

**Deconstructing the “Writing Back” Motif with Abdulrazak Gurnah’s
Paradise and Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Can Postcolonial Writers
Dismantle Colonial Literary Narratives?**

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

Department of English and Humanities
BRAC University
June 2026

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

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

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Approval

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to discern whether Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* are "writing back" to the English and European colonial empires and their literary canons, specifically to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Foundational postcolonial literary theories from books and academic journals provide context to the efficacy of Rhys and Gurnah's writing back: such as Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's idea of the Subaltern, and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry. Furthermore, the research also relies on Chinua Achebe's theory of abrogation and appropriation of the English language as a means of resistance and taking back agency by the colonised subjects. Upon assessing these books, book chapters, and articles, the research finds that Rhys and Gurnah are in fact not writing back to any colonial empire or writer; Rhys writes for a feminist Creole identity, and Gurnah writes to help establish the African literary tradition.

Keywords: Postcolonialism; writing back; Gurnah; Rhys; contrapuntal; orientalism

Dedication

To my mother, who is my rock, to Maisha and Tabassum who have been there with me since my freshman year, and Afzal, whom I have not seen in a decade.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Mahruba T. Mowtushi, whose guidance was essential to the completion of this dissertation. Her patience throughout the research process and her insightful directions at key moments helped shape this research into its best possible form.

I also wish to thank all of the faculty members from the Department of English and Humanities at BRAC University who have helped shape me into the person I have become over the past three and a half years: namely, Ms. Rukhsana Rahim Chowdhury, Ms. Sumaiya Tasnim, Ms. Tasneem Habib Aniqua, Ms. Tabassum Zaman, and Dr. Firdous Azim.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful for the friends I have made from my first semester through to my last one. Thank you, Maisha, Sumit, Soykot, Nijhum, Jabeer, Fahim, Fadila, Sunehra, and Arnob, for your friendship and all the memories over the last three and a half years.

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Chapter 1:

The Colonies Write Back

Postcolonial literature is a wide-encompassing body of writing by writers from formerly colonised regions of the world that explores the far-reaching consequences of imperialism. This literary canon began sometime in the mid-twentieth-century when colonised regions started to decolonise following World War II. Throughout the years, it has transformed into a form of literary rebellion. Among the many versions of postcolonial literature, “writing back” has become one of the most crucial mediums to take back agency from colonial narratives and dismantle the long-lasting stereotypes they have left behind. Prominent postcolonial writers use this mode of writing to write back not only to European and British colonial empires, but to their renowned authors and thinkers. Writing back, like any other medium of postcolonial literature, aims to debunk years of stigma and preconceived notions pushed by colonising forces surrounding the colonised world and their "conceived" savagery.

The central purpose of writing back literature is to subvert narratives within the Western canon, propagated by white colonial writers who were unaware of the far-reaching-consequences of colonialism. Postcolonial writers take on the role of a historian, a revisionist historian some might say, and write literature that pushes back against colonial prejudices. Some postcolonial writers retell entire stories, like Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest* (1974), which is a reinscription of William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1623). Sometimes, they give voice to silenced characters, like Kamel Daoud does in *The Meursault Investigation* (2013), which is told entirely from the

point of view of the Arab character, who is silent and nameless in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (1942).

Other times these writers provide a different spin on Western and imperial canonical texts, adding new plot threads and entire characters to further contextualise the stories from a postcolonial perspective. Many postcolonial writers have attempted to write back to the empire since their respective independence, to varying success. With that being said, simply writing back is not an all-in-all solution to centuries of abuse and exploitation, but it is a start in order to unweave centuries of literary imagery left behind by colonial era writers. The writing back trope is in no way a compensation nor reparation for colonialism, but it is one small feat of taking back control through language by the aggrieved ex-colonised writer.

This research attempts to deconstruct this act of “writing back” through two major novels, by analysing to what extent their authors can write back to their respective colonial empire, and lastly, finding how successful they are in dismantling dominant narratives propagated by the empires surrounding postcolonial literary traditions and their part of the world as a whole.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a foundational primary text for this research, which will aid in analysing the effectiveness and implications of writing back postcolonial literature. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a writing back to the British Empire, and is perceived to be one of the best written and received works by critics and readers alike, ranking among the 100 Best English Language Novels Since 1923 by *The Times* magazine. A postcolonial retelling of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a feminist novel that follows Antoinette Cosway and her turbulent life in and out of Jamaica in the 1830s-40s. Antoinette is Jean Rhys's reimagining of Bertha Mason, Brontë's Madwoman in the Attic, as a Creole woman,

who is caught between the whirlwinds of a colonial white, patriarchal society in both Jamaica and England. Today, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is considered a seminal piece of literature within the postcolonial canon. This is in spite of the fact that the book was written and hailed for being feminist more than its postcolonial interpretations. Both writer Jean Rhys and her protagonist Antoinette are from the Caribbean, and share Creole identities. This offers the unique opportunity to not only analyse the colonised Caribbean experience, but also an identity that was often racially discriminated against by the Black people of the West Indies as well.

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994) is the other primary text for this research. Set in a fictional town in Tanzania at the turn of the twentieth-century, *Paradise* is the coming-of-age story of Yusuf, who is pawned in exchange for his father's outstanding debts to an Arab merchant called Aziz. The novel follows Yusuf's journey as a *rehani* (unpaid worker) to pay for his father's debts as he navigates his formative years throughout East Africa, coming across a colourful cast of characters that range from Arab, Indian, African, and European. Through Yusuf's encounter with this cast of people, Gurnah highlights the effects of colonialism in East Africa, the African diaspora, and the influx of Indian labourers brought on by the British colonial enterprises at the time. Beyond the text, the background history of the novel and Gurnah open many avenues of nuanced interpretations pertaining to intertextuality and the reliance of postcolonial writers on a Western canon. Many scholars consider *Paradise* to be writing back to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). This reading is problematic, in that it takes more away from *Paradise* than it does from *Heart of Darkness*. *Heart of Darkness* stands to lose nothing by being exposed for its problematic depictions of Africa, as this phenomenon is already well documented across nineteenth-century European literary discourse. This research will find

that Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel does not need to write back to any European Imperial novel for *Paradise* to be a successful postcolonial novel.

But why do postcolonial writers write back to their colonisers, instead of furthering their native literary tradition? That is because the influence of colonial empires is still ever present in ex-colonised nations, many of which are propagated by the dominant literary canon. So the postcolonial writer needs to write back and dismantle these influences in order to promote their own culture. However, when a postcolonial writer writes back, they must constantly refer back to works of an imperial writer or thinker. Many postcolonial writers fixate on deconstructing these frameworks. The tendency to draw parallels between works by postcolonial and European writers exposes a reductive fundamental assumption held by many postcolonial writers: that postcolonial literature only exists as a form of rebellion. They ignore the fact that the process of "writing back" — a form of revisionary literary practice — predates European colonial interventions, and is not exclusive to postcolonial discourse.

The literary works of British and European imperial writers and thinkers are static. The empire no longer writes back, as their empires no longer exist. Works from their best writers are nearing a century in age, if not more. Writing back to them is holding postcolonial writers back, as their primary mission is to decolonise their native literary tradition, to cease the mimicry of the shadows of empires, and appropriate the English language to tell their own story. Writing back to the empire further binds the postcolonial writer to constantly refer back to imperial texts in place of native literary canon. Categorising *Paradise* as a literary response to *Heart of Darkness* highlights the erroneous assumption that postcolonial writers have to refer to imperialist texts for relevancy, further propagating the European English novel with its problematic history of imperial negotiations. As a result, this research will find that local literary

traditions of these ex-colonised nations are neglected and unnurtured. Postcolonial writers, with their privilege and established readership, with all their knowing, write novels that respond to colonialist texts instead of furthering their own literary canon.

The presence of religious imagery in both texts is apparent. Rhys explicitly likens the garden at the Coulibri Estate to the Garden of Eden. This likeness comes to life in the line, “Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there” (Rhys 3). Abdulrazak Gurnah’s novel is named after the Islamic plain of the afterlife, a direct juxtaposition to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. He shines light upon the jungles of Africa and represents it as the true natural utopia it is. Instead of describing the dark landscape and dangerous rivers, Gurnah populates his version of East Africa with a colourful cast of characters ranging from Arab, Indian, and African.

The addition of the German imperial officer is of note as well (which is discussed thoroughly in chapter 4). The officer represents a voice of imperial authority in a land far away from their empire (Germany). Yet, he has the authority to act as a mediator between Uncle Aziz’s Caravan and the local leader Chatu. Gurnah pokes at the absurdity of colonising forces when the officer falls asleep in between negotiations between the local leader and the trader. Matters are exacerbated when the officer is described as being followed by a retinue of Askaris — indigenous African natives recruited by European colonial powers. His march into the town, flanked by African soldiers, exposes the hubris of the white man at the height of colonialism. This entire segment mimics Mr. Kurtz going “native” in *Heart of Darkness*. Gurnah exposes the absurdity of a white man in the African jungle ruling as a king by stripping away the allure and mystique of the German officer, which Conrad provides to Mr. Kurtz in his novella.

This research employs Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* as primary texts to discern the efficacy of writing back as a mode of resistance against pervading literary narratives and stereotypes in the dominant colonial English and European canon. Alongside, the research refers to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as supplementary readings. Additionally, the research relies on the theoretical framework established by key postcolonial writers and thinkers such as *Orientalism* by Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern as a voiceless entity, Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry, and Chinua Achebe and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's (*The Empire Writes Back*) (1989) advocacy to appropriate the English language. Books, book chapters, journal articles, and essays by these aforementioned writers serve as complementary readings for this research.

The thesis has some limitations, time constraints being the major among them, as it is part of a bachelor's thesis. Moreover, neither author intended their respective novel to be postcolonial, as they either predate the emergence of this branch of literary tradition, or wrote in conjunction with its rise in relevance. Additionally, not much literature exists on the "writing back" tradition of postcolonial literature. The thesis could not employ any literature that strictly rejects the idea of Gurnah and Rhys writing back to Conrad and Brontë, which is detrimental to Chapter 5 of this thesis. Furthermore, Gurnah's *Paradise* does not have substantial literary criticism for this research to refer to. Further research on this topic could be carried out, analysing other postcolonial literature which is considered to be writing back to colonial empires or their writers.

The first chapter of the discussion for this thesis critically examines Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It juxtaposes Rhys's Antoinette to Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason, responds to

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critical question: "can the subaltern speak?" and discerns the efficacy of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a writing back to *Jane Eyre*. The second chapter of the discussion primarily focuses on Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*, why it should not be read as the Tanzanian writer writing back to Joseph Conrad, and how Gurnah helps establish Swahili African literature in the postcolonial canon. The third and final discussion chapter analyses the findings in the previous two chapters and comes to the conclusion that Gurnah and Rhys are in fact not writing back to their respective empires. Gurnah, though borrowing the narrative heavily from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, never directly refers to his text. Instead, Gurnah references two early Swahili travelogues throughout *Paradise*. Meanwhile Rhys writes a feminist novel that relates her experiences from her own life as a Creole woman. In doing so, both writers surpass their colonial so-called counterparts and instead write to, in Gurnah's case, the African literary tradition in order to introduce it to the world, and, in the case of Rhys, to the feminist cause of subjugated women, and to the Creole identity.

Chapter 2:

Review of Literature

James Hodapp's discourse in *English in Africa*, titled, "Imagining Unmediated Early Swahili Narratives in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *"Paradise"*", establishes the tendency of postcolonial writers to cling to the Western canon in hopes that their work finds relevance in the Western canon. Postcolonial writers continuously make references to white literature, amalgamating it into an intertext that hinges on the words, works, and ideas of the white writers and critics to give credence to their writings. Hodapp posits that the most sought-after and repeated trope in literature is the motif of the journey. Joseph Conrad is one of the key late nineteenth-century European literary pioneers of the journey motif, one that was already established in literature that predates any colonial empire. Religious scriptures like the Quran and epic poems like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* have used the journey motif allegorically centuries ago. The journey motif turned into the holy grail quest in Arthurian legend in the medieval period. Truly, the journey motif is one of the most tested, most effective narrative tools to tell a story that revolves around growth and perseverance, traits that are essential to any good story. The motif of the journey sees the protagonist follow a path that leads them to a person, objective, or an intangible object, by the end of which they transform — usually for the better. This is why *Paradise* is so often compared to, and at times considered to be a "writing back," to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Though no literature exists, *Paradise* can also be considered as a response to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as both stories centre around the loss of innocence.

Yusuf's journey into the "interior" of the Congo with Uncle Aziz and his troupe is epitomic of the journey motif. Hodapp comes to Gurnah's defense in his article. To challenge the

dominant presence of white writers, Gurnah employs Swahili literature to establish an African literary tradition within his text, and that of wider Africa and. By referring to previously unacknowledged Swahili prose texts such as Selemani bin Mwenye Chande's *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika* (*My Journey Up-Country in Africa*) and Salim bin Abakari's *Yangu ya Urusi na ya Siberi* (*My Journey to Russia and Siberia*), Gurnah advocates for independence from white, Eurocentric literature and acknowledges that African literary traditions, which includes Swahili literature, is worthy enough to stand on its own in postcolonial studies. Hodapp argues that Gurnah actually does not "write back" to either Europe or Conrad, rather "writes forward" to Africa. In a literary world dominated by the Western canon, Abdulrazak Gurnah puts African literature at the forefront of his novel, directly referring to Chande's travelogue rather than established writers from the West like John Milton or Ernest Hemingway.

"Gurnah and Naipaul: Intersections of '*Paradise*' and '*A Bend in the River*'" written for *Twentieth Century Literature*, Fawzia Mustafa argues that Gurnah's *Paradise* shares a very similar narrative framework to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. However, Mustafa continues that this is the extent of the similarities between the two texts. Gurnah only uses the premise of Conrad's imperialist text, as a simple framing device for his characters and plot. Gurnah quickly distances himself from Conrad's Africa and the wider Western English language canon by making distinctive Quranic references in his text. The central character Yusuf is also named after the Biblical Abrahamic figure, Joseph, while Uncle Aziz is the embodiment of Aziz of Egypt, a wealthy merchant who purchases young Joseph and treats him with honour. Gurnah is allegorical in naming his characters, as Yusuf and Uncle Aziz within his novel play out the roles of Joseph and Aziz of Egypt from verse 12:21 of the Quran. Additionally, Gurnah makes intertextual

references to Swahili literature in his novel, introducing these previously undiscovered travelogues to postcolonial studies and the wider world.

The article “The Swahili Mtapta: Exploring Translation in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Paradise*” by Ida Hadjivayanis is employed in this research for the purpose of navigating Selemani bin Mwenye Chande’s Swahili travelogue *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika*, primarily because this text does not have an English translation. *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika* serves as the basis for the journey to the interior presented in *Paradise*. The entire route of Uncle Aziz’s caravan, the trade practises by the merchants, and Yusuf’s own journey are all fashioned after Chande’s text, and Hadjivayanis’s journal article is crucial to identify these similarities. The parallels help establish how Gurnah pays respect to Swahili literature.

Shehla Burney’s book chapter, titled, “Resistance and Counter-Discourse: Writing Back to the Empire” in *Counterpoints* reaffirms key points Edward Said brings up in both *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. In their literature, the Western world portrayed ex-colonised nations as brutish and savage, dark and untamable. Postcolonial writers write back in creative and critical ways to make sense of the unfair treatment of large swathes of populations throughout the eastern hemisphere. Burney emphasises the importance of postcolonial resistance, and its crucial role in undermining the Western dominant narrative of Orientalism enforced upon the colonised world. Her chapter offers a supplementary reading to Edward Said’s most influential contribution to postcolonial studies presented in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

In her article “Postcolonial Discourse in ‘*Wide Sargasso Sea*’: Creole Discourse vs. European Discourse, Periphery vs. Center, and Marginalized People vs. White Supremacy” for the *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Silvia Cappello commends Jean Rhys for “writing back”

to the British Empire. Rhys, as Capello puts it, writes back to a founding imperialist novel, in an attempt to fill in the blanks from the perspective of a colonised person in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (209). Rhys writes back and gives the voiceless Bertha Mason a voice and a story in her retelling. In doing so, Rhys humanises the “Other” in an imperial narrative which was written from the perspective of the “centre” of the world. Additionally, Capello makes note of the usage of language in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys uses both Standard British English and creole Jamaican English, characterising Jamaica, Dominica, and all of its inhabitants as a truly lived-out and well realised setting.

Carine Melkom Mardorossian advocates for critics to “double-decolonise” Antoinette in her journal article “Double [De]colonization and the Feminist Criticism of ‘*Wide Sargasso Sea*’” written for *College Literature*. She argues that Antoinette is in a more unique position than her Victorian counterpart Bertha Mason, and as such requires more nuanced interpretations. Jane Eyre was a woman in a patriarchal society, whereas Antoinette is a woman *and* a colonised subject in the patriarchal West Indies. Matters are made worse when her creole identity is taken into account for this research. The central argument to recontextualise Antoinette’s character stems from this quote: “By subordinating the text’s racial to its sexual politics, they (critics) ironically reproduced the same kind of erasure that Rhys had initially set out to correct,” (Mardorossian 80).

On the topic of Antoinette’s position in society, in “Women, Slavery, and the Problem of Freedom in *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” Jennifer Gilchrist highlights Jean Rhys’s approach to the Imperial Abolition of Slavery Act of 1834 in Jamaica and the greater West Indies. Rhys disrupts the white narrative that positions emancipation as a means to freedom, disregarding far-reaching factors like instability, identity crises, and social tension amongst the emancipated population.

The white colonisers present a solution to the very problem they began: they propose to abolish slavery, the very thing they propagated and brought to the African continent. The white colonisers did not consider the potential psychological and generational trauma they would inflict on the colonised populations. In this self-assured manner, the colonisers drew up scriptures such as the Abolition Act to show their superficial benevolent nature. Though this research must concede that Europe and Britain were operating under the belief that they were helping the Eastern world. Their hubris stemmed from a liberal standpoint, a thought that they were elevating the rest of the world to their level.

In “Between and beyond Boundaries in *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” M. M. Adjarian sheds light on the “inbetween-ness” of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette, and Rhys herself. Antoinette is Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys turns this name into a plot point that develops throughout the novel. Bertha starts the novel as Antoinette Cosway. Rochester starts to address Antoinette by Bertha Mason as she continues to show signs of delirium and confusion in the latter half of the book, spiralling due to her failing marriage. However, Rhys emphasises Antoinette’s inbetween-ness by having her go by her white Creole father’s surname, which is Cosway, foregoing that of her white stepfather’s surname, Mason. Adjarian adds on to this, writing, “This demonstrates how the writer is also attempting to break away from total identification with what Brontë and her work symbolise: English culture on the one hand and tacit acceptance of British colonialism on the other” (203).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is essential to this thesis. Her seminal work in “Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” deconstructs the dichotomy between *Jane Eyre* and its “reinscription” of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Spivak does this with an extended metaphor of comparing Antoinette with Narcissus from Greek mythology. Spivak uses the mirror imagery

from the myth to analyse all the instances of mirroring in Rhys's novel. She first highlights how Antoinette mirrors Tia, the servant girl who worked at their Coulibri estate. They become so attuned to each other's mannerisms and routine that Antoinette thinks "It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass" (Rhys 38). This mirror analogy returns later in Thornfield Hall when Antoinette dreams of a ghost, who is actually Tia, except their places are inverted: it is Antoinette who is trapped by the rigid structures of patriarchy, while Tia is free from slavery. Before waking, Antoinette sees Tia in a "gilt frame," much like Narcissus sees himself in the pool: "Here the dream sequence ends, with an invocation of none other than Tia" (Spivak 250). The Narcissus prophecy is fulfilled. Spivak argues that Narcissus is intervened by the Ovidian pool, while Antoinette is othered by imperialism. She is stopped from merging into her true self, an amalgamation of both her Creole and Caribbean identity.

Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* offers clarity on why European writers wrote their texts in the first place with such impunity; why Brontë chose the person of colour from a British colony to be the mad woman from the attic; why Conrad wrote African natives in such vividly racist tones of muted colour. British and European colonial powers deemed themselves to be the Occident, the "centre" of the world, and anything east from there was considered the Orient. Said posits "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (31), developing Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. European writers and thinkers exploited the colonised subjects through their works, fiction and essays, emboldened by the self-assuredness brought on by the idea that the Orient is exotic and thus dangerous to or at least not on par with the Occident, i.e., Europe. Most European writers, perhaps intentionally, or maybe subconsciously, "othered" the East in their literature as well. In *Great Expectations* (1861), Charles Dickens refers to Australia as "Botany

Bay” (14), a name synonymous with Australia’s foundational penal colony in the eighteenth-century, and calls the prison ship “hulks” (209). Though he never uses the words “colony,” or “orient,” his language evokes a sense of vilifying the east.

Said says, “The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be “Oriental” in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it could be—that is, submitted to being—made Oriental” (31). The Orient never chose to be the Orient. Bertha Mason never chose to be the madwoman in the attic. The people of Congo Free State never chose to be Belgian subjects under King Leopold II. These decisions were made for them by foreign forces. This research finds *Orientalism* instrumental in studying postcolonial “writing back” literature.

Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* helps shed light on the thought processes behind both Gurnah and Rhys as postcolonial storytellers, though neither ascribed themselves to this line of discourse at the time of writing their respective texts. European colonial writings have no doubt affected narratives and cultures of the colonised, but it cannot be denied that these narratives, no matter how unfair and inaccurate, are still part of their very histories. The European and English colonisers themselves likewise experienced a change in their culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when many colonies were vying for independence. Said says, “rather than condemning or ignoring their participation in what was an unquestioned reality in their societies, I suggest that what we learn about this hitherto ignored aspect actually and truly enhances our reading and understanding of them” (16). Said’s research highlights that Rhys and Gurnah followed this line of thinking. Rhys writes *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a feminist text rather than one that is written back to *Jane Eyre*. She does not treat Rochester, the only foreigner in the novel, the same way as Brontë treats Bertha Mason. Gurnah uses the journey motif in *Paradise*

without so much as a hint of a direct reference to Conrad or Kurtz. Instead, Gurnah refers inward to Swahili literature, bringing his local literary tradition into the limelight and postcolonial canon. “Writing back” literature should not be a straight denial of the presence of English and European texts from the colonial era texts they are writing back to; rather, they should acknowledge the existence of such texts and their authors, and then deconstruct and dismantle the narratives of the Orient propagated by “Occidental” literature.

Chapter 3:

The Gardens of Paradise

Paradise by Nobel Prize winner Abdulrazzak Gurnah is a coming-of-age story of Yusuf, set in the fictional town of Kawa, Tanzania. Yusuf's father is a local hotelier, and is indebted to multiple creditors, including one Uncle Aziz. Uncle Aziz visits the household often, and Yusuf is never made aware of the reason, developing respect for the man and looking forward to Uncle Aziz's visits, not knowing that every visit spells his family's doom. Eventually, Yusuf's parents pawn him in order to pay their debt. Uncle Aziz takes the young boy under his wing, as they travel by train across East Africa, where the trader has a shop for his wares. After a few years of working for the trader — and a mishap with Hamid and his wife Maimuna, friends of Uncle Aziz — Yusuf is finally asked to join a caravan headed east, to the interior of the Congo.

Paradise is ascribed to be a “writing back” to Conrad by many scholars. The journey motif as a narrative framework substantiates these claims, as the literary genealogy of the text is skeletally similar to *Heart of Darkness*. This chapter explores whether Gurnah actually is writing back to Conrad, and if he is successful in deconstructing the long-lasting negative imagery left behind by Conrad.

The title of this chapter is alluding to the garden attached to Uncle Aziz's property, which is also the namesake of the first chapter of the book: “The Walled Garden.” The garden is also religiously symbolic as it alludes to the Garden of Eden, and how Yusuf cannot enter the garden until he has lost his innocence.

First and foremost, Gurnah does not write in conjunction with *Heart of Darkness*. Gurnah's novel is not a sequel nor a prequel to Conrad's novella. *Paradise* is a novel that can

stand on its own legs in postcolonial canon. The narrative framing is the only connecting tissue between the two texts. Yusuf travels to the interior of Africa instead of a vast and unending heart of darkness in the Congo; he is accompanied by Uncle Aziz and his caravan instead of a steamboat and Belgian colonialists; the party ventures into the jungle in search of trade rather than tracking an ex-company man who has gone “native;” Uncle Aziz’s caravan must liaise with Chatu, a local leader, instead of Mr. Kurtz, an enigmatic European. In one particular scene in *Paradise*, Aziz’s caravan makes camp. The men gather around a fire late into the night and exchange stories. A Mombasan traveller grabs the attention of everyone at the fire, as he relates a story from a land far from Africa. The framing of this scene entices the reader into thinking it is a replay of the introductory scene where Marlow grabs the attention of several people on the Nellie on the River Thames. However, here too Gurnah subverts expectations by not reverting to Conradian storytelling, rather looking forward to Swahili literature (how this is achieved is discussed later in this chapter).

So how does a postcolonial writer “write back” to the empire without ever directly referring to any colonial-era text? To answer this question, the research first looks at the intertextual relationship between *Paradise* and its closest colonial counterpart. Though Gurnah himself has not admitted to or denied his work being contrapuntal to Conrad’s magnum opus, critics are often split between either interpretation. Some see the obviously distinct callbacks and unacknowledged references to *Heart of Darkness*, while detractors claim that postcolonial critics and thinkers labelling a novel as realised and complete as *Paradise* as a mere “writing back” to Conrad is reductive at best, harmful for postcolonial literature at worst. Instead, the text should be heralded for what it is: a coming-of-age story of a young child learning his place in the world,

set during the Scramble for Africa (late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries), when European colonisers were “carving up” Africa for themselves.

Another instance of Gurnah using unconventional techniques to refer to *Heart of Darkness* instead of directly quoting it is the naming convention within the text. Conrad’s text reduces the entirety of the African continent to an immense darkness, a blip on the map which was physically represented within the coloniser’s table-sized uncharted atlas. The darkness also referred to the skin colour of the African people, as evidenced by the number of times Conrad physically describes them: “their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks” (Conrad 20), “a whirl of black limbs” (57). Juxtaposingly, Gurnah names his text *Paradise*, a stark contrast to the image of the dark depth of a jungle symbolising the heart of a continent. Gurnah sheds light on this same continent, using heavenly imagery with the constant recurrence of Uncle Aziz’s garden, which, much like Rhys’s garden in the Coulibri Estate, symbolises the Garden of Eden. The title of Gurnah’s novel, *Paradise*, itself highlights the stark contrast that is evoked in Conrad’s title, *Heart of Darkness* (Mustafa 233).

The name Yusuf itself is an allusion to his Abrahamic namesake Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), while Uncle Aziz is a reference to Aziz of Egypt from Surah Yusuf (Chapter 12), a wealthy merchant who plays an important role in the life of Prophet Yusuf. The Egyptian trader Aziz buys Yusuf as a slave but is nice and kind to him, raising him to become an Egyptian king. The inclusion of Islamic religious allegories into Gurnah’s text, and the absence of Christian allusions in Conrad’s, despite the many religious European missionaries in Africa at the time *Heart of Darkness* takes place, reveals how the dimension of religion presents religious intertextuality in *Paradise*.

Writing back should not be reduced to a simple act of “correcting” what colonial-era writers perceived and wrote about the colonial world wrong. It should be a way of reclaiming the space left during the centuries of colonialism by the absence of muted diverse voices from the colonies. Centuries of art and literature have been lost to linguistic imperialism, as the colonisers enforced their state language (French, English, Belgian) onto the colonised regions, stunting their own linguistic development. As a result, their cultural and literary progress also halted. For the subaltern, “writing back” is a form of resistance to dominant literary narratives by European and English colonisers during the height of their empires (Burney 105). Writing back should work to give voice to those that were voiceless during that era, something Rhys does with Antoinette. Writing back should dispel problematic representations, which Gurnah does for Africa and its peoples. He writes back to Conrad without ever referring to his text nor his characters. Gurnah only borrows Conrad’s narrative framing, and alludes to Mr. Kurtz. The African setting cannot truly be credited as borrowing as Gurnah is a Yemeni descendant, and a Tanzanian citizen. In this regard Gurnah takes Africa *back* from Conrad. He places his story in the Congo as well. The Tanzanian writer floods his text with references to lesser-known Swahili works of literature such as Selemani bin Mwenye Chande’s *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika (My Journey Up-Country in Africa)*, and Salim bin Abakari’s *Yangu ya Urusi na ya Siberi (My Journey to Russia and Siberia)* (to be further discussed later in this chapter), establishing that an African literary tradition existed before Chinua Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Gurnah’s addition of the character of the white German officer with a retinue of Askaris when Uncle Aziz’s Caravan enters the local lord Chatu’s fictional town in Manyema land complicates the efficacy of Gurnah’s writing back to colonial Europe. Chatu holds Uncle Aziz’s Caravan hostage. He claims that people who look similar to Uncle Aziz had passed Chatu’s town

before and cheated him. So Chatu wishes to exact revenge and compensate for his lost goods by holding all of Uncle Aziz's wares. This is when the European officer enters. He serves as a model of European authority in a colonised late nineteenth-century Africa, foreign to both the local lord Chatu and to Uncle Aziz's Caravan. Gurnah uses this setting to criticise and ridicule Mr. Kurtz and the "white saviour" trope that takes place in Conrad's novella.

The man waltzes into the scene with a retinue of Askaris, who are African natives serving colonial forces. "In the middle of the morning a column entered the town. It was led by a European who marched his men directly to the clearing in front of Chatu's residence" (Gurnah 131). After he listens to Chatu's side of the story, the officer yawns and announces that he would "rest" (132), and promptly goes to sleep in the middle of this commotion. Gurnah once again subverts expectations. The reader expects this European to be somewhat like Mr. Kurtz, a charismatic man who has gone "native." Instead, the European officer conducts himself like someone unbecoming of his station. He listens to one side of the story and falls asleep before passing on a verdict.

As already mentioned, Chinua Achebe is another African writer whose name comes up when discussing writing back to Conrad. Though Achebe — like Gurnah — does not directly write back to Conrad, the two texts are juxtaposed in postcolonial discourse. Once again, another writer from an ex-colony is considered to be writing back to Conrad by critics. While there are some elements established by Conrad that Achebe addresses, *Things Fall Apart* is not a reinscription of *Heart of Darkness*.

Achebe is unconcerned with Conrad's Africa. Achebe writes about Igbo culture, and weighs the usefulness and dangers of European missionary ventures in Africa. Both Achebe and Gurnah find the middle ground in their literature. The in-betweenness of their characters is what

makes them both celebrated writers. They are aware of the residues of the colonial literary legacy left behind by Conrad's writings, but they do not let that get in the way of their storytelling. Conrad can fit into this mould. Despite being an European during the era of colonialism, and a product of his time, he had enough sensibilities to know that the exploits of European empires were morally wrong. This is reflected in his text, namely in his depiction of Mr. Kurtz. Kurtz and Marlow are not to be reviled simply for spawning from *Heart of Darkness*. He was writing according to his era's sensibilities. Similarly, Okonkwo is not to be worshipped because he was written by Achebe. On the other hand, Gurnah litters his work with colourful characters from a plethora of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures, and refers to early Swahili literature instead of Western canon.

Chinua Achebe appropriates the English language in *Things Fall Apart*. The cast of characters in Achebe's work talk in Igbo and the characters have Igbo characteristics. Achebe believes that "the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (103). The appropriation of colonial languages, English in this case, is an integral part of this 'writing back.' However, this appropriation is not to appease any European readership. English is a universal language and it simply expands the readership of any author no matter their place of origin. Many African states are actually conversant in English, which signals that English had been appropriated in real-life usage far before it was for African literature. As a result, many African postcolonial writers choose to write in the English language to this day. English has reached such universality that it can no longer be credited to be a single nation-state's language. There is also the added benefit that many of the countries that used to be colonial powers are able to read both fiction and non-fiction from postcolonial writers.

This way, citizens of nation states that were once colonial powers can be aware of the injustice of colonialism. Postcolonial writers, like any person from an ex-colonised country, use their own evolved version of English, whether it be a “writing back” or “speaking back.” This English evolved from centuries of cultural assimilation, exploitation, erasure, but also exchange.

Jean Rhys gives each of her characters distinct dialects based on their place of origin, making the text more lived and realised than any colonial-era novel was able to capture in their depiction of characters from colonies. Achebe excels in this regard as well. His characters speak in Igbo proverbs and idioms, moving African literature away from Eurocentric literary conventions. This way, African languages and their literary canon are established. The rich languages of the continent can contend with and intertextually refer back to each other without relying on writers or texts from the Western canon.

Although Abdulrazak Gurnah writes in a way that advocates for African culture, he does not write in an African language. In both *Paradise* and *Things Fall Apart*, the language that the book is written in is actually not the language the characters are speaking in. The narration is translated from many different languages spoken by the diverse cast in Gurnah’s novel, and the Igbo tribe in Achebe’s. They use their own native languages. This is aptly demonstrated when Uncle Aziz’s caravan negotiates with the local tribal leader Chatu and one of Aziz’s men, Nyundo, who is relegated to translating between the two men, as both representatives speak different languages: Arabic and Kiswahili for Aziz, Kinyema for Chatu. However, Nyundo’s translations are questioned as “the men teased him that he was making up the translations as he went along” (Gurnah 121), adding an element of an unreliable narrator. Nonetheless, the man operates as the translator and Gurnah does not give the reader any other reason to doubt him. Thus the English language presents itself as a truce between the reader and the characters in the

novel. The writer has appropriated this universal language to tell his story with clarity. Much like Achebe, Gurnah must write in the English language, as the former posits, “There is certainly a great advantage to writing in a world language” (Achebe 97). Postcolonial writers have appropriated the English language to tell their stories, regardless of whether they are writing back or not.

One of the key legacies left behind by the English and European colonial empires is the record of colonial exploitation and brutality documented in their literature. Their authors, unbeknownst to themselves, never censored the adverse effects of colonialism on the colonies in their writing. European and English literature have chronicled the rise and fall of colonialism in the background of their novels and essays. These writers cannot be entirely blamed either, for similar to Joseph Conrad, they were all products of their time. In a novel as innocent as E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* (1910) or Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814) the narratives constantly refer to the white characters’ offshore colonies from where they derive their wealth and fortune. This was standard for white English and Europeans at the height of their empires.

However, before the nineteenth-century the colonial empires are merely alluded to in short passages and often treated as something that is happening in the far background of a story, i.e., “Botany Bay” in *Great Expectations* (1861). A shift came when writers like Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, André Gide, and Pierre Loti started using colonialism as the subject for their texts (Said 19). These writers set their plots and characters right in the middle of colonies, and through them explored the cruelty of empires rather than just alluding to them implicitly. Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism* that Conrad was “both anti-imperialist and imperialist” (21), noting the duality of the Polish-British writer. Conrad was aware of the self-deluding corruption of overseas domination (21), and with all that knowing, he produced a novella that is polarising:

some critics say it is anti-imperialist in its depiction of Belgian company, others claim that it is racist in nature with its representation of African people.

Said notes that Conrad could not fathom that natives of the colonies could sustain lives free from the authority and superior guidance from the European colonists (69). Perhaps his biggest contribution to abolishing colonialism through literature was writing *Heart of Darkness*, for he displayed the savagery of colonialism with little censoring. Said calls to not call Conrad a product of his time, which this research fails to agree with. Despite his best efforts and his critique of imperialism, Conrad could not grant the colonised natives their freedom even within the fictional confines of his literature (69). With all his sensibilities, Conrad could not free the colonised world even in his fiction. But what of postcolonial writers like Gurnah and Rhys? Could they free their colonised subjects in their fiction, with all their knowing?

This chapter found that Gurnah did. He elevated Africa from Conrad's dark and mystifying representation, used religious allegories to show how the continent was home to the progenitors of the human race, and established an African literary tradition by referring to two previously unknown Swahili travelogues.

This chapter deconstructed Abdulrazak Gurnah's attempt at "writing back" to both the European colonisers and Joseph Conrad. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe's "English and the African Writer," Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, are among the key texts for this chapter's findings.

Chapter 4:

A Sea of Hybrid Identities

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a feminist novel and a postcolonial retelling of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Though Rhys did not write this through a postcolonial lens, this research employs this reading of the novel. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also considered to be writing back to the English colonial empire. Rhys writes back in two ways: first, she writes back to Charlotte Brontë in an attempt to counter her portrayal of Bertha Mason as a madwoman from the colonies that is as exoticised as it is exploited; next, she writes back to *Jane Eyre*, as *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a prequel. The protagonist of this novel is Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre*, before she became the madwoman in the attic. The significance of this chapter's title is tied to Antoinette Cosway and her author Jean Rhys's identities as colonised Creole women. It speaks to their in-betweenness, and the hybridity of their identities, both being women with white and Caribbean ancestry within them.

Rhys's novel starts before Brontë's begins, several years before Bertha Mason becomes Bertha Mason and moves to England with her husband Edward Rochester. Bertha Mason never speaks in Brontë's novel, is only spoken to. She is an exoticised colonised person of colour, who Rochester describes as "the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!" (Brontë 445). Brontë portrays Rochester as the misunderstood aristocrat, who Jane Eyre eventually forgives and marries at the end, while portraying Bertha Mason as a spectre and scary presence in the attic of Thornfield Hall. Rhys, in turn, does not belittle the character of Rochester. She writes back in a manner that is more effective than it would have been had she attempted to criticise or belittle Rochester in an attempt to exact revenge for Bertha Mason. Instead, Rhys goes back in time, to a

point of the narrative that even Brontë herself perhaps never conceptualised, and starts from there. She populates Caribbean Jamaica with a colourful and diverse cast of characters and makes Bertha Mason the protagonist of her story. She even has her own name to go by this time, Antoinette Cosway.

This particular framing of writing a prequel to an already beloved and established novel makes *Wide Sargasso Sea* such an integral piece of an instance of “writing back.” Rhys writes back to a feminist novel by writing a feminist novel in order to fill the blanks left behind by Charlotte Brontë, a product of her time. She writes to give a voice to the denigrated and supplanted cultures of the colonised world, to tell their side of the story, those who have been considered inferior for reasons that are beyond unjustified (Cappello 47). Instead of simply pointing fingers at Brontë and her white characters, Rhys chooses to establish the Creole woman who is mostly invisible in Brontë’s text and elevates her. Today Antoinette stands as one of the best-written characters with a rich history in postcolonial discourse.

However, Antoinette Cosway does not stay Antoinette Cosway for long. Rhys prepares the reader for the emergence of Bertha Mason early on in the novel. Rochester names her on a whim, as demonstrated in the lines, “Because it is a name I’m particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha” (Rhys 107). This not only symbolises the erasure of identity of a Creole woman, but of any woman in a patriarchal society. Antoinette is stripped away from her birthplace and inheritance, robbed of her name by a coloniser, her husband, and then promptly renamed on the whims of the same husband who is quickly falling out of love with her. Rhys characterises Bertha Mason by giving her the background of a Jamaican heiress and a deep family history, but she cannot save Antoinette from her fate.

No matter what Rhys does, Antoinette's life ends at that fire in Thornfield Park. Edward Rochester "renames his wife Bertha, thus domesticating her in terms of class as well as of sex and race, and confines her to an attic — under the care of a hired nurse, Grace Poole — the othered space against which his English house can define itself" (Mardorossian 81). Rochester's justification for imprisoning Bertha Mason in the attic is her madness, which Rhys alludes to in her own novel, establishing consistency. All Rhys can do is give her a little bit of humanity, which is in no way an adequate compensation for the centuries of savage exploitation of colonialism, and centuries of literary discourse surrounding Bertha Mason perceived as the madwoman in the attic, but it stands to dismantle some of the literary stereotypes and injustices established and left behind by European writers. All Rhys can do is write back to take back some agency for the marginalised characters from the English canon.

Jane Eyre is a seminal work of feminist literature. In an era dominated by white male authors writing about white male protagonists, the Brontë sisters burst into the English writing scene, albeit having to rely on male pseudonyms. *Jane Eyre* has stood the test of time because of its central titular character, who is handy, resourceful, and kind-hearted. As aforementioned, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also a feminist text. Just like *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette Cosway is a woman in a patriarchal society. Both heroines navigate societies dominated by men. However, in addition to being a woman, Antoinette is also a colonised woman in a British colony. Added to this is the complicated nature of the Creole identity: a person of mixed ancestry. She is a white European by descent but was born and raised in the Caribbean. As a result, Antoinette requires nuanced interpretations when being read by critics and scholars, argues Mardorossian (80). Wedged between both a white identity of a coloniser, and a coloured identity of a colonised person, Antoinette suffers the worst of both worlds, which results in her getting called a white cockroach

by the local children: “I hit you back white cockroach, I hit you back,” said Amélie. And she did” (Rhys 75).

The chapter must concede that Antoinette *does* benefit from some advantages of being an heiress in the Caribbean for example having servants at her household and not having to work for a living. This however, does not alleviate her from any of the harsh realities that a Creole woman would suffer in Jamaica after the Imperial Abolition of Slavery Act of 1834 was passed. Rochester’s inclusion in the story and his subsequent marriage to Antoinette further exacerbates the latter’s situation. The institution of marriage is inherently patriarchal, and Antoinette feels the burden of this marriage throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Therefore, this chapter establishes that Antoinette is more disadvantaged than her feminist counterpart in *Jane Eyre*. Thus, as Mardorossian suggests, Antoinette requires double-decolonising. Postcolonial and feminist critics often substitute *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s sexual politics with racial politics, ironically reproducing similar postcolonial discourses that Jean Rhys intends to correct with this text (Mardorossian 80).

With that being said, critics and scholars are not to be blamed. Rhys errs in this regard. She gives Antoinette some of the qualities that are present in colonial texts. Antoinette is a baroness as a child of former plantation and slave owners. She herself owns a plantation and the Granbois estate after the death of her parents. Both of these premises are maintained by coloured servants. This puts Antoinette in a difficult position: as a Creole woman minority herself, she exerts power over those who are lower than her in society. However, with all of these qualities established, the research finds that this is not exactly a misstep by Rhys, but rather Antoinette is written this way by design.

Nobody wants to read perfect characters who are largely infallible with no moral dilemmas. The best and most memorable characters are flawed and offer nuanced interpretations. In a way, this also establishes that Rhys is not writing back to Brontë, as her own protagonist is just as flawed as Jane. Rhys is writing her own story as a Creole woman disguised as Antoinette's. She is writing back to a Creole identity, one that is deeply embedded with her own story.

Jean Rhys sets the story in the backdrop of the aftermath of the Imperial Abolition of Slavery Act in Jamaica. This adds a layer to "writing back" to Charlotte Brontë's colonial backdrop. Rhys not only writes back to the exploits of colonialism, but also to the emancipation acts taking place across the Caribbean during this era. She exposes ignorance of the empires, as they created solutions to problems they created.

The superficial nature of abolition in the Caribbean is more thoroughly exposed in the aftermath of the act, which is crucial to the narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. To her detriment, Rhys shows this superficiality at the expense of her protagonist, who also suffers from the emancipation as heavily as the colonisers. The abolition of slavery affects the Creole plantation owners in Jamaica. Antoinette's family are plantation and ex-slave owners. They suffer from the act, losing their livelihood and position in society. As previously alluded to, "The garden at Coulibri, specifically, is likened to the Garden of Eden after the Fall" (Gilchrist 468); the fall of the Coulibri Estate is allegorical of the loss of Eden.

The new class of freed ex-slaves enter society and are now hostile toward the ex-slave owners. In the novel, Antoinette bemoans to Rochester the loss of her family's plantations, saying, "If I could make you see it, because they destroyed it and it is only here now" (Rhys 132), before slapping her own forehead, protesting the fact that these plantations only exist in

memory now. As Gilchrist (468) points out, Antoinette is quietly blaming the metropolitan English for the destruction of her plantation; first by freeing its workforce and causing it to crumble to disrepair, and later by freeing slaves who eventually ganged up on and burned down Coulibri, the Cosway family plantation, after its restoration by Mr. Mason. Antoinette is a colonist herself. With that being said, however, she is a product of her time, and a victim of circumstances — as this research has found multiple times hitherto — same as the authors of most European colonial texts like Conrad and Brontë.

After the fall of her family plantation and marriage to Rochester, she does grow to like and mimic her servants, growing a special bond with Christophine and Tia. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak* is employed as a supplementary reading to both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and is integral to this research. Spivak asks the question, “can the subaltern speak?” which is already answered in Brontë's text: a resounding no. Bertha Mason is voiceless and relegated to the attic of Thornfield Hall as Rochester deems her mad, and does not want people to see her. Spivak is proven right: “The subaltern cannot speak” (104). Both Antoinette Cosway and Bertha Mason are subaltern: they are marginalised and socially excluded in both Jamaica and Thornfield Hall. Rhys takes up Spivak on this question and attempts to retort that the subaltern *can* speak if given the opportunity.

Spivak posits that “If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (83). This goes back to Mardorossian's point that the colonised female needs double decolonising. Antoinette is given a voice and a name, but the narrative of the novel is still invaded by a white voice, as Rochester narrates a large portion of the second chapter. In this regard, *Wide Sargasso Sea* becomes a polyphonic text, which is substantiated by Mikhail Bakhtin's quote: “A plurality of independent

and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony” (7). The presence of different voices and narrators, especially ones that are very contrasting to each other, presents the opportunity for a polyphonic reading of this novel, which is not present in *Jane Eyre*. Instead of allowing Antoinette to dominate the narrative, Rhys allows Rochester to narrate as well, creating an equal opportunity for both independent consciousnesses to coexist. While Antoinette sees the Caribbean as home, Rochester sees it through the lens of colonialism: a foreign and threatening region from which he must remove and take away his wife and relocate her to England.

Going back to Spivak, Antoinette’s voice falters during the latter half of the book, as readers are presented with her failing mental state, proving that the subaltern can speak, but patriarchy and social rejection can take a toll on them, eventually muting them. Spivak says that even the intellectual, one such as Jean Rhys, one with all that knowing, can be “complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self’s shadow” (75). Rochester’s marriage to Antoinette is summarised in this succinct quote by Spivak, “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (92). His marriage to Antoinette is fueled by capitalistic enterprise; as the youngest son, he ventures out to the Caribbean on orders from his father to marry the Cosway heiress for the dowry of £30,000 and buy their former plantation.

According to Spivak, this is Rhys humanising Rochester. Though this research disagrees with this particular reading, this discourse is important for later (chapter 5). Instead of portraying Rochester as the villain — as Brontë did with Bertha Mason — Rhys gives him almost an entire chapter to himself, so he can say his side of the story. His imprisonment of Antoinette is, in his mind, rationalised by Antoinette’s crumbling mental state the reader is privy to in the second chapter. Rhys portrays Rochester as a victim of the patriarchal inheritance law of entitlement: he enters the picture as a younger son sent to the colonies to purchase the old Cosway plantation

and buy an heiress (Spivak 251). Rochester's entry also alludes to the unabashed hubris of the white man, much like the German officer in Gurnah's *Paradise*, or even Mr. Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Rochester enters an ex-colony that has just been emancipated and buys the plantation of the Cosways, hires coloured people as workers, and marries a Creole woman, essentially ridding the opportunity for a local to assume some agency in the colony. With that being said, his research finds that Rochester's side of the story reveals how patriarchy can punish even men.

Christophine, a Black Jamaican working at the Granbois Estate, is a commodified person (252), like every other woman in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is. "She was your father's wedding present to me" explains Antoinette's mother, "one of his presents" (Rhys 18). Anette, Antoinette's mother, is as much a part of this cog as Antoinette later becomes. This self-assured confidence exposes the underlying problem in these now emancipated colonies. Despite abolition, the natives still played second fiddle to the English and European colonisers. Though they were not all that successful in running these plantations, "Mr. Mason, the New English master of the old Cosway plantation, represents the ineffectuality, at best, of the metropolitan English who came to Jamaica to impose order and to make money after Emancipation" (Gilchrist 468); they had the capital to simply trod into these colonies and purchase these plantations, but no real world experience to justify these ventures.

Homi K. Bhabha's work on mimicry helps deconstruct and analyse the relationship between Antoinette and Rochester. Bhabha puts forward that the complex nature of colonialism puts the coloniser in a position of power. Thus, the colonised people take it that they can regain some agency if they "mimic" the English and European colonisers. This is disadvantageous for the colonised peoples. They forgo their own culture, language, values, and at times, even

religion, in favour of the ones practiced and promoted by the colonisers. Sometimes the aforementioned qualities presented by the colonisers to the colonised are traps meant to make the colonised population more subservient. Through this complex ebb and flow, the colonised people reach a state of “almost the same, *but not quite*” (Bhabha 127). The colonised subjects lose their way in this process, oftentimes falling in the middle with identity crises, dubbed as “slippages” by Bhabha.

Antoinette is one such case. With white parents who were ex-slave owners, Antoinette is in a unique position in Caribbean society. Antoinette is “not quite English and not quite “native,” Rhys's Creole woman stands in the middle of the embattled divide between human and savage, core and periphery, self and other” (Ciolkowski 340). Her social status warrants respect, but the recently emancipated population of Jamaica are hostile towards her family’s slave-owning past. To add to this, her Creole descent makes her stand out doubly as an oppressor to her own kin. But this same white skin does not translate well with the English, as Rochester sees her as strange and foreign.

Slowly, Rochester starts interpreting her actions and behaviour as those of a mad or irrational person. He even gives her a new name. Rochester takes advantage of Antoinette’s attempt at mimicry, which is demonstrated by the latter who keeps attempting to appeal to her husband in order to save their marriage. Rochester responds by trying to ascribe an English identity to her. This brings about the spiralling of Antoinette, and ultimately leads to the climax of the story which bridges the gap between the enigmatic origins of Bertha Mason, and the tragic climax in *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette’s mimicry causes her to lose herself — even the fragmented third-space she was stuck in between English and Creole — and slowly succumbs to becoming a madwoman in an Englishman’s attic. Jean Rhys keeps the origin of Antoinette’s madness

open-ended, as “she does not ever truly offer a single explanation of the real cause of the madness” (Adjarian 204).

The crux of this thesis is complemented by *The Empire Writes Back*, in which scholars Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that postcolonial literature is a response to colonial powers by writers from formerly colonised spaces. Authors writing back can rewrite colonial legacies and histories that are often misrepresentative and unfair to the colonised world. This allows postcolonial writers to rewrite the canon. They can represent the voice that was kept silent when colonial narratives were being written. In all accounts, “writing back” is literature disguised as resistance against colonialism, something that has been abolished for more than half a century, but whose effects have been passed down through generations. Jean Rhys rewrites *Jane Eyre* and gives voice to Bertha Mason, a character who never spoke but was only spoken to and about. Charlotte Brontë describes Jamaica and the wider Caribbean as dangerous, exotic, and inferior to the European colonial apparatus. Rhys dismantles both of these racist and unfair depictions and births Antoinette as resistance, while implementing Biblical allegories in the Coulibri garden.

Among the many ways writers can do this is the use of language. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, language becomes the battleground, “a medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established“ (7). They label two key concepts to understand the complex dynamics of postcolonial language: abrogation and appropriation. Abrogation is the denial of the English language as privileged (37). Abrogation rejects the “metropolitan power over the means of communication.” Appropriation is the recalibration of the dominant colonial language of the centre. It involves the process of capturing the language and moulding it to serve the purpose of the colonised writer. “Appropriation is the process by which the language is taken

and made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience” (38). The Indian novelist, Raja Rao, in a foreword for *Kanthapura* (1938) puts this phenomenon as, “to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own” (Rao vii).

There has been much discourse regarding the language used to write postcolonial literature. Many argue that narratives that seem to dismantle colonial misrepresentations should not be written in dominant colonial languages. Others advocate for the appropriation of dominant world languages like English and French in order to write back to them. This way, these peoples cannot turn a blind eye to these narratives; they will be forced to read and internalise the realities their predecessors have brought upon the colonised world during the height of colonialism. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin also argue that colonialism has brought about hybridity in the identity of the colonised subjects, which is demonstrated brilliantly by Jean Rhys in her protagonist Antoinette (discussed in chapter 5).

Gilchrist notes how, despite emancipation, people like Rochester can own property in a foreign country simply because he can afford it via the money he has amassed due to colonisation. Colonising forces operated their plantations with slaves that were primarily taken from the African continent during the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade (sixteenth to nineteenth-century). The colonisers siphoned resources from these very colonies, drawing wealth and prosperity away from the colonised populations. So once emancipation does come, they do not have the capital to buy plots in their own home. Instead, the white man struts his way to the plantations, purchases it, then promptly forces slaves, usually natives, to work at the premises.

Gilchrist also criticises Rochester’s marriage with Antoinette. Why would a Creole woman of high social standing marry a white man from England? Should she not marry within her country to elevate the social standing of her kin? The answer is hidden in plain sight:

Antoinette Cosway is deeply in love with Rochester. She goes to extreme lengths to make her husband fall back in love with her. "I will be quiet, I will not cry. But Christophine, if he, my husband, could come to me one night. Once more. I would make him love me" (Rhys 87), says a pleading Antoinette, asking Christophine for a love potion that will make her husband fall back in love with her. However, Gilchrist argues that this marriage is an extended metaphor to show the continuation of imperial control over the "other." Rochester's marriage with Antoinette helps facilitate his position in the islands more than it does any favour for the Creole woman.

This chapter finds that Rhys does not write back to Bronte, nor to *Jane Eyre*. Rather, Rhys writes back to the Creole identity by giving voice to Bertha Mason, and giving the subaltern the ability to speak.

Chapter 5:

All This Knowing

Hitherto this thesis has tried to discern how effectively Abdulrazak Gurnah and Jean Rhys write back to the English and European colonial empires, as well as to Charlotte Brontë and Joseph Conrad's texts, *Jane Eyre* and *Heart of Darkness* respectively. With the findings thus far, this chapter of the research will now dismantle this very argument and reinforce another way to read Rhys and Gurnah by suggesting why neither author needs to actually write back to any of their so-called counterparts nor to any colonial or imperial canon. Rather, in this chapter, the research will demonstrate how both writers, with all of their talent and sensibilities, with all this knowing, can write stories that are very distinct in their own merits from the novels their works are constantly compared to in literary discourse.

This chapter will discern what authors of both texts have accomplished with their literary works and with the responsibility of knowledge. The namesake of this chapter is one of Patrick Rothfuss' own chapters from his fantasy novel *The Name of the Wind*, which is book one of the *Kingkiller Chronicle*. In a 619-page novel, this chapter is only one page long, and tells of three medieval-era university students who are drunk "in the fullness of time," and are "busy knowing deep in their hearts that they will never grow old or die" (Rothfuss 373). These bright minds forgo the responsibility of knowledge for one night. The heart of this chapter and its title is applied to the postcolonial authors of this thesis: to see what they do with the responsibility of knowledge, with all their knowing.

In an article written for the *New York Times*, Al Alvarez called Jean Rhys "quite simply, the best living English novelist," while Abdulrazak Gurnah is the (2021) recipient of the Nobel

Prize in Literature. Both novelists, from geographically distinct regions that have been colonised by European and British empires in distinct ways, share colonial legacies, and write as a way to come to terms with what it means to be the postcolonial ‘Other’ as a racial, political, cultural and gender category. The Caribbean, where Rhys was born, was turned into a plantation culture, primarily colonised by Britain, while Gurnah’s birthplace, Tanzania, which is the unification of two independent nations in Tanganyika (the mainland) and the island of Zanzibar, was colonised by Germany which controlled territories in German East Africa. But the fact remains that the traumas inflicted by colonial legacies are almost universal in nature; in that, they take culture, identity, language, religion, and autonomy from the colonised subject.

Despite these traumas, both Gurnah and Rhys were able to capture captivating stories that relate the experience of what it is to be a postcolonial subject in Jamaica and German East Africa. Gurnah refused to move to the United Kingdom as a refugee during the Zanzibar Revolution of the 1960s, which was an anti-colonial uprising that overthrew the Arab Sultanate, occurring just a month after Zanzibar gained its independence from British rule. What resulted from this revolution was the birth of Tanzania. Instead, Gurnah worked his way to the United Kingdom, finishing his bachelor’s degree (1976) and PhD from the University of Kent (1972) before becoming a professor at that same institution. Jean Rhys, in turn, was born in Dominica, which was at the time a British colony, within a white Creole family of European descent. The inequality present in everyday life in the Caribbean influenced Rhys at a young age. As Britain was seen as the “centre” of the world, families sent their children there for education. Rhys moved to London at the age of sixteen and immediately experienced profound isolation, as she was considered foreign and colonial. Rhys explores these ideas in her literature.

This chapter employs the primary texts, as well as the journal articles: Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Adjarian's "Between and beyond Boundaries in *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Mardorossian's "Double [De]Colonization and the Feminist Criticism of *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Hodapp's "Imagining Unmediated Early Swahili Narratives in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*," and Achebe's "English and the African Writer."

Coming back to Abdulrazak Gurnah, he is generally unconcerned with the English canon in *Paradise*, as he is primarily focused on telling his own story with the help of Swahili literature. There is no intertextuality present with the Western canon, as he is never writing back to *Heart of Darkness* or any other Western novel. The only aspect of Conrad's novella Gurnah employs is the journey motif, which is common across all literature from all periods. He does not attempt any sort of intertextuality with the English canon, for *Paradise* is "not dependent on European canonical texts" (Hodapp 89). Instead, Gurnah relates to an African literary tradition, which at the time of the publication of *Paradise*, was largely undiscovered and never referred to. Instead of only writing back to the European empires, Gurnah writes "forward" to his culture in an attempt to establish the African canon and preserve it for posterity. Gurnah presents an opportunity for intertextuality within Swahili literature. He elevates two different Swahili pieces of literature. He directly refers to Salim bin Abakari's late nineteenth-century text *Safari Yangu ya Urusi na ya Siberia* (*My Journey to Russia and Siberia*), which is one of the earliest written travelogues from East Africa. Abakari travels through Eastern Europe and Northern Asia as an assistant to a German officer. This text offers a reverse-gaze perspective, as European landscapes are described through the eyes of a colonised subject.

Gurnah also refers to Selemani bin Mweny Chande's nineteenth-century text *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika* (*My Journey Up-Country in Africa*). It was written between 1893 and 1896 and

published by German linguist Carl Velten in 1901. The travelogue chronicles the caravan leader Chande's trading expedition from the East African coast deep into the interior of the continent during European colonial rule. Abakari is introduced when a group of Arab, African, and Indian merchants in Uncle Aziz's Caravan sit around a campfire to pass a harsh East African summer night. This scene invokes the narrative framing of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, one in which Marlow is settled down on the Nellie on the River Thames. There was an opportunity for Gurnah to insert a story that is derivative of Mr. Kurtz, satirising his mass appeal in the English canon. Instead, an eccentric Mombasan relates the tale of his uncle who returned from a country where "the sun shone until midnight" and "all the water turned to ice" (Gurnah 104). He is, of course, talking about Russia, referred to by them as "Rusi." The freezing cold imagery of that country enamours the traders who have spent their entire lives in the African continent. The Mombasan man goes on to relate the hilarity of the Russian people's obsession with drinking, saying his uncle "entered a small town to find every human being in it - man woman and child - blind drunk" (Gurnah 105).

This scene, as seen in Chande's *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika*, reverses the colonial gaze. In most colonial-era literature, it is the East, the "Orient," that is viewed as dangerous and exotic. The Mombasan says, "The Rusi people were not civilized" (84), which is a brilliant twist of irony. The group of people in a colonised country are calling the white, "civilised" world uncivilised. This scene inverts the colonial gaze: a Swahili traveller is looking at Russia through the lens of exoticism. It also establishes that the Swahili coast and its people are not only civilised but also extremely literate, as the text Gurnah is directly referencing is a travelogue, a form of writing that needs literacy and worldly knowledge. Gurnah is directly challenging

colonial Eurocentric worldviews along with Chande. He does this with no reference to *Heart of Darkness*. Gurnah is not writing back to Conrad.

Gurnah brings to light previously overlooked Swahili texts such as *Safari Yangu ya Ursui na ya Siberia*, in an attempt to reclaim a nineteenth-century multilingual African literary genealogy (Hodapp 90), which is lost in the discourse where *Paradise* is compared to European texts like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *Paradise* is largely dismissed as a novel that is “often read as a simple reversal of European accusations against Africa as uncivilized and savage via the writing back trope” (90). With this perspective, the chapter finds that this intertextual relationship between *Paradise* and early Swahili literature is established by Gurnah, and was not seen in the African literary tradition before this novel. Far from being a response to Conrad's novella, *Paradise* is a platform to introduce African literature to the world.

Gurnah does not directly refer to Selemani bin Mweny Chande's *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika*, but he uses it as a foundational historical source to construct the route Uncle Aziz and his Caravan use, trade practices of the merchants, and Yusuf's journey into the African interior. Like McCarthy's 15 years of research on the Old West, Chande's Swahili text is Gurnah's research on early twentieth-century German East Africa. Hadjivayanis notes the key similarities between Gurnah's *Paradise* and Chande's *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika*. In Chande's accounts, he comes across a town called Chata, which Gurnah directly borrows to name the local leader of the Manyema village, Chatu. The situation they face with this new town is also similar: “Both Chata and Chatu explain that they had to attack because a trader similar to Uncle Aziz had stolen from them” (Hadjivayanis 27). Furthermore, in Chande's travelogue, it is actually he and his caravan that go seeking help from a European figure of authority, as opposed to the German officer who intervenes in Gurnah's text.

The journey motif dooms *Paradise* to forever be categorised with and against *Heart of Darkness*. However, *Safari Yangu ya Urusi na ya Siberia* itself is a novel that employs the journey motif, as the word safari in the title suggests, but that is largely ignored in literary discourse surrounding *Paradise*. As Hodapp posits, “writing back” literature can only write back to a static colonial-era European canon, one that has been dormant for almost a century. Referring back to that era of English literature stunts the postcolonial writers’ growth.

Postcolonial writers are often criticised for writing in the dominant colonial languages in lieu of their own vernacular. This threatens local culture and languages, leading to what Homi Bhabha posits as a form of mimicry: the colonised people mimic the dominant Europeans who have powered them for so long. In doing so, they lose touch with their own linguistic or cultural identity. This has led to the misconception that the African canon starts with *Things Fall Apart*, and any novel written before that is not significant enough to be considered (Hodapp 91). The book *The Empire Writes Back* challenges this notion, as already mentioned in the previous chapter. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin dictate that postcolonial writers must abrogate and then appropriate the English language as a means of literary protest.

Chinua Achebe chimes in on this discourse as well by stating that writers like Abdulrazak Gurnah, who originate from Tanzania, are not anomalies nor “unpatriotic alecks,” rather, “by-products of the same process that made the new nation-states of Africa” (Achebe 95). He is abrogating the reach and power of the English language, denying it its power over the colonised population. He appropriates the language in order to be able to write in a world language. In fact, writing in English should be empowering. Mastery of colonial languages should command respect. Gurnah’s first language is Swahili, and like Conrad, he learned English later in life. Gurnah won the Nobel Prize for Literature by writing in a second language, which also happens

to be the language of his ancestors' colonisers. Writing in a universal language such as English ensures the postcolonial writer can reach a wider audience, adding economic benefits.

Achebe, in perhaps the greatest quote relating to the appropriation of the English language by postcolonial writers, says that the English language must be accessible to all, for "the price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use" (100). Writers should not compromise their message just for the sake of standing out from their colonisers. Achebe is not ambivalent about his decision: "But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it" (Achebe 102), he will use this language to expose the injustices of the European colonials to the world. Similarly, Gurnah writes in English and refers to a travelogue written in the Swahili language, thus introducing the world not only to Abakari's text, but also to Swahili literature, all this without writing back to Conrad.

Jean Rhys in her own right, does not write back to Charlotte Brontë nor *Jane Eyre*. Though *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a prequel, Rhys makes it her own novel, which is not entirely postcolonial in nature, but a feminist text. Rhys sees Bertha Mason (or Antoinette) in herself, and so she took one of English canon's most unexplored characters and wrote an entire novel surrounding her. That is not exactly writing back to the empire nor to Brontë, but rather gives agency to another Creole woman she found helpless and voiceless in a white woman's novel. She gives Antoinette a voice and gives her a backstory that is very similar to Rhys's own. This makes *Wide Sargasso Sea* a story of a Creole woman rescuing another Creole woman, as Rhys herself found it difficult to integrate into London society for her thick Caribbean accent which she had picked up from growing up in Jamaica.

Rhys does not sacrifice linguistic authenticity for the sake of making her characters appear linguistically “polished.” This is what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as heteroglossia. In his own words, “Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel, is another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions” (Bakhtin 324). Through different styles of speech, intonations, and interactions, heteroglossia is created within Rhys’s text. Her characters have distinguishing linguistic features amongst themselves based on their place of origin. Christophine, Antoinette’s surrogate mother, is from Martinique and as such is different in appearance and sound from other Jamaican people. In her most famous quote from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Christophine describes Antoinette’s mother Anette saying, “because she pretty like pretty self” (Rhys 1). Amelie, the mixed-race servant at Granbois, brings much of the tension in the latter half of the novel when she plays foil to Antoinette and Rochester’s marriage. Rhys maintains her unique linguistic integrity, as seen when she says of Rochester, “Your husban’ he outside the door and he look like he see zombi. Must be he tired of the sweet honeymoon too” (Rhys 75). In accordance with what Chinua Achebe said that “The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost” (100), Rhys does not compromise the authenticity of her characters for readability.

Rochester’s fine, polished British English is mimicked by Antoinette, as she is desperately attempting to be accepted by her husband and by white society as a whole. This is juxtaposed with the speech patterns and syntactic language of the Jamaican natives such as Christophine and even Antoinette’s Creole English during the moments she is no longer vying for her husband’s attention. These Jamaican natives speak in their local dialects, which is maintained by Rhys within the novel. Although Antoinette and Rochester’s mode of English can

be deemed to be the dominant mode of language, it does not dominate the entire novel. No single voice or language dominates the text as all forms of the language coexist, resulting in heteroglossia.

These linguistic features highlight the author's tendency to familiarise the world with all of the different vernacular languages and accents present in the Caribbean. If Rhys were concerned only with writing back to Brontë in order to exact revenge for the unfair portrayal of a Creole woman in her text, Rhys could have deconstructed the character of Edward Rochester. Instead, Rhys actually attempts to "humanise" the character, as Spivak puts it (251). Though this thesis disagrees with this conclusion, it finds Spivak's reasoning worthy of note. Spivak notes how Rhys gives Rochester's colonial ventures in the Caribbean more logic than Brontë does. Rochester comes to Jamaica at the behest of his father. As the youngest son, he is inclined to listen to the patriarchal voice of authority in his family. He marries Antoinette for the promised dowry of £30,000 and for the Granbois estate, as well as the Cosway family plantation. Once he is here, he is "Overwhelmed by the dramatic physical features and sensuality of the West Indies" (Gilchrist 475). Rochester is out of his element, but is still treated with care by Rhys. He could have easily fallen victim to Rhys, an avid opportunity for the Creole writer to give some justice to Antoinette and the treatment she receives as Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Though Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not at all reliant on prior knowledge of *Jane Eyre*, Rhys is still respectful of her English so-called counterpart. Rhys acknowledges and respects Charlotte Brontë as a writer. Though Rhys is aware that her work is derived from Brontë's novel, "she also demonstrates a desire to remain true to both her colonial identity and background, both of which exist in a liminal area neither fully British nor fully Caribbean" (Adjarian 203). Rhys compromises neither side; not appropriating another woman's work, nor her Creole identity. The

naming conventions across the novel highlight this appreciation. Rhys preserves the name Bertha Mason, and even gives the name a convincing backstory: “‘My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?’ ‘Because it is a name I’m particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha’” (Rhys 107). Rochester starts calling her Bertha Mason on a whim. From the lens of feminist criticism, Rochester is led to call her this name because he wants to remove Antoinette’s Caribbean identity. This justifies Mardorossian’s advocacy to doubly decolonise Antoinette. Secondly, “He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother’s name” (87), he starts to assume that his wife is growing mad due to her close acquaintance with the obeah Christophine. Furthermore, Jean Rhys describes Antoinette the same way Charlotte Brontë did. She preserves the essence of the character in its original form when she first appeared in *Jane Eyre*, as “Rhys changes none of the terms of Brontë’s madwoman” (Adjarian 463). Both writers describe Antoinette as “intemperate and unchaste” (Brontë 334, Rhys 110). Though these readings could be interpreted as Rhys writing back to Brontë after all, this chapter finds that Rhys is looking to rebel against Charlotte Brontë and her text for the faults of colonialism. Rather, Rhys is respectful in adapting Brontë’s novel into a kind of prequel that can stand on its own as a separate story.

Unlike Gurnah, Rhys writes from lived experience. Rhys likely saw herself in Brontë’s madwoman in the attic. She saw herself in a mute character that was largely treated as an inconsequential side character. Both Rhys and Antoinette suffer from in-betweenness, a unique predisposition largely felt only by subjects of colonialism. As Adjarian posits. “Bertha, like Rhys herself, is from the English-speaking Caribbean: both are members of colonized marginal cultures” (Adjarian 202), both suffer from the confining constraints of hybridity. Stuck between their Creole ancestry and plantation owning privilege, Rhys finds herself in Bertha Mason and

“crosses boundaries,” and “rescues Bertha from silence” (203). This mirror surpasses the novelist-protagonist dynamic as well. The protagonists of both, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, share similarities found common within females in a patriarchal society. Antoinette Cosway and Jane Eyre are two sides of the same coin, both victims of the workings of a homogeneous system of sexual domination” (Mardorossian 81).

This chapter argues that despite the heavy association with Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Gurnah’s *Paradise* and Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* are not writing back to English and European colonial literature. *Paradise* never refers to Conrad’s novella, much less any English or European canonical text. Gurnah establishes African literature by referring to Swahili texts, dispelling the dominant notion that African literature starts with *Things Fall Apart*. Similarly, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not exactly a postcolonial work of literature, rather a feminist one. It reinscribes Brontë’s novel but through the same lens as *Jane Eyre*: they are both feminist literature. Rhys sees herself in Antoinette, as “Antoinette lives in between, in hybridity, much like the author herself, in the world of white Europeans and that of black colonials (Adjarian 204).

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to discern the efficacy of Jean Rhys and Abdulrazak Gurnah's "writing back" to the English and European empires. Though both writers come from a postcolonialist background, their works are not postcolonial pieces of literature. They do not challenge the colonial canon, nor do they add to it. Instead, both writers establish themselves in the postcolonial canon. Gurnah writes a coming-of-age story in *Paradise*, that only borrows the journey motif from Joseph Conrad, a literary convention that Conrad did not himself invent, as some of the oldest fables and scriptures used it for classical heroes' journeys. On the other hand, Rhys writes a feminist novel in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that works in conjunction with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* rather than against it.

Chapters 3 and 4 attempted to find the extent of their ability to write back to Conrad and Brontë. In chapter 5, the thesis challenged its own argument and found that neither author in actuality is writing back to any empire nor any colonial era writer. Both texts can exist in isolation — though a reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* could be further elevated with prior knowledge of *Jane Eyre*. More than anything, this is a testament to the integrity of the authors. Instead of making Rochester the antagonist in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys makes him narrate a significant portion of the second chapter, and develops his backstory as to why he is in the Caribbean in the first place. Gurnah refers back to two foundational Swahili travelogues of the nineteenth-century instead of any English canonical text. In doing so, Gurnah introduces to a world of readers the works of Chande and Abakari, and the wider literary tradition of Africa.

This speaks to the sensibilities of both writers as they expertly navigate texts that were so denigrating to them both personally. *Jane Eyre* exoticises and traps a voiceless Creole woman inside an attic, who is subjected to racial displacement and patriarchal domination. She burns down Thornfield Hall and acts as a foil to Jane Eyre. Rhys does not exact revenge. She rescues the Creole woman, renames her, gives her a life, despite knowing that Antoinette's life is inevitably going to end in a fire. Rhys reaches into her innermost recesses to find Antoinette inside her, and then shares that identity with her, almost unifying the two souls together. The English colonisers, in their attempt at "othering" the colonised world, unified two people.

Gurnah and Rhys only borrow elements from their so-called colonial-era counterparts to tell original, personal stories. Yusuf's journey to the interior is supplemented by religious imagery, especially that of Uncle Aziz's garden. Gurnah alludes to the fact that heaven lies at home, at the garden, but he is not allowed there without losing his innocence, which he does later in the book. Only then can he walk into the garden, and when he does so, Gurnah describes the scene as "Yusuf walked under their shade he felt like an intruder" (Gurnah 37). Immediately, however, he is spotted by the Mistress of the house, Zulekha, who keeps to the upper level of Uncle Aziz's estate, and never comes out, much like Bertha Mason in Thornfield Hall. Khalil says, "She watches you in her mirrors in the trees when you walk in the garden" (37). As soon as he enters the garden, Yusuf is tempted to sin. Jean Rhys, on the other hand, takes from her lived experiences as a Creole woman to write Antoinette Cosway. Like Rhys, Antoinette also suffers from a life of living in-between, as Adjarian notes, "Antoinette lives in between, in hybridity, much like the author herself, in the world of white Europeans and that of black colonials" (204).

Abdulrazak Gurnah models his entire novel after a nineteenth-century travelogue, Selemani bin Mwenye Chande's *Safari Yangu na Bara Afrika* (*My Journey Up-Country in*

Africa), written in the Swahili language. Then, in a scene that is otherwise inconsequential, he refers to another Swahili travelogue, this time *Yangu ya Urusi na ya Siberi* (*My Journey to Russia and Siberia*) by Salim bin Abakari. He relies on intertextuality, but the texts he refers to come from a well of undiscovered Swahili literature. Gurnah challenges Conrad's depiction of Africa and its jungle as dark and savage by never referring to Conrad's text. Gurnah simply presents Africa as a haven: a utopia of diverse cultures and people, supplemented by the recurring motif of Uncle Aziz's garden. Gurnah deliberately includes a European officer in his narrative but chooses not to critique Mr. Kurtz; rather, Gurnah highlights the hubris of the European empire when the officer falls asleep in the midst of mediating a situation he was never called to mediate in the first place.

Both writers show their sensibilities coming from postcolonial backgrounds. All their education and all this knowing allows them to construct such moving tales derived from works of literature that dehumanise elements that are close to them: the Creole madwoman in the attic Bertha Mason, for Jean Rhys, the jungles and peoples of Africa for Abdulrazak Gurnah. Furthermore, they do this without even the veil of the postcolonial genre. Rhys writes a feminist text that speaks to not only the Creole identity, but every woman who has been subjected to racial exclusion and the oppression of patriarchy. Gurnah's *Paradise* is a coming-of-age story of a young boy, through whom Gurnah lives out the dreams of millions of African children and what they could have been without the interference of European empires.

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