

**Rebirth of Bertha Mason in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Rereading *Jane Eyre* in the
Light of Postcolonial Feminism**

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing a 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 that has been accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

The thesis intends to explore the evolving dynamics of feminist literature by examining how colonial histories eventually reform into postcolonial feminist voices. By investigating Jean Rhys's reclamation of Bertha Mason or Antoinette Cosway, the underrepresented paranoid character in *Jane Eyre*, this research examines how Rhys creates a multidimensional figure of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* through a postcolonial lens. This paper also looks into Rhys' contrapuntal reading of Bertha or Antoinette, reclaiming her white Creole identity, unveiling the colonial oppression contributing to the broader discourse of postcolonial feminism (Said, *Culture & Imperialism*).

Contrapuntal reading, a term introduced by postcolonial theorist Edward Said in his work *Culture & Imperialism*, is a critical approach that analyses texts from two or more perspectives present in colonial literature. "In practical terms, "contrapuntal reading" as I have called it, means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England" (Said 66). The study investigates how Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be read contrapuntally to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in which the author presents the position of a coloured woman in Victorian literature. The central focus of this paper will be on Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, redefining the character of Bertha in a different light from Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and exploring how Rhys reads Brontë from an alternative angle. Through literary exegesis and a contrapuntal reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this paper analyses how each novel sheds light on the other within the context of the current postcolonial feminist scholarship.

Keywords: Creole identity, Postcolonial feminism, Contrapuntal reading, Reclamation, Transcreation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	2
Approval.....	3
Acknowledgement.....	4
Abstract.....	5
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	8
1.1 Statement of the problem.....	9
1.2 Rationale.....	10
1.3 Background.....	10
1.4 Theoretical Framework.....	13
1.5 Objectives.....	16
1.5.1 General Objectives.....	16
1.5.2 Specific Objectives.....	17
1.6 Literature review.....	17
1.7 Research Questions.....	20
1.8 Research Methodology.....	20
1.9 Scopes and limitations.....	22
1.10 Conclusion.....	23
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	24
Chapter 3 Discussion.....	38
3.1 “Othering Bertha Mason in the Victorian era”.....	38
3.1.1 The social context of Bertha’s living.....	38

3.1.2 Tracing the history of Bertha.....	40
3.1.3 Finding the roots of madness/neurosis in the 18th and 19th-century novels	41
3.1.4 Behind the attic: Why Rochester found life intolerable with Bertha.....	43
3.1.5 Bertha's silent voice in <i>Jane Eyre</i>	46
3.2.1 Reclaiming Bertha in <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>	47
3.2.2 Analysing Bertha's social and racial isolation through Rhys's novel.....	49
3.2.3 Spivak influence on Rhys's postcolonial transcreation.....	50
3.2.4 Bertha's Contrapuntal Vision in <i>Jane Eyre</i>	51
3.2.5 Bertha's Narrative Voice in <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>	52
Chapter 4: Analysis.....	55
4.1 Madness and feminist resistance of Bertha.....	56
4.2 Reclaiming the attic: Madness, gender, and colonial oppression.....	58
4.3 Questioning the patriarchal norms.....	59
4.4 Why this title, <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>	61
4.5 <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> and feminist retelling: Voices from Margins.....	62
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	63
Works Cited.....	65

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the shadow of Thornfield Hall and the turbulent history of the Caribbean, two voices echo through time - one restrained, the other reincarnated. Between restoration and reincarnation, at the heart of this thesis is a form of resurrection that needs our attention. In the first place, the character of Bertha Mason, a white Creole woman (father from the West and mother from the Dominican Republic) functions as a victim of colonial oppression in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*; and later, through the newly named character Antoinette Cosway, Jean Rhys recovers her position and points to it as a colonial domination in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Cutting through the thickets of colonial injustices and the tangle of gendered silences, Rhys gives a new birth to the woman who was once confined in colonial oppression. The aim of this research delves deeper into the intertextuality of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Rhys reclaims Bertha Mason's identity as Antoinette Cosway through the lens of postcolonial feminism.

Moreover, this study discusses the interplay between the silent narrative and colonial suppression in the works of Brontë and Rhys. Patriarchal forces not only dismantle Bertha or Antoinette as a reflection of Jane but also shed light on the excluded narrative. *Wide Sargasso Sea* investigates how Victorian coloured women have been subtly constructed through masculine authority, drawing on the particular experiences of the marginalised woman, Bertha, or Antoinette. The thesis examines how Bertha Mason's character as Antoinette Cosway showcases colonial patriarchy; therefore, some critical issues such as race, gender, belonging, and displacement are explored.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Underneath the grand towers of Thornfield Hall and blazing Caribbean sun lies a forgotten woman, Bertha Mason— a silenced, marginalised, and Creole woman. This is what inspires the discussion on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. These two accomplished writers' literary texts trace the complexities between patriarchal norms and colonial domination. Mr. Rochester's marginalised wife, Bertha or Antoinette, is shown as a madwoman, trapped in an attic by her English husband. This consequence forces modern readers to think about who she was in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, a 1979 book by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar inspired by Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In response to the white imperial narrative by Victorian author, Jean Rhys invites the readers to retell the story of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Antoinette, where she dares to confront the central forces of female identity formation that happen due to gender and racial displacement. Victorian readers thus misunderstood silent characters who were completely controlled by racism and gender dynamics, particularly prominent in characters like Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys's novel is crucial in emphasising Bertha's journey and her search for lost identity in a male-dominated society. At the root of this problem is the literary erasure of women's identities, who are Creole, marginalised, coloured, and unworthy of Victorian England.

Conveying all these arguments in her madness, Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* observes the colonial backdrop to a woman's quest to reclaim her lost identity and belonging. This masterpiece is regarded as a prequel to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where Antoinette Cosway is the heroine of the novel. This figure serves as a part of the colonial structure to find out how coloured women of the Victorian era were being misused by Victorian authors. Embracing all these ideas, this paper takes shape in the space between the two writings and asks: How does Jean Rhys reconstruct the narrative? And later, how does Bertha's voice become a speaker?

Through Brontë and Rhys's masterful narratives, I embark on a journey to unravel the complex web of race, gender, and colonial oppression that surrounds the character of Bertha Mason or Antoinette Cosway in my undergraduate thesis. In this setting, postcolonial feminism reclaims space and reveals how essential the *Wide Sargasso Sea* is to see Bertha from a contrapuntal voice in *Jane Eyre*.

1.2 Rationale

The thesis re-examines the silent narrative of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* through Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys's novel provides a powerful sense of postcolonial feminism by giving Bertha a new identity as Antoinette. Scholars such as Molly Hite, Gilbert and Gubar, Susan Sniader Lanser, and others have challenged the dominant male narrative voices. They examine how contemporary women writers subvert patriarchal norms and traditions. This research is important because it retells Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* deeply to rebirth the character Bertha and sees the character contrapuntally and giving different perspectives on the narrative views. Covering the intersections of gender, race, and resistance in both texts, the study highlights how Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a powerful transcreation of *Jane Eyre*.

1.3 Background

Postcolonial feminism builds on its theoretical foundation by exploring the connections between how colonial suppression and masculine ideas illuminate the silence of women in life and literature. It challenges both Western feminist universalism and colonial injustices that often erase women's talents in formerly colonial countries, particularly in the Caribbean. Postcolonial feminists argue that social justice is intertwined with the need for justice in identity and

displacement. Retelling *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals that male narratives have historically marginalised women's narratives and viewed them as silenced characters in Victorian society. Thus, Rhys' rewriting of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an inclusive work for understanding Antoinette's portrayal from an alternative angle.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is a 19th-century feminist work, published in 1847. This novel was published in Victorian England, a time of strict hierarchy, colonialism, and rigid gender roles. At that time, women were expected to be modest, educated, as well focused on domestic roles. Even the author Charlotte Brontë published this novel under the pseudonym Currer Bell. Men and women were both deeply rooted in patriarchal and imperialist values. In this case, the writing behind Jane's strong voice is that of another woman, Bertha/Antoinette, as a danger. She is often seen as a madwoman confined in an attic, dehumanised by British imperialists. Brontë navigates Bertha's diagnosis, rather than an identity that scales the balance of nature against our efforts. Rhys' reclaims that Brontë's novel represents Bertha as a victim of patriarchal oppression, where the author uses her as a patriarchal tool to establish patriarchy. Brontë realistically described Bertha's character, without a feminist voice, under the patronage of men. In contrast, Jean Rhys, in her 1966 novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, delves deeper into the colonial shadow of *Jane Eyre* to reclaim what Brontë had left unsaid, and her work inadvertently alludes to colonial patriarchy. This novel was published during the postcolonial era, focusing on the central character Antoinette Cosway, a young white Creole woman living in the West Indies. She has experienced social isolation due to her Creole identity, which Rhys underlines in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

The book combines contemporary themes of race, gender, and lost identity with the timeless history of colonialism. Set in Jamaica, *Wide Sargasso Sea* follows the story of a coloured woman, Bertha, through white eyes, who later became known to readers as Antoinette, a white

Creole woman caught between these colonial suppressions. As Rhys uncovers the fragmented voice of a Creole woman, Antoinette, torn between two worlds, she confronts colonial legacies and patriarchal myths, revealing madness, identity, and displacement. Thus, *Wide Sargasso Sea* became a powerful read to the readers who were often open to reinterpreting the classic texts like *Jane Eyre* from the counterpoint of view of the colonised figure Antoinette Cosway.

Through a contrapuntal reading of the character Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* contemplates the fragmented identity of Bertha as Antoinette, who eventually navigates with her lost identity, race, and displacement. Rhys's work is a parallel to *Jane Eyre*, where Rhys reads the character from different narrative views and gives counterpoints in Brontë's many aspects to see Antoinette or Bertha contrapuntally. *Wide Sargasso Sea* itself is a good example that seems to offer readers the inclusive voice of a coloured woman.

When I read *Jane Eyre*, I find that modern readers often criticise Bertha as a madwoman who threatens Jane and Rochester. A character described as a dark and ghastly figure allows readers to see Bertha as a 'madwoman'. This creates an urge in 20th-century writers like Jean Rhys to rewrite *Wide Sargasso Sea* to understand Bertha's character more deeply. This illustrates a traditional tendency to blame a person for their specific actions without investigating the real cause. Bertha is fully excluded in Brontë's novel, the only trait that has been misunderstood by her character. Brontë has forcibly made her a madwoman to establish patriarchy at that time. For this reason, retelling the character of Bertha as Antoinette is crucial for the 20th-century readers to understand her background and identity deeply. This work acknowledges the need for Jean Rhys's exploration of the character of Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, while simultaneously uncovering her silent voices, racial discrimination, and gender oppression.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial feminism is a fluid framework that intersects gender, race, and colonialism, shedding light on the unique experiences of women in formerly colonised countries and challenging the universal claims of Western feminism. Postcolonial feminism is about recognising and interrogating the interconnected structures of gendered exploitation and colonial oppression.

In the late 20th century, postcolonial feminist theories developed to challenge Western feminism. They also considered new avenues for inclusive justice by exploring the culture, history, and racism that had historically silenced the voices of coloured women in colonial societies, particularly Jamaica. To fully understand current interpretations of postcolonial feminist theories, it requires historical origins. This framework has been generated through the reconstruction of postcolonial feminist concepts as well as critical analysis, which makes this research more alive. It grabs the attention of the readers to understand the writings of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* to critique their limitations. From a close reading of these literary texts, readers raise questions like, How does Rhys reclaim Bertha's identity through postcolonial feminism? In the early 20th-century writing, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys explores the themes of gender, race, and belonging, which have come to be known as "postcolonial feminism".

The parallel to *Jane Eyre*, Rhys' novel breaks up Bertha's fragmented identity, renaming her Antoinette Cosway. Rhys argues that both colonial oppression and patriarchal systems stem from this Western feminism. Brontë identifies Bertha as the "other" in *Jane Eyre*, highlighting her silent narratives. "There is always the other side, always!" (Rhys 101). Antoinette's statement reminds us of the existing colonial suppression and exposes its historical background. "I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys 77). Antoinette reveals her postcoloniality by demonstrating her fragmented voice, identity,

and belonging. Rhys, a great feminist writer for her powerful portrayals of marginalised women navigating a patriarchal world. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a fundamental transcreation of *Jane Eyre*, where Bertha comes back with a new identity, Antoinette Cosway. Readers can see her with all kinds of human features, mostly that she could speak for herself, which is a new recreation of the character.

Similarly, Brontë's *Jane Eyre* can be read through a postcolonial feminist lens, where it depicts Jane's struggle to establish autonomy in a patriarchal world. Brontë describes Jane as a complex and resilient character who maintains her independence. Jane asserts, "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you" (Bronte 386). Jane depicts herself as an intelligent, passionate, and outspoken woman, often challenging global dominance and societal expectations placed upon women in Victorian England. It is associated with postcolonial feminism, where feminist argues for us to raise questions against these expectations.

To further extend the framework, the research applies Gayatri C. Spivak's concept of translation as in the chapter "The Politics of Translation". Spivak said, "...the task of the translator is to read the original intensively" (Venuti 318). This kind of 'intensive reading' is applied in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* to establish this as a contrapuntal reading of *Jane Eyre*, in which she has created a new text to narrate the story of Antoinette. Rhys' novel becomes a postcolonial transcreation that recovers Bertha's suppressed voice in *Jane Eyre* from her counter-narratives. By analysing the different timeframes of these two novels, this study connects Said's contrapuntal reading with Spivak's concept of "intensive reading" (335). *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an intensive reading of *Jane Eyre* that has emerged as a powerful framework to challenge colonial hegemony. It is a fundamental concept of postcolonial frameworks that penetrates deeply into women's

identities, isolation, and resilience. A central belief of postcolonial feminist thought is that women's identities are shaped by race, gender, and colonial history. Drawing on all of these resources, postcolonial feminist theorist explores the themes of race, gender more directly, particularly concerning women's voices and agency.

In dominant narratives, women from the Global South are often portrayed as marginalised and dehumanised. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette states, "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" (Rhys 118). Through this metaphorical connection between femininity and vulnerability, Rhys showcases how women were denied their voice during the colonial period. This connection is crucial for understanding the helpless victims like Antoinette.

Postcolonial feminism argues that true empowerment comes through the recognition of this layered oppression. It emphasises the need for lost identities, voices, particularly for women living in the postcolonial era. Banu Ozkazanc-Pan, in her journal "Postcolonial Feminist Research: Challenges and Complexities," argues that postcolonial feminism challenges the dominant Western representation of women in the Global South without properly understanding their lives. She claims that "Critique representations of Third World subjects in Western theories and texts and engage with the notion of the 'native'. Yet such critique is not undertaken with the aim of producing more 'authentic' representations or correcting 'misrepresentation' of subjects" (Ozkazanc-Pan 574). According to Banu, postcolonial feminism must challenge the "representation of Third World subjects in Western theory and texts", as it shows Western women as voiceless and oppressed, whereas this critique seeks to understand how gender, race, and colonial involvement have shaped women's identities.

Finally, both Brontë and Rhys advocate a reevaluation of social values and an emphasis on women's autonomy. Rhys's work exemplifies this idea, as her central character, Bertha or Antoinette, a white Creole woman from Jamaica, loses her identity and belonging. Rhys seeks to give Bertha a new "voice" by checking out her colonial trauma and past belonging. Whereas, Postcolonial feminism disputes that "Critique aims to show how West/Rest are relational concepts and studying encounters among West and the 'Rest'" (Ozkazanc-Pan 575). So, it is clear that Postcolonial feminism demands a decolonisation of feminist theory, giving a new voice to silent narratives; however, postcolonial feminist believes that all of their struggles are not the same. Some critics still hope for a global feminist solidarity that would support and speak out for marginalised women, like Bertha or Antoinette.

1.5 Objectives

1.5.1 General Objectives

The goal of the thesis is to conduct a deep examination of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to explore how colonial histories eventually reform into postcolonial feminist voices. It could refer to a study that investigates how Brontë's fictional character, Bertha, challenges dominant Western narratives, exemplifying postcolonial feminism. By analysing the intersection of gender oppression, racial subjectivity, and masculinist power, the paper pursues a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate around postcolonial feminism and its significance in addressing current concerns about social justice for Victorian coloured women. Therefore, Rhys, through Said's contrapuntalism, recovers Bertha's lost identity and voice. Also, Rhys establishes that Antoinette's madness is not an innate diagnosis but a colonial imposition on her character

1.5.2 Specific Objectives

1. To analyse women's position in the Victorian era through the character, Bertha, in *Jane Eyre*.
2. Tracing the roots of madness or neurosis in the 18th and 19th century literature to understand the character Bertha or Antoinette more deeply.
3. Through the broader context of postcolonial feminism, *Wide Sargasso Sea* reclaims Bertha's fragmented identities, intersecting with gender, race, and belonging.

1.6 Literature review

“Postcolonial feminism critiques representations of Third World subjects in Western theories and texts and engages with the notion of the “native”” (Ozkazanc-Pan 2012). The study addresses the intersection of gender, race, and resistance through the lens of postcolonial feminism. Below are many noteworthy works and their contribution to the field:

Molly Hite's intricate work, *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Narrative*, is a fundamental text in postcolonial ideology. Hite contends that feminist writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Jamaica Kincaid, Jean Rhys, and Virginia Woolf's literary texts challenge patriarchy and give a new identity to the excluded voices. She writes, “The silencing of female attempts to articulate an 'other side' to the dominant stories of a given culture is never complete, in that this ‘side’ is not in any absolute sense unimaginable or inconceivable” (Hite 3). Hite's research emphasises the feminist aspects of narrative strategy while ignoring its postcolonial dynamics to understand Bertha's reincarnation as Antoinette.

Susan Sniader Lanser's *Fiction of Authority: Women Writers' Narrative Voice* challenges the dominant male narrative voices, particularly for women-related issues. It claims that the oppression of women writers is fundamentally linked to the patriarchal and colonial pressure.

When narrative theorists talk about voice, we are usually concerned with formal structures and not with the causes, ideologies, or social implications of particular narrative practices.

With a few exceptions, feminist criticism does not ordinarily consider the technical aspects of narration, and narrative poetics does not ordinarily consider the social properties and political implications of narrative voice (Lanser 4).

Feminist theorists may speak of a literary character who refuses patriarchal pressures as “finding a voice,” whether or not that voice is represented textually. Lanser's work offers a conceptual structure for comprehending the interplay between voice, resistance, and subversion in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*: they assert in the book, “...female writers struggle with a pervasive patriarchal system that continuously confines female characters to the 'angel in the house' and the 'madwoman in the attic' (Gilbert and Gubar 45). A woman in the Global South (Jamaica) is secretly looked up in the attic by her husband, due to her mental illness and physical disabilities. Gilbert and Gubar criticise the polarized representation of women within a patriarchal society. While their work aligns with the power of men and women in the context of Western society, Bertha is seen as a madwoman. “Becoming a woman means relinquishing achievement and accommodating oneself to men and the spaces they provide” (Gilbert and Gubar 89).

Peter N. Singer, in his article “The Mockery of Madness: Laughter at and with Insanity in Attic Tragedy and Old Comedy,” argues:

...the departure from normal perceptions or behavior—which may also involve transgression of social norms—referred to by such terms as ania and paranoia certainly overlaps with some of the features of madness in its more precise designation; but in themselves these lack the very specific features of madness as typically presented in tragedy, that is as an episodic, violent and dramatic event (Singer 300).

This work explores a framework for comprehending how neurosis is a recurring motif in Western literature, often operating as a social norm and a masculinist structure. As it claims that madness is not an inherent disease, instead, it is shaped by patriarchal norms to suppress women's experiences.

Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez's work *Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations* discusses the complex identities of different groups of people in Europe in the context of creolisation that often challenges patriarchy. As well as the women challenge these patriarchal notions and embody different forms of autonomy rooted in the land, and those who imprison these women. As it argues:

... not a plural society because, unlike other ex-imperial powers, it has not yet absorbed any significant fraction of its colonial or ex-colonial subjects and, therefore, hasn't diversified its ethno-cultural composition. Paradoxically, for an oceanic society, Portugal has been quite successful in the exportation of this ethno-cultural diversity (Verges 169).

Marianne Hirsch's *The Borderwork: Feminist Engagement with Comparative Literature* advocates that feminist literary studies must cross traditional, national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries to fully understand and engage with the complexities of identity and power (Hirsch 3). Hirsch discusses that female talent cannot be confined to a specific framework. His exploration is crucial for understanding the full complexity of women's lives and belonging in the Victorian period.

Besides, Hirsch investigates how Creole women face double oppression in terms of their colonial background.

Sandra M. Gilbert's "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress" searches Rhys' reconstruction of a long-silent and emblematic character, Bertha. Victorian readers were not surprised by Jane's romanticism toward Rochester but rather by "its anti-Christian" refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society—in short, its rebellious feminism" (Gilbert 476). At the heart of this research, Gilbert and Gubar argues, "...her confrontation, not with Rochester but with Rochester's mad wife Bertha, is the book's central confrontation, an encounter... not with her own sexuality but with her own imprisoned hunger, rebellion, and rage" (Gilbert 476).

1.7 Research Questions

The thesis asks the following questions:

- 1) Does Bertha or Antoinette function as a patriarchal tool?
- 2) How does patriarchy shape coloured women in Brontë's novel?
- 3) How does the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* become a powerful postcolonial feminist text?
- 4) How does *Wide Sargasso Sea* offer a different perspective when the protagonist is a madwoman?

1.8 Research Methodology

The paper uses a qualitative method to understand the character Bertha or Antoinette through non-numerical data like texts, websites, and articles. This study also conducts a deep examination of the primary texts, like *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. These two writings, including *Jane Eyre*

and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, other supplementary sources include scholarly articles, novels, texts, chapters, journals, and some critical essays. The book chapters are based on theories such as postcolonial feminist theory to strengthen this thesis claim.

The approach of the study integrates postcolonial feminist writings to analyse areas where explorations are linked to coloured women. The thesis is based on a close interpretation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This research is informed by a deep understanding of postcolonial feminism as it supports gender, race, and colonial oppression, particularly on women like Bertha Mason. The study attempts to examine in depth the extent to which Jean Rhys reclaims Bertha Mason's identity and inclusion in *Jane Eyre*. It aims to investigate how Bertha's inherited trauma contributes to her psychological decline.

The key method of my study is a close analysis of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The study directed itself around the core ideas of postcolonial feminism as a theory, to point out some areas where exploitation happens. Also, it uses Spivak's idea to establish *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a contrapuntal reading of *Jane Eyre*. It also includes all the writings and articles that focus on colonial oppression, patriarchal dominance, and racial inequality in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This study investigates how both texts represent postcolonial aspects, while Rhys reclaims Antoinette's Creole identity in a Caribbean context, and how her marginalisation becomes a key tool in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In-depth analysis of the central character, Bertha or Antoinette, and other women like her in the Victorian era. To provide a clear understanding of this, other characters such as Rochester, Jane, and Annette are also described in this research.

1.9 Scope and limitations

The research primarily focuses on doing a deep textual analysis of these works by Brontë and Rhys. The main objective is to investigate how Rhys depicts the interrelation of gender, race, and resistance, concerning women in the Victorian era. And discusses how Antoinette's tragic fate creates sympathy among the readers. This study seeks to utilise postcolonial feminist theory as the central analytical framework to find out how dynamically colonial histories transform into postcolonial feminist voices. It aims to analyse how Rhy and Brontë's literary works depict the colonial legacy of Bertha or Antoinette and reinforce existing postcolonial feminist concepts.

The paper also applies Spivak's "The Politics of Translation" to establish *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a contrapuntal reading. Toril Moi's book *Sexual/Textual Politics* has made feminist writings relevant to this topic. This study places Rhys's work into the broader context of postcolonial feminist literature, conveying a comparative method. It connects to an analysis of the roots of Bertha or Antoinette's diagnosis in 18th and 19th century literature, finding whether her madness is an inherent disease or just a condemned disease caused by patriarchal power. Finally, it involves further assessing the validity of her diagnosis within a postcolonial feminist perspective by searching her medical records.

However, this research has some limitations. At first glance, one limitation is its exclusive focus on *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, even though both of these texts are essential to postcolonial feminist analysis. This narrow thinking may later lead to colonial oppression, racial trauma, and gender inequality in other contemporary novels. This analysis is limited by the context of these texts and the position of postcolonial feminist theory prevailing at the time. My research was hindered by some personal issues, and I could not include much of the secondary readings due to that. While this research acknowledges its limitations, there are still some ways to build on this

foundation by expanding the scope of this analysis, using different theoretical perspectives, or filling in gaps by adding medical records to better understand Bertha or Antoinette's condition.

1.10 Conclusion

Through a contrapuntal reading of the character Bertha or Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this study critiques how Rhys's literary work enlightens the postcolonial feminist concept by reclaiming Bertha's silenced voice, transforming her from the typical colonial stereotype into a human figure - Antoinette Cosway. Through Said's powerful contrapuntal concept from postcolonial theory, Rhys establishes *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a powerful contrapuntal reading in the sense Spivak has used it. Rhys sees the character Bertha contrapuntally and gives different perspectives on the narratives. Rhys, in her new transcreation of the character from *Jane Eyre*, recalibrates Bertha's narrative by giving counterpoints, challenging the British imperialists. Rhys highlights the figure from its core, where it is neither a prequel nor a sequel, but a parallel narrative. Against all colonial injustices, Rhys's novel showcases the suffering of women in the Victorian era. The heroine of the novel, Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, expresses the colonial oppression, isolation, and social displacement that come with patriarchy. Also, Rhys emphasises the social context of Antoinette's early life and her surroundings, acknowledging the postcolonial aspects and their significance in world literature.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Charlotte Brontë and Jean Rhys' masterpieces, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, are among the most intensively studied works in English literature. These two novels captured the attention of the nation and sparked much debate in literary circles. Many critics and scholars have further interpreted these texts from different perspectives, such as feminist criticism and postcolonial feminism.

Molly Hite intricately weaves a rich narrative in *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narratives*, highlighting how contemporary women writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Jamaica Kincaid, Jean Rhys, and Virginia Woolf subvert the dominant, and often challenge patriarchal narratives and Western feminism. Hite asserts:

These contexts are no more innocent of masculinist presuppositions than my original question, and they condition critical practices that lead us to read innovative fiction by women back into a tradition that presumes women's writing is inherently- conservative or flawed or both. Such contexts serve to mute female differences, effectively intervening in women writers' attempts to articulate what I call here the other side of the story (Hite 3).

Hite reflects on traditional literary structures that are shaped by masculinist beliefs, silencing the voices of women like Bertha Mason. Through these narratives, she also underlines how feminist writers recuperate authoritative texts to challenge masculine power and spark a new "birth" for marginalised voices. Female writers in Hite's work, Jhumpa Lahiri, Jamaica Kincaid, and Jean Rhys, are silent warriors who have to fight against patriarchal norms as well as their social

positions. Therefore, female writers are being unfairly judged by male-centric notions; as a result, their unique voices are misunderstood and ignored (Hite 4).

Rhys offers *The Other Side of the Story* to reclaim a new voice for marginalised women in the Victorian period, whereas Hite's frameworks warn that, without a postcolonial perspective, critics risk repeating the same patriarchal practices that led to Bertha's marginalisation in the first place. Hite discussed her work from a feminist perspective and colonial oppression. In Hite's view, considerable contemporary women writers denounce a literary tradition that is ".....apprehended as profoundly masculinist" (Hite 2), and this custom often marginalises female characters. In the book, "The silencing of female attempts to articulate an 'other side' to the dominant stories of a given culture is never complete, in that this 'side' is not in any absolute sense unimaginable or inconceivable" (Hite 3). As indicated in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is the ultimate "other", a Creole woman. Charlotte Brontë exhibits Bertha predominantly from the perspectives of Rochester and Jane, strengthening the narrative of European superiority and the "otherness" of the colonial issue. This framework is particularly relevant to the postcolonial rereading of *Jane Eyre* in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Although it seems that Rhys does not decisively view Bertha Mason in detail, rather her works fit into a tradition that dehumanises and marginalises women, seen as disruptive to the patriarchal system. Yet, Bertha's lack of challenge to this colonial approach limits her as a symbol of "otherness".

Hite observes that Jean Rhys, a distinguished figure in "contemporary feminist narrative" (Hite 4), because of her radical innovations that are deeply rooted in her masculine literary culture, associates the marginalisation of Bertha by offering her a new "birth". With her new name as Antoinette Cosway, Rhys enquires about the monolithic portrayal of Bertha as simply a "madwoman" and later reveals her social, cultural, and colonial oppression that leads her to a tragic

end. And how become a victim of colonial oppression in *Jane Eyre*. Although Hite's argument does not fully expose Bertha's behaviour in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her argument asserts that Rhys's rewriting focuses on marginalising female characters. *Wide Sargasso Sea* itself is a powerful piece of literature in which Rhys uncovers Bertha's cruel treatment by Rochester in Thornfield Hall and her colonial society that forces her to be "othered". As Hite points out: "In the case of Brontë, however, the tragedy is complicated by the kind of writing she insists on doing. And the muffled theme of madness makes itself heard as a voice intruding into a meditation on blame" (31). By embodying female struggle, Hite reveals that Rhys deconstructs the traditional patriarchal systems and instantly overlooks the "muffled theme of madness" and the "meditation on blame". The author unmuffles the narrative of madness to give Bertha a new agency. She delves deeply into the social, cultural, and psychological stresses that lead to Antoinette's breakdown, shifting the focus away from the underlying guilt. Nevertheless, Rhys's work helps readers understand how the colonial backdrops and Rochester's patriarchal power make a madwoman, as showcased through this research. From a feminist point of view, like Molly Hite, Rhys refuses Bertha as a "madwoman" as Brontë describes, instead exploring her roots, allowing readers not to see Bertha as a madwoman, but as a white Creole woman struggling with identity, belonging, and colonial oppression. Accordingly, Hite concedes the feminist aspects of narrative strategy, ignoring its post-colonial dynamics to understand Bertha Mason's 'rebirth' as Antoinette Cosway as a symbol of double marginalization.

With her critical theory book, *Fiction of Authority: Women Writers' Narrative Voice*, Susan Sniader Lanser often draws customary narrative structures and challenges the dominant male narrative voices, which is the central theme of this study. The author explores the notion of narrative authority, particularly for women-related issues. Lanser has written three modes of

women's narration (autobiographical, personal, and communal) and advocates that voice works like a social power through which women writers challenge colonial oppression and traditional forms in Victorian society.

Lanser, who has been in social work, discloses that women writers have distinctive narrative strategies to perpetrate ultimate masculinist structures. Lanser's work scrutinizes how women writers construct narrative voices under the colonial gaze. In the context of "rebirth of Bertha Mason," Lanser's unyielding generosity to the narrative theory illustrates Rhys's narrative autonomy in the *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where the author instantly challenges the limited portrayal of Bertha in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Brontë's narrative, on the other hand, first narrates Bertha from the perspective of Jane and then positions her as the "madwoman in the attic". Lanser argues, Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* reclaims narrative authority by giving Antoinette Cosway her agency, mostly because she could speak for herself in Rhys' novel. The power of this narrative allows Antoinette to choose her voice, which enables the audience to understand her history as a white Creole woman in a colonial history. Rhys's narrative method can be speculated as a direct response to the deemed female voices and the construction of female "otherness" with the influential literary traditions that Lanser profoundly resolves in her work. *Fiction of Authority* depicts how Bertha's identity is rewritten; it creates space for women's autonomy: they have to speak up for themselves and raise their voices against this patriarchal world. In foregrounding these female voices, Charlotte Brontë's authority over Bertha's narrative, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Lanser provides a more complex history of Antoinette's authority as a woman over Jane's authority in *Jane Eyre*. Lanser argues with us to rethink the world around us and how we respond when faced with such racism, gender inequality, showing that women offer great insight into shaping their sustainable future.

When feminists talk about voice, we are usually referring to the behavior of actual or fictional persons and groups who assert woman-centered points of view. Thus, feminists may speak of a literary character who refuses patriarchal pressures as “finding a voice”, whether or not that voice is represented textually. When narrative theorists talk about voice, we are usually concerned with formal structures and not with the causes, ideologies, or social implications of particular narrative practices. With a few exceptions, feminist criticism does not ordinarily consider the technical aspects of narration, and narrative poetics does not ordinarily consider the social properties and political implications of narrative voice (Lanser 4).

Lanser uses “finding a voice” as a symbol to imply that feminist critics use “voice” to theorise women’s resistance, while narrative theorists focus on the narrative’s technical structures. In this way, in the context of Bertha’s ‘rebirth’, Rhys grants a voice to a marginalised woman in *Jane Eyre*. Within this feminist understanding, Antoinette’s narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is her “finding a voice,” even though that voice is limited by the masculinist and colonial suppression that she faces throughout her entire life. Further, Lanser’s theory defines how women writers frequently connect with their erudite ancestors. For instance, Rhys’s in-depth examination of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Therefore, one way in which Rhys reclaims Bertha’s story to find her Creole background and reality in *Fiction of Authority* is to comment on masculinist systems that have historically kept women marginalised and silent.

By the same token, even as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* discuss the interlocked crisis of women in Victorian literature from a feminist perspective. Gilbert and Gubar draw their title inspired by Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, in which Mr. Rochester’s first wife (Bertha) is secretly locked up in an attic, due to mental illness and physical

disabilities. Gilbert and Gubar weave in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, depict the obstacles of female writers, how societal expectations often confine them to limit their creative expression. Their weaves in the character of Bertha, portrays as a ‘madwoman’ where ‘madnesses’ symbolises the consequences of the suppression of female narratives. Reflecting on the history of Victorian literature, Gilbert and Gubar contend that female writers struggle with a pervasive patriarchal system that continuously confines female characters to the “angel in the house” and the “madwoman in the attic” (Gilbert and Gubar 45). Their theory of “madwoman in the attic” illustrates the polarised representation of women within a male-dominated literary landscape, reflecting societal expectations about women’s autonomy and creative expressions. In fact, *The Madwoman in the Attic* concentrates on how Victorian literature eventually ignored women by portraying them either as ‘pure angel’ or ‘dangerous woman’. In Rhy’s writing, Antoinette is represented as a complex, multidimensional character whose identity is shattered by colonialism and imperialism. Through her portrayal, Gilbert and Gubar underline a complex examination of gender ideas. Conversely, the ‘madwoman’ carries the silenced, marginalised, and often violently punished side of the ideal, which is the more oppressed part in Brontë’s work.

In this depiction, the female character embodies rage, sexuality, and intellectual rebellion that cannot be confined within patriarchy. As its core, Gilbert and Gubar test their theory on prominent 19th-century female writers such as Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen, and George Eliot to find their limitations, struggles, and disrupt stereotypical writing. For instance, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the ‘madwoman’ (i.e, Bertha Mason) becomes the key figure to describe the limitations placed on women writers. Through the “madwoman” theory, Bertha is delineated as irrational, unstable, and dangerous, traits that are condemned in women and often accepted in men:

Can we feminist critics continue to speak in the larger world not as stereotypical “talking heads” but as what have come to be called “public intellectuals”? And can we do such a job without losing the disciplinary sophistication and methodological savvy we’ve so carefully cultivated? (Gilbert and Gubar 16)

This offers insight into the possible consequences of women’s ambitions and the social pressures, encouraging them to transcend their prudence. One of their most powerful messages is how women like Bertha are dehumanised, silenced, and held back by their husbands for not fitting into their culture. From a feminist perspective, as explored in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, it is also about women who are often silenced and misunderstood by men and shaped by colonial oppression. Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* is a perfect portrayal that represents the dynamics of 19th-century women writers in the context of male dominance and Europeanization, a clear affirmation of the suffering of women in that Victorian era. Conveying the suffering of women, Gilbert and Gubar subtly re-examine *Jane Eyre* and interpret Bertha as Jane’s dark twin, and Jane’s anger and resistance to patriarchal constraints. The word ‘madwoman’ represents a metaphor of women’s sufferings in Victorian society that eventually labels them a neurotic patient. As a result, their framework of the ‘madwoman’ archetype offers a valuable perspective for understanding Bertha Mason in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Yet, they construct Bertha as a madwoman, a white Creole woman caught in an attic for a while. Bertha, seen as an excluded figure for her racial, gender, and colonial histories across the novel *Jane Eyre*. And, her every act was considered as a ‘madwoman’ in the Victorian eyes. Specifically, the burning action, as seen:

After seeing smoke coming from Mr. Rochester's bedroom, Jane rushes in to discover his bed engulfed in flames and the curtains on fire. We later learn that the fire was started by

Rochester's wife, Bertha Mason. This is foreshadowing of the burning of Thornfield Hall by the violently insane Bertha (Brontë 353).

From this action, Jane is assured that this action must be performed by Rochester's 'mad' wife, Bertha. This fire later allows the readers hints to think of Bertha as an outrageous figure who is consistently making trouble in Jane's and Rochester's lives. The use of the character like Bertha represents those female voices which demeaned and marginalised because of social exploitation and displacement; therefore, Gilbert and Gubar mainly concentrate on the power of men and women in the context of Western society, where Bertha is seen as a 'madwoman'. "Becoming a woman means relinquishing achievement and accommodating oneself to men and the spaces they provide" (Gilbert and Gubar 89).

The depiction in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys of Bertha Mason's reincarnation is presented not as a madwoman, but as a white Creole struggling with identity, resistance, and colonial oppression. Peter N. Singer, in his article "The Mockery of Madness: Laughter at and with Insanity in Attic Tragedy and Old Comedy", discusses how madness or neurosis, especially in women, is a recurring motif in Western literature, often operating as a social norm and patriarchal structure. In the same way, Peter essentially represents how female madness is often shaped by social norms and patriarchal forces that label female resistance as madness. Not only does this article show the extra dimension of Bertha's struggle against social norms, as well as her husband's behavior, but it also questions the legitimacy of madness as a male-dominated narrative to control women's voices. Against all odds, Peter N. Singer has always strived to achieve excellence in his work by overcoming all barriers in society. In tragedies, sometimes madness refers to something more specific. It happens dramatically or breaks out violent moment.

The departure from normal perceptions or behavior—which may also involve transgression of social norms—referred to by such terms as anoxia and paranoia certainly overlaps with some of the features of madness in its more precise designation; but in themselves these lack the very specific features of madness as typically presented in tragedy, that is as an episodic, violent and dramatic event (Singer 300).

In this way, some unusual mental states like ‘anorexia’ and ‘paranoia’ share some aspects of ‘madness’ and break social rules, but they don’t fully link with the madness that is imprinted in tragic stories. The exploration of the “mockery of madness” in attic tragedy and old comedy suggests how often laughter is used in these genres and how characters are considered mad. Their life, resilience, struggles, and laughter are depicted in tragedy in specific ways: “laughter” and “laughter with madness”, where “laughter” dehumanises mad figures, reinforces their otherness, and establishes them as objects of fear (Singer 302-305). This all fits in with the traditional interpretation of figures such as Bertha in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Eventually, Bertha is confined in the attic, and the attic is labeled “mad” because she stands in the way of Jane’s happiness. Consequently, Bertha’s neurosis is used to justify her imprisonment and silence her voice. Peter N. Singer’s idea of ‘with laughter’ showcases its deeper meaning (Singer 304). Thusly, we can say that this type of pursuit is the juncture when ethical madness discloses social absurdity and challenges social norms. Their action is to be considered as the instruments of women’s resistance. This article explores ideas about female madness, which is not an inherent condition, but is shaped within the patriarchal system to suppress women’s talent (i.e., Antoinette Cosway).

If we find it difficult to imagine the hero Odysseus laughing at his enemy behaving absurdly and self-humiliatingly in a fit of madness, it is surely far more difficult still to

imagine him laughing at the pathetic figure believing himself to have slain and entrapped his enemies (Singer 310).

This assertion expresses the social absurdity, discloses the enemy's behaviour, and challenges Western feminism and gender roles, which becomes coherent with Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Through Antoinette's narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys criticizes the colonial forces that contribute to her mental decline. In this light, Antoinette's actions are depicted through the lens of Bertha's "madness" in *Jane Eyre*. The use of "benefits of madness" is essential to Jane's development as a white English subject. Through their understanding of madness, Rhys's novel allows the subaltern to look for the intersections of violence, race, gender, and class that silence dehumanised women.

This layering of gender inequality and racism in the lives of Victorian women in the literature, depicted in *Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations*, chapter 3, by Francoise Verges, rummages through Creolisation beyond its Caribbean origins and provides insights into the multifaceted processes of Creolisation within the European context. The whole of their existence moves beyond the Caribbean Creole roots to show how women (i.e., Bertha Mason) come from mixed heritage with double oppression in European society. It showcases how these women lived within the culture, always negotiating their place, always seen as coloured. Yet despite all this, it looks at the complexity of hybrid cultures and identity formation and examines how European identities and cultures are being reshaped by the legacy of colonialism and ongoing migration; their stories are often misunderstood or undervalued. By shedding light on their lived realities, Verges, in the chapter "Creolizing and Resistance," states, "Creolization is a process and practice among other processes and practices of negotiation when living in a world of contrast and differences" (Verges 44). This concept of Creolisation concentrates on the themes of hybridity,

identity transformation, migration, and its colonial impact. “Creolizing and Resistance” grapples with the notion that Europe is not a static entity, but rather an ongoing process of “creolization”. Examining the postcolonial context, the authors investigate how colonial conflicts and contemporary traditions are continuously leading to the emergence of new cultural forms, identities, and relationships within Europe. This scrutinizes the interplay between the dominant European culture and the influence of various diaspora communities, resulting in hybridity and the blurring of traditional boundaries (Verges 50). *Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations* illustrates:

In the European context we need to relate creolization not only to the colonial past, but to the transformation of societies through postcolonial and other migrations, diaspora and exile’, I want to look at how the postcolonial and other migrants who arrived in the mid-to late twentieth century in Europe created a ‘creolized understanding of citizenship’ often against the backdrop of racist subjection and exclusion (qtd. in verges 7).

Despite the challenges women face, it considers how the trauma of Europe’s colonial past reshapes its present, influencing race, culture, and identity, and how these women continue to challenge the systems that seek to silence them. This assesses the impact of immigration on European society and the emergence of hybrid cultural forms such as language, music, art, and literature.

[i]s not a plural society because, unlike other ex-imperial powers, it has not absorbed yet any significant fraction of its colonial or ex-colonial subjects and, therefore, hasn't diversified its ethno-cultural composition. Paradoxically, for an oceanic society, Portugal has been quite successful in the exportation of this ethno-cultural diversity (qtd. in Verges 169).

By means of these expressions, Verges discusses the complex identities of different groups of people in Europe in the context of creolisation, which often challenges traditional notions of belonging. As well as the women who challenge these notions, who embody different forms of autonomy rooted in the land, and who imprison these women, the author reminds the reader to value them and respect their role as women.

In Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature, Hirsch contemplates that feminist literary studies must cross traditional, national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries to fully understand the complexities of identity and power (Hirsch 3). Hirsch underscores that women's talent cannot be confined to a specific framework and that their steps become essential to understanding the full complexity of their lives in her inclusive work. Hirsch's work combines memories of violence across the generations. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as a whole, not only depicts how women challenge the masculinist notions to change the geographical boundaries of Victorian women, but it also rewrites Bertha Mason's silent narrative in *Jane Eyre*. Through *In Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature*, the author's critique resonates with the notion of a postcolonial feminist project in Rhys's work. Her work argues to us that feminist work must be transformative and open, and linked with its differences to reflect the realities that women face in that era. This rewriting of Bertha's identity emphasizes how comparative literature must pay attention to colonized and marginalized voices and recognize the intersections of gender, race, and colonialism (Hirsch 7). Referring to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Hirsch's study addresses the specific intersection of colonial injustices and gendered silence found in the Creole women's experience. By embodying her work, this gap becomes clear that *Borderwork* does not fully explore how postcolonial feminist rewritings like *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveal racial and colonial dynamics that traditional feminist critics often ignore (Hirsch 14). Hirsch's examination acknowledges the

readers with valuable insights into postcolonial feminism and concentrates on Bertha or Antoinette's double oppression through Rhys's powerful transcreation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a sequel kind of thing.

Wide Sargasso Sea is a depiction of a canonical narrative through the character Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Drawing on Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal feminist reading in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul: Plain Jane's Progress", Rhys reconstructs an ignored and marginalised character, Bertha, from Brontë's narrative. At that time, "Victorian readers were not surprised by Jane's romanticism toward Rochester but rather by its anti-Christian' refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society—in short, its rebellious feminism' (Gilbert 476). "... her confrontation, not with Rochester but with Rochester's mad wife Bertha, is the book's central confrontation, an encounter not with her own sexuality but with her own imprisoned hunger, rebellion, and rage" (Gilbert 476). By analysing the texts, it is clear to the reader that Bertha is not just a madwoman confined in an attic at Thornfield Hall; therefore, she is the embodiment of Jane's emotional turmoil and irrationality. Gilbert writes to highlight both Jane's tension and Rochester's fate. In the attic, Bertha becomes the dark mirror of Jane Eyre's internal struggle against these social norms. As Women in Jane's world, acting as agents for men, may be the keepers of other women" (Gilbert 477). In a sense, Gilbert goes back to Bertha's past, where Bertha represents her rationality and Jane represents her irrationality.

On the contrary, *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges this view by giving Bertha a new name, Antoinette Cosway, and a life rooted in the Caribbean. Antoinette Cosway is a white Creole woman controlled by her English husband, Rochester. Her madness is not innate but is caused by colonial oppression and long periods of isolation. Rhys's examination of the Bertha metaphor reveals the struggles of Victorian women as well as feminist anger. In Gilbert's work, Bertha's

haunting death at Thornfield Hall is seen as a symbol of Jane's liberation, whereas Rhys reclaims that she is not Jane's shadow.

Taken together, although several studies have been conducted to explore how feminist writers reclaim their writing in the face of colonial pressures and how they challenge patriarchy, very few studies have traced the roots of colonialism and madness in 18th and 19th-century literature. In this paper, an attempt will be made to trace the roots of Antoinette's madness through an analysis of the trauma, displacement, and colonial oppression of her early life.

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSION

In the 18th and 19th century literature, mental health issues were often misunderstood as “hysteria,” leading to them being seen as the work of literary figures like Bertha or Antoinette. This era is notable for the rise of early feminist voices like Jamaica Kincaid, Chinua Achebe, Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and Wollstonecraft, who had begun to question this patriarchy. To look at this issue critically, we need to understand the intersection of postcolonial feminist theory by analysing texts, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Besides, how Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* serves as an intensive contrapuntal reading of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, a parallel of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, exploring Gayatri C. Spivak’s *The Translation Studies Reader*. To fulfill this objective, a detailed in-depth analysis of Charlotte Brontë’s novel, *Jane Eyre*, and Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which are recognised as the most important works in English literature. The key figure, Bertha or Antoinette, serves as a victim of patriarchal oppression, where in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys retells her post-colonial backdrops by embracing her social context, trauma, displacement, and gender roles through postcolonial feminist perspectives. Rhys takes Bertha out of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and gives her a new agency as Antoinette. This is a new recreation of the character as Antoinette Cosway, where *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an intensive reading and provides counterarguments in Brontë’s many aspects.

3.1 Othering Bertha Mason in the Victorian era

3.1.1 The social context of Bertha’s living

Bertha Mason, aka Antoinette Cosway, is a heroine in Jean Rhys’ novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She was born into a slave-owning family in Jamaica in the 19th century, when the abolitionist

movement was taking place in the West Indies and many black slaves had to fight for their rights. Antoinette's father was a slave and died at a young age, which made her life even more miserable. Her father was a West Indian planter and merchant named Jonas Mason, and her mother, Annette identified as a Creole. In Rochester's account of Bertha's family, the "germs of insanity" are passed on by the Creole mother (Thomas 1). This firmly establishes Antoinette as a white Creole heiress of the Jamaican peasant class. As a white Creole woman on the West Island of Jamaica, Antoinette and her family suffered from the oppression of dual identity. They were also marginalised by European rulers and hated by blacks during that time. "I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches" (Rhys 6). Blacks called her a 'white cockroach' and whites called her a 'negro'. Antoinette could not fit into any community as she was rejected by both black as well white. This consequence makes her a neurotic patient, as trauma and course have stemmed from her childhood. Moreover, slavery reached its peak in the 19th century, when Antoinette entered in West Indies. Further, as the daughter of a slave owner, she was born with a deep-rooted curse of slavery that unexpectedly exposed her to social conflict. "I am not used to happiness,'... 'It makes me afraid" (Rhys 68). This assertion expresses her unstable identity and background, thus making Antoinette's life more difficult.

In fact, Antoinette's relationship with her family was a bit complicated because she did not receive much attention from her mother, Annette. "But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that was useless to her" (Rhys 4). This statement underlines that Antoinette's mother was not willing to spend time with her, which isolated her from her own family and surroundings. As a child, she lost her father at a very young age and did not get much love from her mother, which spoiled her childhood and kept her isolated all the time.

3.1.2 Tracing the history of Bertha

Bertha or Antoinette is the first wife of Mr. Rochester, the master of Thornfield Hall. As she grows up, Antoinette tries to find love in her English husband. "...I have sold my soul or you have sold it, and after all is it such a bad bargain?" (Rhys 47). So, we assume Antoinette as a typical woman who has suffered from her husband's imperialistic power, which leads to a tragic end to the marriage. We see her often suffering from mental health problems and some identity crisis. As a white Creole from Jamaica, Antoinette is not accepted by either the black slave community or the European community. Instead, she is called the "madwoman" for her actions in Thornfield Hall and is trapped in an attic for around ten years by her white husband.

...white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So, between you and I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all (Rhys 77).

Sue Thomas in "The Tropical Extravagance of Bertha Mason" depicts that Antoinette's marriage to Mr. Rochester was arranged by her family for financial gain. Richard Mason stated that their marriage is legally consummated in Spanish Town, Jamaica. But Rochester married Antoinette only for her money rather than love. "The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition" (Rhys 47). This means Antoinette's inheritance was handed over to her husband (Rochester), granting him financial support as her husband and colonist. Rochester had no love for her wife Antoinette. He has started to call her 'Bertha' instead of calling her real name. This name reminds the readers to think of her life, caught in the attic for her madness.

Thomas criticises Rochester's narrative speech for eventually blaming Bertha's Creole mother. After their marriage, Rochester claimed to have discovered her true nature, defining her

as violent and unpredictable. “When my wife is promoted by her familiar to burn people in their beds at night, to stab them, to bite their flesh from their bones, and so on” (Brontë 345). This leads him to confine her to the attic. Rochester openly portrays Bertha as a mad and dangerous woman, and the language he uses, ‘stab’, ‘burn people’, and ‘flesh’, conveys the idea that she is no longer a rational woman but a mad woman. Hence, Thomas, in his journal article *The Tropical Extravagance of Bertha* argues, “[a]n interpretation of the significance of the British empire in *Jane Eyre* must begin by making sense of Bertha Mason Rochester, the mad, drunken West Indian wife whom Rochester keeps locked up on the third floor of his ancestral mansion” (Thomas 1). Bertha remains silent due to Jane’s narrative and has no narrative autonomy in the novel because she does not challenge Rochester’s influence over her narrative. She occasionally escapes from her captivity, causing chaos and even failure. One of these failures ultimately leads to the destruction of Thornfield Hall.

In a dramatic turn, her marriage to Rochester is considered only as a source of financial power, which eventually leads Antoinette to a tragic death. “...Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do” (Rhys 154). This realisation leads her to death as Sue Thomas’ journal underlines how Brontë’s representation of Bertha and Richard Mason’s ‘Creoleness’ found their way into fictional characters like Bertha Mason from the late 18th to mid-19th centuries. Where Brontë fastens it to the harsh realities of slavery in Jamaica and past slave rebellions. Together, it dissects Bertha Mason’s Caribbean background in the Spanish town of Jamaica and her inherent illness from her Creole mother.

3.1.3 Finding the roots of madness/neurosis in the 18th and 19th-century novels

The 18th and 19th-century novel serves as a critique of society’s growing attitudes towards mental illness, particularly towards women. According to the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, “Mental

illness is an illness affecting the mind, in which a person's thinking or behavior is disturbed" (Oxford). Madness provides some further insight, being a state of mind that interferes with normal thinking, behavior, or social interaction, or is a serious mental illness. In Petteri Pietikainen's book *Madness: A History*, Pietikainen scrutinises the rise of 'neurosis' among women in the 18th and 19th centuries. The author concentrates on the concept of 'neurosis' and shows what it means to be 'mad'. "For degenerationists, madness was in the blood, and the effects of heredity were cumulative: the milder form of madness or neurosis of one generation became full-blown insanity in the next generation" (Pietikainen 259). This simply means that a person believed that if a family member suffered from minor mental health problems, their next generation was more likely to suffer from mental health problems during that time. Nonetheless, 'madnesses' was often evaluated as a serious mental health illness that resulted in generations being confined to asylums; thus, a new concept emerged: 'neurosis' in Victorian literature.

Neurosis was initially seen as a problem of the nervous system, with some physical symptoms and mental ones. Over time, it became more 'psychological' in the late nineteenth century, meaning that conditions such as "hysteria" appeared as mental suffering. Essentially, Pietikainen investigates how the concept "neurosis" helps the readers to expand the understanding of mental health issues beyond acute "madness" during the 18th and 19th centuries. A great example of this is William Wilkie Collins' 1860 novel *The Woman in White*, which begins with a woman dressed in white frantically escaping from an asylum. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secrets*, published in 1862, 'enters the realm of madnesses. These 18th and 19th-century novels highlight how women of that time were trapped in endless suffering from patriarchal norms. Sarah Walters' 2000 novel *The Woman in White* takes inspiration from, which explores the confessions of women in a madhouse.

3.1.4 Behind the attic: Why Rochester found life intolerable with Bertha

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is a 19th-century novel that tells the story of Jane, who rises from a school for orphans to become a governess at Thornfield Hall. She is thoughtful, unpredictable, and her journey from falling in love with Mr. Rochester, the owner of the Hall. The trouble is, Rochester is already married to a white Creole woman called Bertha. She is being locked up in a random attic for her madness by her husband. After their marriage, Rochester tries to commit bigamy and fails; he dramatically leads the small wedding party to meet his mad wife, who dutifully performs like a "madwoman" for the occasion. But he always tries to present himself as an English gentleman, although he takes little compensation from Antoinette's family. And instead of getting a divorce from her mad wife, he is taking care of her while Antoinette, just a woman, lives on the verge of being accepted by either black or white.

While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again, louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber; though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued. (Brontë 163)

Jane felt a mysterious presence of Bertha or Antoinette in Thornfield Hall and was assured that she was surely a madwoman in the attic. Rochester is genuinely pitied by Jane and the people present at the wedding when he marries Jane, and is abruptly interrupted. Mr. Rochester keeps all his property, and there is no question of his being considered mad compared to Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secrets*. In contrast, a woman in the same situation who enters into a marriage without admitting her past is criticized in the Victorian era.

Rochester's wife, Antoinette, is particularly interesting to modern readers, possessing an eagle eye for patriarchy and a more nuanced understanding of mental illness. She has been locked up in the attic for ten years after Jane's arrival, and Jane discovers her identity, one after another, through a series of disturbing words and actions that would surely tick the box for the stereotypical definition of madness. Bertha's frantic laughter and sudden violent actions led to her setting Rochester's bed on fire.

That is MY WIFE,' he said. 'Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know—such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! And THIS is what I wished to have' (laying his hand on my shoulder): 'this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon, I wanted her just as a change after that fierce ragout. (Brontë 448)

Later, Rochester blames her increasing madness on her mother being in a lunatic asylum. He pleads, "My bride's mother I had never seen: I understood she was dead. The honeymoon over, I learned my mistake; she was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum" (Brontë 466). As *Lady Audley's Secrets* confirms, madness is not necessarily transmitted from mother to daughter. As Virginia Woolf argues in his book *Three Guineas*, "A woman has a notion that she is despised. ..." (Woolf 184). According to Woolf, when a woman is forcibly adopted by someone from another race or married to a man from another race, she has to become part of that race, leaving her own country and nationality to embrace her husband's country and nationhood. Her madness, infidelity are the result of Rochester's mistaken beliefs that her neurosis was inherent from her mother and that he might be a part of the plan of their marriage. For her Creole heritage, she cannot be a proper Englishwoman. Even Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper at Thornfield Hall, is better than

her. To translate into a modern context, she prefers to perform all duties rather than read poetry and sing songs about nature. Rochester disputes:

These were vile discoveries; but except for the treachery of concealment, I should have made them no subject of reproach to my wife, even when I found her nature wholly alien to mine, her tastes obnoxious to me, her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger—when I found that I could not pass a single evening, nor even a single hour of the day with her in comfort; that kindly conversation could not be sustained between us, because whatever topic I started, immediately received from her a turn at once coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile—when I perceived that I should never have a quiet or settled household, because no servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders—even then. I restrained myself: I eschewed upbraiding, I curtailed re- monstrance; I tried to devour my repentance and disgust in secret; I repressed the deep antipathy I felt. (Brontë 466-467)

Bertha or Antoinette may not be bright, but a lack of brightness does not justify being imprisoned for around ten years. Rochester's description of her as a violent and unreasonable temper does not prove her as a madwoman. "Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In blaze and vapour, Mr. Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep" (Bronte 226). Through this action, the author explores Bertha Mason's destructive behavior. Also, in these lines, her attack on Richard Mason's portrait and her betrayal, "She bit me," he murmured. 'She worried me like a tigress, when Rochester got the knife from her' (Brontë 322). Through her brutal behavior as Richard Mason, Brontë portrays her as a dangerous woman in Victorian eyes. While Mr. Rochester justifies his actions in his desperate attempt to win back Jane's love, which he has probably been

yearning for for months. The modern reader must therefore question both the diagnosis of Bertha's madness in *Jane Eyre* and her treatment. Is Bertha Mason a victim of her husband's treatment, as much as of her mental weakness, or is Rochester someone who tries to convince the reader of the harsh reality of a coloured woman in nineteenth-century literature by locking her in an attic, secluded room at her husband's, and never letting her out? Novels such as *Jane Eyre*, *The Woman in White*, and *Lady Audley's Secret* have revealed much more than readers' knowledge about patriarchal control systems and female vulnerability.

3.1.5 Bertha's silent voice in *Jane Eyre*

Bertha or Antoinette serves as a colonial tool in *Jane Eyre*. While Jane is modest and reserved, Bertha's behavior is wild and unconventional to the readers. This contrast accentuates the societal expectations placed on women during the Victorian era. Bertha or Antoinette represents the colonial oppression that women faced at that time. The critics need to balance the gothic elements of the story with a deeper understanding of her as a tragic death. It is important to accurately consider her mental health and show her as a symbol of female oppression. The author portrays Antoinette as neither romantic nor dehumanised. Rochester's description of Bertha showcases her dehumanisation, such as "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal" (Brontë 446). Brontë underlines Bertha's demonic traits while maintaining her silence. Her character provides a rich exploration of issues such as identity and imprisonment and reflects the limited options available to women in the nineteenth century. It stresses the danger of being labeled as 'other' or 'mad' when one does not conform to social norms. "This was a demoniac laugh-low, suppressed, and deep-uttered, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber door" (Brontë 225).

It underlines Bertha's violence and irrational behaviour through her indirect interactions with others. In the world of literary adaptation, Bertha or Antoinette serves as a powerful reminder of the complexity of the female experience. Her anecdote invites audiences to think critically about the historical context of the novel and the challenges women faced in that era. "Concealing the mad-woman's Neighborhood from you, however, was something like covering a child with a cloak and laying it down near an upas-tree" (Brontë 458). To Rochester, Antoinette is just an 'other' of the West Indies. They both are completely different in thinking; therefore, their marriage is destined for failure.

On the other hand, in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, author Jean Rhys writes about the original identity of Bertha or Antoinette and the various problems associated with this colony, and challenges the influence of Rochester's narrative in *Jane Eyre*. Rochester somehow creates an identity for his wife that suits him as a male colonist. In this way, Rochester's action on his wife represents him as a male colonist. His action to look at his wife in an attic and present her as a neurosis patient showcases himself from a Western perspective. Even though Rochester is another European man and connects his mind with Antoinette's identity to the West, it is a threat to her because she is not the only woman from the West, but a colonised woman from Jamaica. Rochester in Brontë's depiction works as an ideal patriarch who comes from England and removes Bertha's voice from the narrative. At the very end of the novel, it switches back to the first-person narrative, and Bertha is caught in Rochester's house at Thornfield.

3.2.1. Reclaiming Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Wide Sargasso Sea is written as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, a classic of feminist literature. In Brontë's novel, Mr. Rochester's secret wife is Bertha, the mad wife whom he confined

in the attic at Thornfield Hall for a while. In contrast, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* tells the reader about the character Bertha with a new name Antoinette, a descendant of a Jamaican white Creole woman, who escapes a life of poverty by marrying Rochester. As readers, the name 'Bertha' makes us uncomfortable because it warns that soon Rochester will erase Antoinette's real identity and turn her into a dangerous madwoman trapped in the attic.

While animating the life of Antoinette, Rhys highlights how hidden truths about post-emancipation Jamaica could be revealed through miscegenation, property, and the fear of white Creoles being transformed into blackness. The overgrown and unkempt natural environment of the novel is a sign of the Creole peasant class's loss of control over nature, a concomitant effect of the fall of slavery and the apprenticeship system established by the British government. This paper looks at how these concerns integrate with representations of post-plantation society through feminist and postcolonial readings, which analyse the representational choices included in the novel. Brontë's novel focuses primarily on the life and plight of the heroine of the same name, whereas Rhys focuses on the biography of Antoinette Cosway, who would become the madwoman in the attic of *Jane Eyre*. Finally, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys connects with the colonial oppression of the West Indies slave-farming class with the relations of the 19th-century British sub-aristocrats.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, readers meet the heroine Antoinette, a nine-year-old girl from a slave family. Readers can know her upbringing in the Caribbean, and how she entered into a terrible marriage with Mr. Rochester, and is imprisoned in an English country house. It also underscores how her marriage leads her to a tragic end. So, *Wide Sargasso Sea* examines the themes of identity, race, and resistance, which is the central argument of it. Rhys argues, "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (Rhys 1). At the very core of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the understanding that women are fighting

against racism and social isolation within the context of patriarchal dominance. The author tells the narratives reflecting on the racial and social isolation of Antoinette's family on the Coulibri estate. Her early life in Jamaica begins with a devastating trauma when her home on her Coulibri estate catches fire and her disabled brother Pierre dies.

The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like a sunset, and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left, the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, the rocking-chairs and the blue sofa, the jasmine and the honeysuckle, and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. When they had finished, there would be nothing left but blackened walls and the mounting stone. That was always left. That could not be stolen or burned. (Rhys 27)

3.2.2 Analysing Bertha's social and racial isolation through Rhys's novel

The importation of slaves was banned throughout the British Empire with the enactment of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. The Emancipation Act of 1833 effectively abolished the ownership of slaves. In the West Indies, an apprenticeship system was introduced soon after abolition, lasting from 1834 to 1838, and it was discontinued due to the non-cooperation of former slaves. The apprenticeship system was originally set up to protect slave plantations from the loss of labor that would occur after abolition (Draper 102-105). The story of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set against the backdrop of the financial competition that followed the Emancipation Act, but given the historical context in which the novel is set, former slaves had already left their jobs with slave masters and avoided the apprenticeship system, since Antoinette and her mother Annette were domestic servants at the beginning of the novel, and later Antoinette and her husband Rochester were part of it. "We are not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because

she pretty like pretty self' Christophine said" (Rhys 1). The exception is Christophine, a freed Martinican former slave who was given to Antoinette by her mother and stands as a source of anti-colonial spiritual wisdom in the novel. "The slaves have been set free. However, the slave owners have not received the compensation they were promised" (Rhys 1). This system economically elaborates the tension between ex-masters and ex-servants, particularly in the apprenticeship system.

3.2.3 Spivak's influence on Rhys's postcolonial transcreation

Wide Sargasso Sea is a fundamental contrapuntal reading of *Jane Eyre*, where Rhys reflects on Antoinette's fragmented identity, race, gender, and resistance through her counterarguments. Rhys writes this novel through her acknowledgment of history, politics, and anthropology. This is a process of contrapuntal reading in which Rhys produces a new text, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and establishes it as a powerful contrapuntal reading through using Spivak's concept from Spivak's *The Translation Studies Reader*. Spivak speaks, "The task of the translator is to read the original intensively" (Venuti 319).

Drawing on Spivak's idea of translation as reading, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an intensive transcreation of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in which she argues that this new transcreation is not just a linguistic act but a recreation of an excluded character. It offers "Translation is the most intimate act of reading" (Venuti 321). From Spivak's deep understanding of postcolonial translation suggesting that accurate translation goes beyond time and culture to produce a fresh new text, as Rhys does in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys sees Bertha contrapuntally to establish the character of Antoinette through exploring her trauma, colonial oppression, and social displacement.

Wide Sargasso Sea is a prequel or a new adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, set in a new era and time. This novel is seen through Antoinette's perspective instead of Jane's. Rhys sees the character from different points of view, where the heroine is completely a proper human being, with all kinds of human features. The author tries to establish Spivak's idea that "translation is intensive reading" and tries to give counterarguments on Brontë's many aspects. This novel is not a literal translation of *Jane Eyre* but a postcolonial translation of its silence. By reading *Jane Eyre* deeply and creating a new, fresh text, Rhys implements Spivak's idea. *Wide Sargasso Sea* becomes a contrapuntal reading from writing, where Rhys concentrates on the ignored figure, Antoinette, making her a heroine of her novel, giving her a new voice. It makes *Wide Sargasso Sea* a new production in which it is seen as a contrapuntal reading of Edward Said.

3.2.4 Bertha's Contrapuntal Vision in *Jane Eyre*

Edward Said introduces the concept of "contrapuntalism" in his book *Culture and Imperialism*. This concept is used to read postcolonial literature to find excluded and neglected voices. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha acts as a colonial tool through which Brontë establishes a patriarchal society and later, Rhys dynamically transforms it into a postcolonial perspective. Brontë used a marginalised woman, such as Bertha, as an excluded and neglected figure in her novels. Bertha's narrative is discussed through her husband, "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations?" (Brontë 445). Along with her husband's description of her madness, she is further dehumanized when Jane interprets her as a coloured woman. Every time her gender is suppressed by the British coloniser.

Bertha is seen as an 'other,' which makes her a silent character in Brontë's writing. From Said's contrapuntal concept, Rhys rewrites Bertha's character in the light of postcolonial

translation and sees Bertha as a Contrapuntal figure. Rhys brings all of her ideas together and gives a good reading of *Jane Eyre* and draws on *Wide Sargasso Sea* from Spivak's idea.

3.2.5 Bertha's Narrative Voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Wide Sargasso Sea exemplifies the colonial patriarchy within the British capitalist perspectives. It connects Rochester and Antoinette, a white Creole, trapped within their societal expectations. "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys 44). It is also important to understand that Antoinette and Rochester's emotional responses to the natural environment are completely different and contrasting. Despite her English ancestry, her Creole identity rejects her as a white man's wife.

In the early parts of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, an almost pantheistic connection to nature is combined with a hatred of humans, apparently due to Antoinette and her mother's social isolation and fear of what ex-slaves' opinion about them is. The wildness of the garden symbolises the loss of the power necessary to create order in nature, politics, and social hierarchy. In the *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the untamed nature also symbolises the loss of slavery. Antoinette sees herself as part of the West Indies and identifies herself with it. As Rhys describes, "Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell" (Rhys 3). All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery—why should anybody work?" (Rhys 3). This garden is used as a metaphor for lost colonial power. "And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms, I would think 'It's better than people.'...All better than people. Better. Better, better than people" (Rhys 11). It embraces Antoinette's alienation from nature. Rochester is always overwhelmed and suspicious of nature and the dark characters he finds there.

In Rhys's novel, the most important source of the rumours is Daniel Cosway, who claims to be Antoinette's half-brother and writes a poisoned letter to her husband. When Rochester later visits him, Daniel Cosway makes some malicious accusations about the madness that prevails in Antoinette's family. Daniel later warns, "Then it seems to me that it is my Christian duty to warn the gentleman that she is no girl to marry with the bad blood she has from both sides. But they are white, I am coloured. They are rich, I am poor" (Rhys 72). There seems to be some truth in these accusations, although Mr. Mason has twisted them beyond all recognition. Even after burning down Coulbiri estate and killing his son, Mason has not lost his mental state. Mr. Mason does descend into madness despite the trauma and accusation. He even brings English colonial values to establish the Coulbiri estate as more powerful. He further affirms, "Money is good, but no money can pay for a crazy wife in your bed" (Rhys 74). This creates tension in Rochester's mind, which forces him to question whether Antoinette's madness is congenital or caused by her mother. For these accusations, Antionette reacts, "That my mother was mad and an infamous woman and that my little brother who died was born a cretin and that I am a mad girl too" (Rhys's 101). The skin colour of various black characters is mentioned throughout the novel. Daniel Cosway mentions, "I am coloured", through which he wanted to prove to himself that he has white blood as well (Rhys 73).

Wide Sargasso Sea is dramatically imprinted as a question of legitimacy from Rochester's perspective, as Daniel Cosway tells him about the miscegenation that resulted from the crossing of white Creoles with their black slaves. Rochester's interview with Daniel Cosway confirms his hatred towards what he sees as a disgraceful Creole status of his wife, Antoinette. This begins a process of gradual loss of love from his wife and his growing cruelty. Although Rochester questions her about the allegations, she denies having an affair with Daniel Cosway, and

Christophine believes her. Rochester's trust is gradually eroding from here. "He has no right to that name". "His real name, if he has one, is Daniel Boyd. He hates all white people, but he hates me the most. He tells lies about us, and he is sure that you will believe him and not listen to the other side" (Rhys 101).

CHAPTER 4

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Wide Sargasso Sea serves up some dedicated themes of racism, identity, and belonging, concerning the description from Brontë. This novel vividly exposes the roots of colonial oppression and patriarchal power in the post-colonial Caribbean, presenting the silent character Antoinette, who was confined for a long time in an attic by her husband (Rochester). Rhys rewrites Bertha's identity, analysing her past and where she belongs. Based on the Creole background of her in Jamaica, *Wide Sargasso Sea* depicts what it means for coloured women to be trapped in an attic and what it feels like to be betrayed by a husband. It is not only a post-colonial behaviour; rather, it is a behaviour that society has imposed on a coloured woman in the Victorian period.

Rhys observes *Wide Sargasso Sea* from the different perspectives of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. By retelling the story from Antoinette Cosway's perspective, Rhys sheds light on Antoinette's trauma, displacement, and loss of identity that once marked her as a "madwoman". By using the story in acting, Rhys aligns Antoinette's talent and experiences with the broader context of women's personalities and emphasises how their voices are isolated by male-dominated narratives. Using Antoinette as a central figure, Rhys, through her writing of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, analysed colonial suppression, racial ambiguity, loss of resistance, and gender. *Wide Sargasso Sea* features a misogynistic society that is detrimental to maintaining the balance of equality in society as well as sustaining life. The male colonist in Brontë's novel is an English man who represents an imperialistic, patriarchal role that motivates the modern writers to write against this masculinist power. Rhys' retelling of *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges these social norms and traditions, showing courage to write about patriarchy and a silenced narrative constrained by the Victorian system. Mr.

Rochester's dominant voice is fragmented, revealing how power manipulates truth for its purposes. But then, Antoinette is a different narrative in which the dialectics of gender oppression, mental illness, and postcolonial trauma are aligned with the framework of identity politics. Therefore, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is associated with the female narrative voices and patriarchal norms within the postcolonial framework to inspire readers to challenge these norms and stop seeing them as "other". Through an intensive reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, readers can see how postcolonial feminist knowledge becomes entangled with the identity politics of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the hauntingly contrapuntal reading of *Jane Eyre*.

4.1 Madness and feminist resistance of Bertha

Bertha or Antoinette's story spans from sun-drenched Jamaica to the dry windows of Thornfield Hall, where she is seen as "other" to the European's. Her presence in *Jane Eyre* has an impact on the women whose lives intersect with hers. Charlotte Brontë uses her to initiate patriarchy in the 18th-century literature. Brontë uses a neurotic woman like Antoinette without giving her a proper feminist voice. Antoinette is a victim of patriarchal oppression, where in Brontë's narrative, Jane argues:

It grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal, but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face" (Bronte 446). Later, Rochester asserts, "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations? Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard! (Bronte 445)

Bertha is portrayed as a neurotic patient who inherits her neuroticism from her Creole mother. Her Creole background is always seen as "other" and jeopardises her Caribbean birth. Bertha, as a

core character, reveals colonial patriarchy, which is the ultimate goal of white people. Instead of divorcing her, Rochester shelters Bertha, gives her good treatment, and hires a nurse to treat her well, which makes him a great person in the eyes of the English. He is a dutiful and compassionate husband in Victorian eyes. This kind of patronising of Rochester to his coloured, mad wife makes him a noble man in the Victorian people. Rochester comes to Jamaica, meets Bertha, and marries her. After marrying Rochester, Bertha comes from the West Indies to England, becomes the wife of an Englishman. But she can never be an Englishwoman because of her Caribbean background. From the beginning, she was seen as “other” in the eyes of an English writer; she is always seen as a coloured woman. As the writer asserts, “It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face. ... the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes” (Brontë 432). As in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester’s caring nature gives Bertha a large home; a nurse, rather than rejecting her, makes him a great man in Victorian patriarchy. “At last, I hired Grace Poole from the Grimsby Retreat” (Brontë 472). Through Rochester, Brontë shows a dutiful husband who takes care of his neurotic wife and justifies his actions to keep her away from Thornfield Hall. Brontë’s statement exemplifies colonial patriarchy, which is the real goal of white people. To make things easier for the readers, Brontë needs a neurotic woman like Bertha to establish patriarchal control.

4.2 Reclaiming the attic: Madness, gender, and colonial oppression

Jean Rhys takes the intricate colonial world of the Caribbean as a primary way to explore the themes of race, gender, and colonialism in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys brings postcolonial feminist themes to the novel’s narrative, reclaiming Bertha as a new name for Antoinette from *Jane Eyre*, primarily as the “madwoman in the attic”—a white Creole woman confined between race and

gender in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys's retelling of the story shows us how madness is not innate; rather, it is shaped by colonial patriarchal oppression. In fact, this novel is not just about Antoinette's tragic end, but also about a coloured woman who continuously suffered the most difficult consequences of the Victorian era.

Wide Sargasso Sea depicts unequal colonial oppression, often using Creole women like Bertha or Antoinette, while character Rochester symbolises the dark colonial power. Rhys retells *Wide Sargasso Sea* to highlight how marginalised women are treated by the white Europeans. "They hated us. They called us white cockroaches" (Rhys 6)- The English viewed the natives as inferior because of their color. "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys 44). These coloured women in the *Wide Sargasso Sea* fight against this gender oppression because they dare to raise their voices. Their role is to challenge not only the narratives but also their society, as they fight against the patriarchal structures that threaten to relegate them to the margins of society.

Rhys acknowledges that this is not Rochester's kindness or love to Bertha; it is indicative of colonial patriarchy. "I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but mine, mine" (Rhys 135). These simple ways, including love, show how colonial patriarchy works, such as calling Antoinette by another name. Rochester starts calling her "Bertha" instead of her real name, as she claims, "My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?" (Rhys 107). It is a depiction of colonial patriarchy, where a wife loses her true identity to her husband. The constant fight between the power of the female authority (Bertha) and the power of the colonial patriarchy (Rochester) is analysed. This is the beginning of how the English writer attempts to establish patriarchal power without a feminist voice. Analysing the female character Bertha, Rhys reminds the readers that

this is not just a depiction of challenging colonial patriarchy but also showcases women's struggles in the 19th century.

4.3 Questioning the patriarchal norms

Bertha or Antoinette symbolises all the patriarchal forces through which Rhys challenges these social traditions. She was constantly confined in an attic for her crazy actions. Brontë, through the character Jane, represents the traditional Victorian ideal of womanhood as well. Women of that time are expected to work as nurses as well as lovers; Jane will be your lover in her young age and a nurse in her old age. Jane's emotional qualities fit into these criteria. After the madness of Rochester's wife, she is the ideal of all these. "I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion-to-read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you" (Bronte 664). These lines simply invoke all the elements to shape a woman's identity. Bertha, at every moment of her life, where she is intelligent, well-educated, rich, fair, and talented, serves love and nurture. However, in doing so, Brontë also diminishes Jane's character. While Rochester is presented as a great male character in Victorian literature, Brontë diminishes Jane, despite all her virtues, portraying her in a caring role like Bertha, where the only difference is social acceptance. All of Jane's caring, loving qualities make her a perfect woman, while Bertha is a madwoman. Here, Brontë also unintentionally devalues the position of white women while simultaneously portraying the realistic gender norms of the time without giving a feminist voice. In Brontë's novel, both Jane and Bertha serve as symbols of Rochester's patronage, with Bertha a warning character to the reader and Jane a reward.

Rhys rewrites Bertha as Antoinette, tracing the roots of her identity and giving her a new voice, once rooted in emotional displacement and colonial trauma. Now, Antoinette Cosway

demonstrates her resistance through her gradual reinterpretation in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, especially when she speaks for herself. When we see Antoinette in Brontë's narrative, there are no descriptions of her character; we don't know her actual identity, we just see her as a dark and ghastly figure. But when she comes to Rhys's narrative, readers can see Antoinette with all her human features. This is a very wonderful representation of the character. This is a re-reading of the text *Jane Eyre*.

Antoinette acts as an anti-patriarchal force in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Her narrative becomes a tool against the colonial patriarchal system that ultimately seeks to classify them. This story is about Antoinette Cosway, where the author states, "It is the story of Antoinette Cosway, a white girl who grows up in the Caribbean, has a disastrous arranged marriage, and goes mad, imprisoned in an English country house" (Rhys 10). Rhys's account of the main character resists the male-centric perspective of *Jane Eyre*, debunking the myth of the "madwoman" and replacing it with the harsh reality of a woman isolated from culture, silenced by marriage. However, in this novel, Antoinette symbolises all sorts of patriarchal oppression that makes their suffering spectacular.

At its core, the *Wide Sargasso Sea* portrays true female autonomy and leadership through the character Antoinette Cosway - something we desperately need today, and also against all the social norms that support unequal outcomes. Despite the many limitations imposed on her, women like Antoinette, deeply rooted in the Caribbean landscape, raise their voice against the male-dominated narrative.

The female characters in this novel are presented as symbols of peace rather than chaos in society, rejecting all male attitudes towards power, their greedy nature. Rhys describes this dynamic as an example of the patriarchal narrative structure of *Jane Eyre* that rewards authority

while pursuing difference. Finally, *Wide Sargasso Sea*-Antoinette becomes a postcolonial literary work of reclaiming the entire traditional authorship by making us reconsider its roots and recognition in the Caribbean lens.

4.4 Why this title, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

The title *Wide Sargasso Sea* first comes to Rhys' mind from the word 'Le Revenant', which means zombie or something that comes from the dead (Rhys 2). From using this title, the writer of the narrative emphasizes the sense of haunting and being haunted. By using this title, the author emphasizes the feeling of haunting and being haunted.

In the title *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys is drawn into Antoinette's emotional and cultural isolation. The 'Sargasso Sea' is a part of the Atlantic Ocean that lies between Europe and the Caribbean. The word 'sea' is used as a powerful metaphor for being caught between two worlds; thus, like the sea, the main character Antoinette is caught in a culture that is too Caribbean for the English people, too English for the Caribbean people. The idea of 'Le Revenant' reflects the haunting nature of Antoinette's life as she is seen as a colored woman in *Jane Eyre*. The narrative is indeed full of magical and 'revengeful' types of experiences: explorations between reality and unreality, life and death, day and night, and present and past (Rhys 10). Eventually, the use of the word 'Wide' in the title shows how far Antoinette is from any sense of her belonging. Through the title *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys portrays her voice and reclaims her lost identity in Brontë's novel.

4.5 *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Feminist Retelling: Voices from Margins

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys brings postcolonial feminist narratives to the forefront by re-enacting the silent voices like Bertha Mason/Antoinette Cosway from the margins of Brontë's *Jane*

Eyre. Rhys sees the character contrapuntally and gives different perspectives on the narrative views. Rhys presents the character from its core, where it is neither a prequel nor a sequel, but a parallel narrative. Except for Antoinette's Creole heritage, Rhys is more concentrated on her childhood trauma, neurosis, and argues against all the aspects of Brontë's narrative. The author mainly placed Antoinette in the centre, looking at it from a postcolonial feminist perspective. The author just tries to give her a voice to speak about her pain, trauma, and colonial oppression that she faced in her childhood. Finally, Rhys managed to bring Antoinette out from Brontë's narrative and let the reader see her contrapuntally, and establishes that Antoinette's madness is not an innate diagnosis but a colonial imposition on her character. Rhys's narrative becomes a powerful feminist text because of its postcolonial aspects that have been explored.

Charlotte Brontë mediated the patriarchy in her Victorian writings as she had to publish this novel under the pseudonym Currer Bell. Another prominent Victorian author, George Bernard Shaw, often supported women's rights and spoke out against patriarchy. Eliza Dolittle in *Pygmalion*, for example, challenges patriarchy by refusing Professor Higgins' proposal and expressing her desire for personal freedom, which Brontë failed to do. In her novel written from a resistant perspective, Rhys confronts the oppressive power of patriarchy, a structure that destroys women and confines them as "other". In this way, *Wide Sargasso Sea* serves as a transcreation of *Jane Eyre*, almost like a counter-narrative. Rhys approaches the heroine Antoinette from the contrapuntal point of view, offering readers an alternative to see and reassess a marginalised character.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Reimagining Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys exposes colonial oppression through the figure of Bertha Mason or Antoinette Cosway. Through the broader context of feminism, Brontë bypasses colonial histories to establish patriarchy. Rhys reforms it from postcolonial feminist perspectives by examining race, gender, and colonial oppression. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys examines how Caribbean Creole woman raises their voice against colonial patriarchy and sees the character contrapuntally to establish that the tragic figure Antoinette's madness is not an innate diagnosis but a colonial imposition.

At the heart of it, postcolonial feminists assert that most feminist critiques are deeply rooted in colonial legacies rather than simply gender or race. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys represents Antoinette as a symbol of colonial displacement, racial hybridity, and female suppression. According to general readers, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, where Rhys sees Antoinette from a different perspective. I feel that it is neither a prequel nor a sequel, rather it is a parallel text of *Jane Eyre*. Through her intensive reading of the text *Jane Eyre*, Rhys discusses Antoinette's madness and proves her neurosis is not inherent but a colonial phenomenon caused by colonial oppression and childhood trauma.

In the end, Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* serves as an important postcolonial feminist text, in which she re-imagines the coloured woman from Charlotte Brontë's margins. The novel is a powerful contrapuntal reading of *Jane Eyre*, where Bertha has been used as a colonial tool to portray Rochester as an ideal patriarchal symbol. Rhys challenges colonial patriarchy with

Antoinette's feminist voice. This is why Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a critical contrapuntal reading for modern readers.

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