companionship and in other words, the "wandering womb" was not the cause of madness in women, rather the treatment they had received throughout their lives, taking care of their female duties rather than being treated as human beings with opinions, feelings and hope (Showalter 61).

The Victorians also believed that it was women instead of the men who were more vulnerable to insanity and likely to pass it on to their generation. Therefore, authors of the Victorian eras adopted the traditional images of insanity and portrayed it in their works, such as in *Jayne Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë defines madness of the first Mrs. Rochester, the animalistic image of madness reflects a deviation from the rational human condition, and we are shown a female character who is violently insane. It was during that time that insanity was widely explained by any inappropriate behavior that was not accepted by the societal norms such as a woman being loud, sexually promiscuous or unsophisticated. Jean

Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jayne Eyre*, Bertha is called Antoinette, and is provided a voice for the readers to get a different perspective of the life of a madwoman, portraying her as a human being with needs and reasons behind the things she does.

1.1:Representation of Madness in Literature

“Though this be madness, yet there is method in't”. – William Shakespeare (Hamlet)

Theatre, being the earliest form of entertainment and a way of communicating with the audiences, has always found great fascination in portraying madness since a madman or a madwoman were considered as an influence and reflection of the society. Through the words of the famous playwright William Shakespeare even before various research was done on madness, he provided the readers and audiences with ideas about madness through his plays, in the words said by Polonius in Hamlet, he says that a person whose actions and doings might seem absurd and crazy to another person there is always a rational purpose in what one is doing. However, the madwomen were of more fascination since they depicted a cultural link between femininity and insanity. An important question that arises through all works of art and literature is that of what madness really means, according to Julianna Little, in her essay, ‘“Frailty, thy name is woman”: Depictions of Female Madness’, she says, “There is no one description that can capture all the variants of what might be considered deviant behavior and thought over time. It is a concept that has been characterized by centuries of religious, political, social, medical, and aesthetic dynamics”. The definition of madness according to her changes according to the lenses it is viewed through. When viewed through religion, madness was used as a tool to oppress or persecute, medically madness was considered an illness or disease of the mind, politically and socially insanity was considered to be oppressed, discriminated and confined. In literature when madness was viewed aesthetically it was associated with the reflection of the society and a form of self-expression

(Little 2). Michael Foucault in his “Madness and Civilization” gives detailed accounts of how the lunatic was viewed as something very unusual and their appearance or sight seemed fascinating for the people to watch. Foucault writes: “It was doubtless a very old custom of the Middle Ages to display the insane. In certain of the *Narrturmer* in Germany, barred windows had been installed which permitted those outside to observe the madmen chained within. They thus constituted a spectacle at the city gates.” (Foucault 64). Hence, the madmen and madwomen being treated as an exotic spectacle gave dramatists an opportunity to portray madness in their dramas and provide various lenses for the audiences to view it. A definition of madness therefore evolved during the sixteenth and seventeenth century laying steps for the treatment that the troubled individuals receive in recent times. Amy C. O'Brien provides various depictions of madness in Renaissance drama where mental illness was considered as an activity of the demon possessing the human body. Since it was considered demonic no other factors, be it cultural or psychological was taken into account, more over various treatments were carried out to get rid of the evil spirits which included sweating the body, vomiting and bleeding (O'Brien 11). According to her, “Portraits of insanity and of insane asylums in the literature of Renaissance England generally reflect the inhumane and fantastical treatment of actual illnesses and expose the corruptions and ineffectiveness of institutionalized treatment.”(12). In the process of treating the patients, many were tortured, physically as well as mentally and many were killed. The literature of the Renaissance England exposed the inhumane treatment that especially the women were receiving in comparison to the men. The modern writers on the plight of the women during that period focused on writing about a major cause of mental illness of women being that was the discrimination that they faced by the society in comparison to the men. The women were placed below the men and had very little or no liberty upon marriage. The women felt inferior to the men and were placed in restrictions even though they belonged to a seemingly free

society. Their helplessness and worthlessness resulted in their disturbed state of mind, making them feel undervalued and oppressed. These factors might have highly contributed to the mental illness in most women (O'Brien 10). Furthermore in her opinion, Amy, explains that the literature written about madness in the Renaissance era, showed women in chaotic situations being driven into madness, while some cannot take the patriarchal pressure and takes steps of suicidal while others sink into depression or find the strength to combat and fight against it (10) . Whenever we speak of literature William Shakespeare is a name which is unforgettable, hence he has created some notable characters in his plays which portray madness of different kinds. His creation is unforgettable such as the character of Lady Macbeth in the play Macbeth, who portrays madness through obsessive compulsive behavior. Another remarkable character he creates is that of Ophelia in Hamlet, who is a love-struck melancholy woman. She is portrayed with loose hair decorated with garlands of flowers. Women with loose hair during the Renaissance era were considered to have conducted an offensive behavior. Female madness was romanticized within these dramas which had no relevance of real life interpretation of mental illness. During Renaissance another drama that portrayed insanity of women and their treatment was John Webster's Duchess of Malfi. This drama portrayed the patriarchal oppression and domination that the Duchess had to go throughout her entire life eventually leading to her death (O'Brien 18). These works of literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth century exposed the oppression that women were facing driving them into madness.

Susanna Bennett conveys that, "Madness was an ambiguous topic in the nineteenth century, a theme popular with novelists because of the narrative potential it provided. During this time the term encapsulated organic illnesses, psychological issues and social problems under its broad terminology. Increasingly madness was regarded as an illness in need of medical treatment, although residues of eighteenth century anxieties about madness as an

absence of reason and even a moral evil remained.” (2). The definition of madness had evolved since the sixteenth century up until the nineteenth ,mental illness was considered a medical condition yet remained a controversial term. The struggle was real for the Victorian female authors to represent women in their work due to various limitations imposed upon them. Their works either portrayed a woman angelic or insane and monstrous. Susanna Bennett in her work “Representations and Manifestations of Madness in Victorian Fiction” reveals various portrayals of madness in Victorian literature. One main aspect of madness in the Victorian novels was that of madness as a hereditary illness being a root cause of lunatic behavior (6). The way in which insanity was portrayed in literature highly influenced the Victorians resulting in the gendered approach to madness. She further conveys, “Females were believed to be emotionally unstable and therefore were likely to manifest symptoms of lunacy when burdened with too much emotion.” (7). Social class was another important aspect during the Victorian era, which influenced the way people were diagnosed with forms of madness. Causes of Madness was different for the poor, middle class and the rich. For the poor, malnutrition, exhaustion of the body and muscles, monotonous life, misery, financial stress was the root to insanity , while for the middle class competition, failure, stress of business were the main root and for the rich was over consumption (Bennett 9). Other ways in which madness was portrayed in Victorian literature was that of alcoholism and criminal acts. The way alcohol influenced a person’s behavior was similar to what insanity did. Criminal acts were thought to be committed by one when he or she were not in a reasoning state of mind similar to what madness was thought to be. There was a reinforcement of fear and anxieties as most Victorian novels constructed madness as dark, dangerous and violent.

Much Madness is divinest Sense -

To a discerning Eye -

Much Sense - the starkest Madness -

'Tis the Majority

In this, as all, prevail -
 Assent - and you are sane -
 Demur - you're straightway dangerous -
 And handled with a Chain –
 - Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson a well-known poet of the Romantic era, writes in her poem “Much Madness is divinest Sense –”, about insanity a familiar topic in the modern era, where she argues that if a woman does not act according to what the society thinks is appropriate, then she is labelled as insane, abnormal, dangerous and needs to be locked up (R. Anderson306). She further argues that madness is divinest sense as an appropriate reaction to the male domination and patriarchal oppression. In her poem she sheds light upon her ideas of being regarded as mad, insane rather than remaining in a forceful unhappy marriage or excluded from the world of knowledge intellect and learning. She believed that insanity was a way out of the oppression that women faced in the patriarchal society. The frequent portrayal of female madness in Victorian novels in the nineteenth century, led to the feminization of madness which constructed the female malady and can be read in a way which looks at women as the other. This construction of female madness was even noticed by Michael Foucault, the French philosopher, literary critic and social theorist. He was a highly influential figure who insisted that madness was a social construct through his “Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason”. He wrote “It’s not a history of the development of psychiatric science but of the imaginary moral and social context within which it developed. There’s no objective knowledge to madness, but merely the formulation of a certain experience.” (Foucault 66). In recent times, as we have advanced more and more in various fields of medical science, the literature produced now is different from that produced in earlier eras. Just as authors like Jean Rhys and Sylvia Plath in their novels focus

to teach women to create various identities for themselves due to the patriarchal limitations and oppression, furthermore providing a voice for the marginalized insane women, who are silenced. Other ways of representing madness in the twentieth century was that of the traumatic and psychological effects of the world wars, loneliness, depression, isolation and identity crisis of the troubled individual.

Hence, madness was highly influenced by the period and its meaning evolved with time and circumstances and society, what remained was that the madwoman was of more fascination than the madman to the authors as it gave a narrative thread with multiple plot and character possibilities engaging the readers more and more.

Chapter 1.2: Methodology and Aim

As discussed earlier, that madness throughout the centuries and works of literature have been associated with women. Similarly, Bronte portrays the treatment that the madwomen received during her time, the Victorian era where madness was considered hereditary and a feminine illness, dangerous and one which required confinement. She shows that the madwoman was denied a voice and autonomy by creating the character of the silenced Lunatic Bertha Mason. This portrayal seemed disturbing to Jean Rhys who was highly influenced by her time, when there was advancement in psychiatry and she therefore gives the madwoman a voice to help the readers understand her pain and sympathize with her. Therefore in my paper I have firstly shed light upon the literary theory of intertextuality. Which shows that works of literature are a continuation of the other, each piece of literary work is inescapably related to another. Similarly, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an intertext of *Jane Eyre*. The past memories of Bertha's life is narrated by Bertha herself who was Antoinette before being renamed by her husband, therefore renaming in the novel is where intertextuality paves a path. Bertha as well as Mr. Rochester are the common characters, along

with other elements such as dreams and gothic elements borrowed from Bronte's novel. Additionally I will be looking closely at *Wide Sargasso Sea* from the Post-colonial lens, where experiences of those colonized and their relationships with the colonizers is explained, focusing upon how the brutal colonial history affects the life of the protagonist and pushes her towards madness. Lastly looking through the feminist perspective which observes gender in relation to power, I shall highlight the patriarchal oppression which the protagonist goes through her entire life serving as one of the reasons of her deteriorating mental condition. My aim is therefore to show that the protagonist's mental condition was not hereditary rather constructed by providing rationales present in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in contrast to *Jane Eyre* where she is silenced. Hence, I will be referring to Michael Foucault, Elaine Showalter, Edward Said as well as Frantz Fanon to provide evidence for my research question along other journal articles.

Chapter 2: Intertextuality between Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea

A literary work can be a continuation of another by using intertextuality, a term first coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s where she combined various theories of language and literature together (Martin, 148). She believed that each text was a rewriting of another text and that there were intersections with 'surfaces' from other texts. Intertextuality was a theoretical approach mainly by the postmodernist authors in order to strengthen core ideas of their texts, however it can be found between any text, including postcolonial/colonial ones. The concept of intertextuality is present between *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. Jean Rhys writes her novel as a prequel to "Jane Eyre" and in her work she narrates the story of the lunatic Bertha. Voice is provided to Bertha which was previously absent in Brontë's work. However, she not only re-creates the mad woman who was previously portrayed as a monster, but also writes about her husband Mr. Rochester trying to make the readers understand them both (Pizzichini 279).

The story of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, highlights the life of Antoinette Cosway, a white Creole heiress, beginning from her childhood in the Caribbean and moving towards her unhappy marriage to an unnamed Englishman who reconstructs her identity by changing her name in the course of their marriage, later declaring her insane and taking her to England with him, where she is locked up in an attic. Throughout the novel we see her caught up in an oppressive patriarchal society as well as identity crisis as she neither belongs to the white Europeans nor the dark skinned Jamaicans. In order to understand where the two novels intersect, it is important to discuss the plot of *Jane Eyre* briefly as well. A Bildungsroman where the life of Jane is narrated straight from her childhood to her adulthood, the story is narrated in first person by Jane, where she talks about how she falls in love with her employer Mr. Rochester portrayed as a Byronic character. Bertha is the only obstacle between Jane's happiness as she is the first wife of Mr. Rochester, depicted as a mad, dangerous and

monstrous woman locked up in their attic. Eventually Bertha escapes from the attic and burns down the house killing herself. Mr. Rochester is injured, yet in the end reunites with Jane.

In *Jane Eyre* Bertha is a minor character who is the central character Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. We see, that she is referred to as Bertha by her husband as well as several other characters and this renaming of her is where the postmodern device intertextuality paves its path. Hence, the two characters are common between the two novels. When Antoinette's husband calls her Bertha she replies, "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too." (Rhys94). Bronte narrates the life of Jane from childhood to adulthood and Rhys does the same for Antoinette. In the course of Jane's life we see that she matures through her life from a disturbed and miserable childhood she eventually becomes stronger with time. However, Rhys chooses a similar starting point of her story by narrating the miserable childhood of Bertha where she was rejected by the white Europeans as well as Black Jamaicans. Her life story is narrated in detail providing us an insight into her isolated and gloomy childhood. The depravity of maternal love was also a common element for both Jane and Bertha. Even though both these characters have similar childhood experiences of living in an isolated world, powerless and unprotected, yet they end up differently. Jane grows stronger with time and experience while Bertha is vulnerable and slowly slides into insanity.

Another common element between the two novels is that of dreams, which are used to foreshadow the future and happenings in the novel as well as to portray the suppressed desires and fears of Jane and Antoinette. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we find several instances where dreams play a vital role. As a child she had seen her first dream, after which she finds her friend Tia betraying her. "I went to bed early and slept at once. I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed, I could not move. I

woke crying” (Rhys 11). This dream of hers portrayed her fearful future which was ahead of her. Similarly, we find another dream which just like the first predicts her alarmed future, and the fears repressed in her unconscious mind.

Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest. I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen. Now we have reached the forest. We are under the tall dark trees and there is no wind.

"Here?" He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. ... (Rhys 34)

This dream also foreshadows her arranged marriage with Mr. Rochester along with all the anxieties she has suppressed within her regarding her husband. And in the end we see the last dream of hers which connects to Bronte's novel. The dream where she says, "That was the third time I had my dream and it ended. I know now that the flight of steps leads to this room where I lie watching the woman asleep with her head on her arms. In my dream I waited till she began to snore, then I got up, took the keys and let myself out with a candle in my hand..." (Rhys 122). Jean Rhys takes Bronte's ending and attaches it to the last dream of Antoinette. However, Rhys leaves the ending an open one for the readers to interpret unlike Bronte. In Rhys's novel Bertha only dreams of the violent revenge that is conveyed in *Jane Eyre* (Mojgan, Shirin and Nasim 158). Rhys aims to keep Antoinette's innocent character till the end of the novel, hence, just depicts her fate as a dream unlike Bronte, who shows the violent side of Bertha who burns down Thornfield.

Lastly Gothic elements present in both the novels show a sense of intertextuality. The novels have Gothic and supernatural elements creating a psychological suspense for the readers (Mojgan, Shirin and Nasim 160). Since Bronte was highly influenced by the Gothic novels during the nineteenth century she incorporated those within *Jane Eyre* and Rhys borrows the Gothic elements of Bronte's novel and brings it into "Wide Sargasso Sea". The superstitions of the Caribbean as well as their belief in magic and obeah creates a supernatural atmosphere in Rhys's novel. Rochester's uncanny experiences, the strange character of Christophine and lastly the element of madness present in the novel adds on to the gothic elements borrowed from *Jane Eyre*. Therefore, the same subject matter, theme of dreams and the gothic elements act as features which connect both the novels and show that Rhys uses *Jane Eyre* as an intertext for her novel even though the plot and story is distinct. The postmodern technique of intertextuality therefore substantiates an important message: that works of literature are a continuation, mixture or repetition of other works with little or no originality (Mojgan, Shirin and Nasim 162).

Chapter 3: Difference in portrayal of Lunatic Bertha

3.1: Portrayal of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*

As discussed earlier, *Jane Eyre* as an intertext for *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the common element between the two novels is that of the Lunatic Bertha. However, in both novels she is portrayed differently. Valerie Beattie in her journal article conveys, “Whether she is construed as the champion of female rebellion, or as the image of monstrosity that Jane Eyre must reject in the course of her Bildungsroman, Bertha Mason, Charlotte Brontë’s paradigmatic madwoman, continues to compel feminist criticism to address the highly problematic yet omnipresent conjunction of madness and femininity.” (493). Charlotte Brontë presents an iconic love story of Mr. Rochester and the governess Jane in *Jane Eyre* and in the process of doing so, she creates a remarkable character of the lunatic Bertha Mason, who although portrayed as an obstacle to Jane’s happiness, becomes literature’s most memorable and controversial character. Bertha is picked up from Brontë’s novel and placed in the central position in *Wide Sargasso Sea* where the novel is narrated from her perspective, she is painted more sympathetically as Antoinette Cosway and is recognized as someone who represents all women in society who are victims of patriarchy and colonialism, yet possess power and strength to overcome such sufferings.

In *Jane Eyre*, as the title suggests, it is Jane the governess around whom the story revolves. Brontë places emphasis on Jane’s maturity from childhood to adulthood and the events that eventually make her stronger. She also creates the iconic love story of Jane and the Byronic hero Mr. Rochester. However in doing so, she creates an obstacle in Jane’s happiness, Mr. Rochester’s first wife, the lunatic Bertha, locked up in the attic due to her insanity. Bertha’s portrayal through the eyes of Mr. Rochester and Jane is seen throughout the

novel providing the readers an animalistic image of her. Bertha in Bronte's novel is silenced.

According to Foucault,

Language is the first and last structure of madness, its constituent form; on language are based all the cycles in which madness articulates its nature. Such discourse is both the silent language by which the mind speaks to itself in the truth proper to it, and the visible articulation in the movements of the body (100).

Foucault says that Madmen here are deprived of reason and suggests, "Begins where the relation of man to truth is disturbed and darkened" (104). Therefore, Bronte deliberately might have portrayed Bertha in such an inhumane way denying her voice, as to show the readers the treatment that the madwoman received during the Victorian eras and how they were viewed by the society. Foucault summarizes his ideas on the silenced by saying that, "in the inaccessible domain of nothingness" (107), he says that those who are accused and deemed as mad and those who have reached a point of nothingness and seem absurd and unreasonable to others, is similar to reality, where truth has been void and distorted through the social constructs, and reaching its own level of senselessness. Hence, in embracing madness then, it is an individual's ultimate display of attaining and sustaining personal freedom, arguably where they enter a realm that's a better place to exist, than reality. (Bruce 19).

In the first encounter that Jane has with Bertha she only hears, "demoniac laugh – low, suppressed and deep" and some gurgling and moaning (Bronte 164). Also, "a snarling and snatching sound, almost like a dog quarrelling" (Bronte 231). These descriptions of Bertha's voices even before the readers get to know about her, creates a savage like creature impression on them. Bertha is painted as a dangerous wild creature rather than a human being. Additionally as the story proceeds, we see Jane's first meeting with Bertha when she

tears her veil the night before the marriage; Bertha is described by Jane, as “a form”, that scares her. Jane conveys her thoughts on Bertha to Rochester, “the foul German spectre – a vampyre” (Bronte 312). “The “lurid” creature that tries on Jane’s veil and looks at her image in the mirror has a purple face, blood shot eyes, dark, swollen lips, and a furrowed brow” (Bronte312). The words and descriptions used for Bertha is that of a demonic figure, harmful and malicious. The most distressing image of Bertha is provided at the end of the novel where she is depicted as uncontrollable, destructive and wild. Bertha is denoted as “it”, instead of “she”, Bronte depersonalizes her and provides a beastly image of Bertha being extremely violent, jumping to her feet and grabbing Rochester by his throat in an attempt to murder him. Bronte describes that,

The lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equaling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest--more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. He could have settled her with a well-planted blow; but he would not strike: he would only wrestle. At last he mastered her arms; Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinioned them behind her: with more rope, which was at hand, he bound her to a chair. (322)

We see that Rochester had immense disgust and hatred towards Bertha as he in his wedding party in front of all the guests says, “Bertha Mason by name; Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations?”.

Rochester also reflects the Victorian beliefs of madness as a hereditary phenomenon. Jane’s descriptions about Bertha are such that they only portray her as a terror and a villain. Similarly Rochester’s view of her are not distinct. Rochester talks about his marriage to Bertha, and describes the unharmonious evenings he spent with her, the violent breakouts she would have and the cursing that he would have to face from her. “The filthy burden, the

maniac, the monster, as he calls her, was brought to Europe with him and locked in her “goblin’s cell” (Bronte 341). These descriptions of Bertha surely speak of the inhumane and unsympathetic treatment she had received. No description or account is provided in the novel of why Bertha had been driven into madness and how her condition had deteriorated. Lastly the burning down of Thornfield hall, was a destructive act carried out by Bertha which resulted in her death. “She once again tried to set the house on fire, succeeded this time, and in an irrational act that is to be expected from the likes of a lunatic, jumps to her death with a yell.”(Bronte472).

Therefore, Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, is a madwoman locked up in the attic and when set free a wild beast, destructive and dangerous. However, a gap left in Bronte’s novel about Bertha’s condition, her past life and how she had been driven into madness, and the person she was before her present condition creates an opportunity for Jean Rhys to use as a foundation for her *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys creates a past for Bertha and provides a different lens to view *Jane Eyre*.

3.2: Portrayal of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Bertha, Bronte’s most controversial character, locked up in the attic gave out an important message to all the women who were being rebellious about patriarchal society, that they would end up just like her and therefore should just accept the social restraints. However in recent times, Jean Rhys, a white Creole girl herself, rewrites the story of Bertha from the perspective of Bertha since she was dissatisfied with the depiction of Bertha by Bronte. She creates Bertha’s story where she gives her strength and power to rebel against the social Victorian constructions. Hence, there lies a difference between how she is portrayed in Bronte’s novel and in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In Rhys’s novel Bronte’s Bertha is not Bertha, rather she is Antoinette. No longer is she a lunatic, animalistic, uncontrollable beast

locked up in a dark attic, rather an attractive young lively Creole girl with mixed emotions, thoughts, love, relationships and memories and spirit of her own (Lerner 284).

Antoinette Cosway, is introduced as a white Creole girl, child of a white plantation owner in Jamaica. Just like all human beings she has various roles, of a daughter, sister, friend and wife who has been ruthlessly deprived off all the happiness she deserves. The world around her isolates, rejects her and tries to construct an identity for her which is that of a madwoman. In the first part of the novel, we find a delicate young girl's childhood full of solitude, isolation and rejection. Her only friend, Tia, betrays her and her mother who is labeled as a madwoman rejects her and she therefore never receives the love and affection from her mother. Hence, she lives in her own world which is a mixture of terror and peace. "But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her ...I was a little afraid of her" (Rhys 7). Hence, Antoinette longed for care and love which she never received from her family. After the death of Antoinette's father, her mother had married Mr. Mason who did care for Antoinette and had left half of his wealth to her and half to his real son. However, the death of her real father and loss of her brother and the deteriorating mental condition of her mother all contributed to a disturbed and gloomy childhood.

Separation from her loved ones had occurred very early in Antoinette's life. Additionally, as she grew up her stepfather got her married to an Englishman who was mostly interested in the wealth he would acquire through this bond. These words have been spoken by Rochester who agrees of their marriage as an economic bond, he says, "Thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. ...I have sold my soul or you have sold it, and after all is it such a bad bargain" (Rhys 42). However, she being deprived of love and care, fell in love with the man carelessly and attempted to find comfort in their relationship. She believed that her marriage was the only source of happiness and hope to get

her out of her present condition but due to the lack of love from her husband's side the marriage turned out to be another tragedy in her life. She has also been painted as a dependent woman even after having so much wealth to herself. She lacks power, and hence her freedom is taken away from her when Rochester re-constructs her identity as Bertha, whose fate is that written in Bronte's novel. Another portrayal of Antoinette was that of a girl cursed and hated by the natives of her hometown since she was the daughter of a slaveholder. She therefore finds herself in an identity crisis, and the people around her were hostile and mentally tortured her. She gives detailed accounts of how she had been treated by the people around her, "I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches. Let sleeping dogs lie. One day a little girl followed me singing, 'Go away white cockroach, go away, go away'. I walked fast, but she walked fast.... 'Nobody wants you. Go away'" (Rhys 9). The words that were used for her by others, deeply hit her within and were deeply rooted within her heart just like a curse (Anderson 40). Therefore, the hurtful childhood experiences, her husband's affair with a servant, betrayal, oddity in her husband's eyes for her, and the mental trauma from the people around her together was highlighted by Rhys in her novel in order to humanize Bertha's tragic and socially complex, even contradictory condition.

Chapter 4: Rationalizations of Madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

4.1: The colonial system

Literary works of the nineteenth century by British novelists were filled with superiority and depictions of the whites higher in rank and status. Similarly Bronte's novel was one where Jane was portrayed as the superior white, disciplined and modest, whereas Bertha, a Creole woman was painted as mad, wild, savage and undisciplined. Hence after this novel focusing on Englishness, Jean Rhys sets out to write her novel in order to raise voice

against the colonizers by creating a rebellious, mad character where she proclaims that Bertha will no longer be a helpless lunatic woman but a strong white Negress. However alongside she shows that the colonial system was a rationale which contributed to Antoinette's mental deterioration. The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* along with a feminist text is also a post-colonial text. Paula Grace Anderson in her journal article, "Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: The Other Side/"Both Sides Now" says that,

Wide Sargasso Sea is a book about being a woman, a particular type of woman, in a particular cultural environment, at a particular point in history. It is also a book about a particular environment and its psycho-cultural reality (57).

She emphasizes that this novel can be read from a feminist as well as a post-colonial perspective as the novel highlights the journey of a woman who is Creole, and emphasizes on the environment she belongs to and the historical context of it as well. Looking at the colonial system, where the colonial subject is the one who is oppressed and a source of labor and the identification of that subject is one that differs from that of the western powers. Additionally in the colonial schema, colonial subject's race, religion, ethnicity, culture is inferior to those who are in power. The slaves or colonized people are not seen as human beings with feelings emotions and thoughts, rather as a source of benefit and wealth for the colonizers. The oppressed are robbed off their culture, beliefs, and language and most importantly their lands are snatched away, resulting in identity crisis which as a result can lead to madness since the identity of the colonized people is fragmented and as an influence of the colonial powers their past keeps haunting them. As Luangphinit writes in his "Tropical Fevers: "Madness" and Colonialism in Pacific Literature", that any discussion on madness or insanity within the colonial scenario must always be viewed keeping in mind the constructed social positions which are also subjects of differences of class, color and heritage (61). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is not only the blacks whose identities are subjected to the colonial system but it is also the

Creole woman, Antoinette, who is stuck between the white imperialists and the black natives. She however lacks a solid identity and this lack of identity and crisis is one rationale of her madness. According to Frantz Fanon, in “Decolonizing Madness: The Psychiatric Writings of Frantz Fanon”, mental illness was as a real experience that people endure which is highly influenced by the society as well as the culture. His this understanding of mental illness led to the possibility of being able to link madness with colonial and post-colonial societies and culture. Fanon therefore showed the relationship between an individual and an oppressive social structure. In colonized places namely African countries right after the colonial rule, a great number of people were suffering from mental illness and were shipped to be locked up in asylums, Fanon however spoke against this inhumane treatment and he rejected the notion that psychiatric treatment could not be applied universally as everyone had different experiences and that in addition to biology other factors have an impact on mental condition.

The post-Emancipation Act was a period of disturbance and distress as there was a traumatic transition for both the whites and blacks in the West Indies. The whites once in power were now powerless and did not have money and the blacks who had been slaves and tortured by the powerful whites were now free yet full of hatred and disgust for the whites and holding on to the past memories of discrimination and dominance. Hence, Antoinette as a child is thrown in the face of a brutal history of the society and people around her. She is called “white cockroach” by the people around her and also cheated by her only black friend Tia (Anderson 60). Due to her environment Antoinette faces identity crisis, as she is neither accepted as a black nor a European. "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys 40). Just like her mother, she feels isolated and is not accepted in either worlds even though she has inheritances from both. In the face of this difficult life full of isolation, identity crisis, hatred, violence and poverty Antoinette goes through mental trauma. As the story begins, we immediately get to know about Antoinette's

family's position in the society, "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (Rhys 3). These opening lines show that the family was not a part of the Europeans living in the West Indies. Similarly the Jamaican natives did not approve of Antoinette's mother as a proper "Jamaican lady", since she was of "mixed blood", hence, neither the Europeans nor the black natives approved of Antoinette's family to be a part of their society, they made fun of them, bullied them and no one came near them either. We see that Antoinette's mother is the first one to be pushed into insanity as a result of grief due to the colonial history which results in her having a life full of isolation and solitude. Their house is set on fire as a result of which Antoinette's brother dies, this setting house on fire was done by some ex-slaves as to show their hatred. This incident and loss of a child drives Antoinette into madness which eventually leads to her death. Even after Antoinette's death her madness still followed Antoinette, the people kept talking about her madness and would stop if they saw Antoinette, additionally the people would say that as her mother was mad Antoinette would follow her footsteps and this is what really happens. Antoinette descends into madness not as a result of grief like her mother but as a result of being divided between two cultures and not being able to be a part of any. Loss of identity therefore plays a vital role in her mental breakdown.

In part one of the novel, where Antoinette gives detailed accounts of her childhood and past memories we see that the only friend she talks about is a black native Tia, who eventually betrays her, furthermore she talks about how her mother pushes her away and she does not receive the motherly care and love from her. As a result of which she detaches herself from the people around her and connects more to the nature, she says:

I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think, 'It's better than

people.' Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin – once I saw a snake. All better than people (Rhys 11).

Therefore, Antoinette's isolation, feeling of loss, fragmented identity all contribute to her unstable state of mind and vulnerability. Antoinette is "othered", as Edward Said phrases the process catalyzed by Orientalism, the term used to describe the culture and people of the "east". He conveys in his work, the construction of the orient and how it is problematic as it favors othering. He says "The Orient was almost a European invention..." (Said 71). Hence based on Said's analysis on the construction and creation of Orient, it is evident that it is merely a way to solidify Western culture and beliefs by creating a binary where the dominant part is that of theirs while the orient becomes the othered. Mainly because of being a Creole woman, of mixed blood, Antoinette is othered by both the black natives who are filled with immense hatred for the white colonizers and the Europeans who have lost power and wealth to the newly freed slaves hence, Jean Rhys narrates the story of the other. By emphasizing on the colonial system and providing an account of her past memories she provides a rationale for Bertha's madness depicted in *Jane Eyre*, showing that it was not hereditary as the Victorians believed rather a result of the brutal colonial history.

4.2: Influence of Social and Cultural Constructions

However, the colonial system was not the only reason behind Antoinette's madness, the social and cultural constructions also played a vital role in her mental instability. Marriage played an extremely important role in Antoinette's transition to Bertha. Her white husband, Mr. Rochester not only others her but also re-constructs her identity and takes away her autonomy. In the dynamics of their marriage, Mr. Rochester is given the position of the white settler and Antoinette as the colonized who is a means for the benefit of the colonizer. Just as we see that in order to better off his financial condition Mr. Rochester married

Antoinette and their union was for economic reasons. Hence, this relationship between the two acts as a metaphor to portray the power dynamics between the colonial subject and the colonizer (Şenel 42). However for Antoinette, the marriage was a way to find comfort and love which she had not received throughout her life, hence she was dependent on her husband for love as well as wealth. Just as the society expects a woman to be dependent, the patriarchal society which she was a part of resulted in her having to have no say in her marriage to a stranger decided by her step-father where all her wealth was given to her husband. Because of this economical exchange, Mr. Rochester gained power in their marriage and Antoinette was stripped of power. Antoinette's lack of power and agency in the marriage represents all women in a patriarchal society.

As for the narration of their marriage and Antoinette's mental breakdown we find that it is Mr. Rochester who narrates this part of the story. He provides an account of their marriage where he says, "So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations. Everything finished, for better or for worse" (Rhys 36). This is conveyed by Mr. Rochester as to embark on his honeymoon, but sounds more like a threat in his description of the courtship with Antoinette, he uses words which one would use for a war-like situation, and such vocabulary foreshadows the end and outcome of their marriage. Further in the novel we see that the name of the place where they stop for their honeymoon is "Massacre", this word however is used to foreshadow death, death of their marriage. Throughout their marriage we see that there is a sense of animosity displayed by the husband towards Antoinette. This contributes to the reason of madness which she eventually slips into after being cast aside by her husband, the only ray of hope in her life. Mr. Rochester states "the woman is a stranger" (Rhys 39) when he talks about his own wife, and others her by calling her "the woman" and a "stranger". She is alienated as for not being English nor European according to Mr. Rochester and he places her in the same category as the colonized others. As

for her description, the husband describes her eyes as dark and abnormal, additionally his use of vocabulary for her and his feeling of their marriage as something to protect himself from the other shows that there is was no sign of a happy ending. “I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love” (Rhys 56). Mr. Rochester accepts that he did not love Antoinette, rather he was just sexually attracted to her, and therefore he asserts his lack of love for her. Also we see that the husband refuses to communicate with Antoinette, when she tries to persuade him not to listen to false stories about her, he asks her “Is there any other side?” to which she replies “There is always the other side, always”, (Rhys81). Hence, the husband's question puts him in the position of the patriarch who refuses to listen to her. Due to her mixed blood, Antoinette can never be the proper English wife her husband demands her to be and because of which he slowly starts labelling her insane.

Antoinette is finally labelled as mad by her husband when he receives a letter from Daniel Cosway who claims to be her brother, as in the letter he says that she is a madwoman and that madness runs in her family, not astonished by this, as the letter serves as a confirmation of what Mr. Rochester had previously decided. Since madness was considered hereditary by the Victorians, according to Mr. Rochester it was a good factual reason to be portrayed for his wife's madness making him innocent from any contributions to her declining mental illness. Hence, we find the madwoman Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys therefore provides a different perspective to Antoinette's madness which differs from that of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* where madness is considered hereditary and in her blood. Therefore according to Rhys narrative, Bertha's madness was not hereditary, rather a reaction to her husband's cruel and cold behavior towards her, in deed, she says “Do you know what you have done to me?” (Rhys95). This shows that Antoinette knows that Mr. Rochester is to be blamed for her labelled madness. Her madness is nothing but a reaction to her husband who she loved with all her heart as he claims her to be mad and wild.

Hence, her madness was highly influenced by her relationship with her husband, instead of a happy married life, she had received betrayal, isolation and rejection. Throughout her life, right from childhood she was abandoned by her mother, betrayed by her only friend Tia, rejected and hated by the Europeans as well as the black natives, dominated by her step-father and forced to be married to a stranger who she accepts with all her heart yet receives nothing but betrayal and rejection. The incidents throughout her life makes her into the insane woman she is portrayed in *Jane Eyre*. These are the rationales that Rhys depicts through her narration and makes the readers sympathize with the wild, lunatic, dangerous monster in *Jane Eyre*.

Chapter 5: Reconstruction of Madness by Jean Rhys

Bronte's novel extensively reflects the Victorian notions of madness and explanations provided for Bertha's madness echo ideas influenced by Victorian psychiatry. Madness was considered a disease transmitted especially by the women to her children and so on. The notion of madness being hereditary was very much present in the novel, similarly a woman was considered "mad" due to deviant behavior and flaws in their character as women were required to be repressed sexually and emotionally and if they failed to do so they had to suffer as their behavior was not to be accepted by the society. These ideas therefore are clearly demonstrated in Bronte's novel through the character of Bertha, showing connections of insanity in women in the nineteenth century. Lynn argues that one cannot understand someone's life without having some knowledge about the time they lived in (148). Shedding light upon Lynn's thoughts, we see that after almost hundred years when Jean Rhys writes her novel as a response to Bronte's there had been advancement in psychiatry, no longer did people believe in the Victorian notions of madness, rather Rhys offers a completely different perspective of Bertha's madness in her novel. Jean Rhys narrates the madwoman's side of the

story making clear the rationales behind her being driven into madness and she also reconstructs madness as a form of revolt against the patriarchal oppression and racial complexities. She lifts the lunatic Bertha from the lowest position of a neglected, rejected wild woman to the heroine who possess immense strength and power in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* where she depicts the ultimate vengeance on Rochester as response to the oppression Bertha had to go through.

As Rhys sets out to paint the different perspective of Bertha's madness offered in Bronte's novel, in the process she reconstructs madness from a hereditary disease to a form of revolt and response to the oppression most women face under the patriarchal society. Bertha reacts with anger, rage and strength to the doings of her husband. First and foremost what we see in the novel is the renaming of Antoinette to Bertha by the husband. This act holds a very significant place firstly by connecting both the novels and paving way for intertextuality, secondly it shows us that the husband reconstructs Antoinette's identity, imposing Bertha upon her and forcing her to be someone who she is not. As Antoinette was not the proper English woman which the husband had expected for himself to be married to, he changes her name hoping her to fit into the desired role of the proper English wife. Through reconstructing her identity he also imposes authority over her clearly we see the patriarchy values instilled within him, Antoinette resists at first and questions him upon which she finds that Mr. Rochester was fond of the name Bertha and in order to please her husband upon who she was economically dependent accepts this renaming as an attempt to become the ideal English wife. Another reason for renaming of Antoinette was the similarity between her and her mother Annette's name. "He never calls me Antoinette now", Antoinette tells Christophine, "He has found out it was my mother's name." (Rhys 71). This shows that Mr. Rochester was however tracing the cause to Antoinette's madness to her mother's madness and fearing that her name would have an impact upon her, he renames her. Antoinette does

not just lose her name rather she loses her identity as the lively creole girl turning into Bertha. Hence, providing Bertha another name Rhys shows that it was not Antoinette who was not insane rather the husband casts her insane and being threatened by her passionate nature attempts to silence her by taking away her identity and turning her in the madwoman depicted in Bronte's novel. In the last part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette says, "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass. There is no looking glass here and I don't know what I am like now." (Rhys 117) These lines indicate that name holds the utmost position in indicating a person's identity and by locking her up in a mirrorless room Mr. Rochester did not want Antoinette to have any connection with anyone including her own self. Therefore, renaming and constructing a new identity for Antoinette made her feel detached from herself and therefore Rhys proves the readers that Antoinette did not want to be Bertha rather she was turned into the madwoman locked up in the attic.

Since Rhys portrays that the external factors contributed to Antoinette's deteriorating mental health condition, this key notion is illustrated through the trope of the looking glass, which Antoinette comes across in her dream towards the end of the novel. Lori Pollock in his journal article, "(An)Other Politics of Reading "Jane Eyre" mentions Jacques Lacan's theory of self, where the child looks at itself in the mirror to describe how he self and the other is created. According to Lacan, the child recognizes its image in the mirror but this recognition is split, where the child becomes the subject and the object (250). Hence, the looking-glass mentioned in *Wide Sargasso Sea* shows the detachment between Antoinette and her reflection, when she comes across a looking glass and according to her she sees a ghost, she says "The woman with the streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (Rhys 123). Even though, there is a detachment from her own self, yet there is recognition. The reflection that Antoinette sees is of hers, but not true to her, rather, this

reflection shows and confirms that madness was constructed and imposed upon her by others. Antoinette sees Bertha, the madwoman who had been created by her husband and others, this reflection of hers is not of the self but the other that is Bertha not Antoinette. Therefore Rhys describes the fragmentation of Antoinette's identity through racial as well as patriarchal oppression hence, she does not recognize her identity as Bertha Mason and seeks to destroy her other self.

Setting fire to Thornfield hall, was not as an act of madness rather an act of vengeance. Thornfield hall symbolizes Mr. Rochester's wealth and power. This act was not by Bertha, rather Antoinette a lively creole girl who had suffered patriarchal oppression, racial discrimination throughout her life. This was a response to all her sufferings that built up inside her and this act was perceived by the society as an act of madness. Which was the only way left for her to set herself free from the sufferings and oppression. When Antoinette dreams of Bertha's previous action in Jane Eyre she experiences the moments in terms of her own past and not what was written in Jane Eyre, she mentions her memories of Tia and her hometown Coulibiri. These past memories of Antoinette shows that destruction of Thornfield Hall was one where she had control over her actions and that it was up to her to translate her dream of Bertha's previous actions into reality. Li Luo conveys

In burning down Thornfield, Antoinette breaks out of the patriarchal system. The destruction of Thornfield is significant, because it is the way that leads her back to freedom. In destroying the tyranny of the patriarchy, Antoinette has taken revenge on the patriarchal society and her white oppressor and achieves her self-identity (1227)

Furthermore in his journal article, "A Symbolic Reading of Wide Sargasso Sea", he says, that fire symbolizes victory and in that fire, she finds her identity, freedom, destroys the prison, shows power and strength to take control over her actions and fulfills her revenge (1228).

She chooses to be seen as a madwoman for the society as it is her madness and silence that brings her husband's attention towards her and thus making her significant in some way which she had never been to anyone in her entire life. At the end of the novel, we find that the madwoman is provided with a voice and allowed to speak, unlike Bertha who only spoke through her insanity and madness, but Antoinette was given the opportunity to put her madness into words and express her feelings. She feels suffocated with all the words inside her mouth which she had deliberately silenced and hence breaks out. Her madness becomes the loudest weapon and she speaks her mind,

At last I was in the hall where a lamp was burning. I remember that when I came. A lamp and the dark staircase and the veil over my face. They think I don't remember but I do. There was a door to the right. I opened it and went in. It was a large room with a red carpet and red curtains. Everything else was white. I sat down on a couch to look at it and it seemed sad and cold and empty to me, like a church without an altar. I wished to see it clearly so I lit all the candles, and there were many. I lit them carefully from the one I was carrying but I couldn't reach up to the chandelier. Then I looked around for the altar for with so many candles and so much red, the room reminded me of a church. Then I heard of a clock- ticking and it was made of gold. Gold is the idol they worship. (Rhys 122)

Her words clearly show that though she is in a disturbed state of mind, she clearly remembers and knows exactly what she is doing, she can differentiate between dream and reality. Her drastic step towards freedom to most is madness, but looking through her perspective, she had taken entire control over the situation and people around her, she finds freedom and regains her lost voice. Therefore Antoinette needed to lose herself in order to gain herself back.

Grace Poole was sitting at the table but she had scream too, for she said, ‘What was that?’ She got up, came over and looked at me, I lay still, breathing evenly with my eyes shut. ‘I must have been dreaming,’ she said. Then she went back, not to the table but to her bed. I waited a long time after I heard her snore, then I got up, took the keys and unlocked the door. I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and burned it up again to light me along the dark passage. (Rhys 124)

Rhys provides the readers with an opportunity to read *Jane Eyre* through the absent voice of Bertha, in order to understand the hidden messages. ‘Clearly the words used within Antoinette’s speech and her presence of mind along with her actions all portray that her madness was imposed upon her and constructed by her situation and the people around her. Jean Rhys provides a voice to Antoinette to convey the readers the struggles of a Victorian woman who did not follow the traditional norms of the society and was therefore labelled mad and insane. Elaine Showalter in her *The female malady: women, madness, and culture in England, 1830-1980*, draws a relationship between madness and women which has been constructed in two ways, one where madness is thought to be the wrongs of a woman and the other is that madness is “the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before the scientific male rationality” (3). Therefore madness was considered a female malady as more women experienced it and even if the men did experience it was still however considered feminine and this stereotype was imposed upon the women in the late eighteenth century during the Victorian Era in England. The asylums were filled with women and any deviant or not lady-like behavior was severely punished (Showalter 17). According to Showalter’s opinion on the relationship between madness and women, we find similar traits in Jean Rhys’s novel, where Antoinette’s Creole identity and deviant behavior unacceptable by the society eventually led

to her insanity. Hence, Rhys reconstructs the image of the madwoman which was previously constructed in *Jane Eyre* and lets the readers know why the madwoman does what she does.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Women starting from as early as the seventeenth century towards the nineteenth century continued to be the predominant group of patients in mental asylums. Even today, according to Elaine Showalter, women are the majority of patients at psychiatrist clinics and hospitals (3). Feminists around the world have found that women's position has continued to be that of the "other" and any kind of behavior in women which is unacceptable by the socially constructed feminine norms result in them being labelled "mad" or "insane". Hence any women who laughs a little louder, is open about her sexuality, stands up for herself, dares to dream in this patriarchal society is called "mad". Therefore throughout history, madness is perceived as an act of rebellion and resistance. It is the madwoman who people fear and it is she who receives attention. Therefore in an attempt to understand female madness it is important to keep in mind the things that have regulated their lives for centuries (Little 78). Elaine Showalter in her *Female Malady*, conveys that women throughout literature have been depicted as weak, fragile, beautiful, distracted, hence creating a cultural tradition of woman or femininity as madness (4). Hence, femininity and madness are intertwined in such a way that they have been made inseparable. However, there is no such notion that femaleness leads to madness in woman, nor is it genetic or hereditary. In order to look for answers regarding female madness it is important to know about the social constructions imposed upon womanhood. Hence, this is what Jean Rhys does in her novel, she highlights the past life of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, so that the readers can know why Bertha does what she does and through her narration she provides rationales of her insanity. She re-writes the story of the mad woman in the attic and redefines her final act of burning down Thornfield as a rebellion

against the oppression she had suffered rather than a random act of madness. Additionally Rhys emphasizes that Antoinette's eventual madness was a result of her husband's indifferent behavior and a marriage where she was tossed aside by him due to his European notions of a colonial woman. Rhys re-constructs the notions of the madwoman previously constructed during the Victorian Era and portrays Bertha as a victim of the patriarchal and colonist society. Bertha in *Jane Eyre* is denied a voice, identity and purpose which Rhys provides in her novel. Antoinette takes her revenge and lets herself free from the prison and pain she had received throughout her life. *Jane Eyre* is re-written from a modern postcolonial standpoint where Bertha is no longer held captive in the colonialist framework as she is provided with an identity and voice of her own. Rhys reconstructs the image of the wild and uncontrollable lunatic Bertha into a lively Creole girl with her own spirit and thoughts, a strong woman who despite her sufferings rebels against and overcomes the patriarchal and colonial oppression and regains her lost identity. Antoinette's entire life is portrayed as a struggle where she was never understood and constantly fought battles with her environment, people around her trying to be heard by someone and her madness was which helped her succeed . This complex phenomenon of women's madness cannot be ended with a simple answer, yet what remains is "her pain is very real and we must listen to what she has to say" (Little 81).

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