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**A study of a Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966)
as a "writing back" of
Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847)**

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Dedication

To my family

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Abstract

During the post-colonial period, many authors from previously colonized countries emerged to “write back” to the European canonical texts. This research paper examined postcolonial “rewriting” of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847) by Jean Rhys in Wide Sargasso Sea (1966). It explored the concepts of “subversion”, “rewriting” and “displacement” used by Rhys in order to counter Brontë’s colonial discourse introduced in her work. To reach the purpose, I have applied Ashcroft et al.’s theory of The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures. In the discussion, I have studied the historical context of both novels in order to understand the writers’ ideology. I have attempted to undertake a comparative study between the two works in which I have displayed how “writing back” manifests in the postcolonial text. After having examined the two novels, I have come to the conclusion that Rhys has rewritten Brontë’s work by subverting its main elements which are characters and themes.

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I. Introduction

The present work is a comparative study between two authors from different countries, namely Charlotte Brontë from England and Jean Rhys from The Dominican Republic. The two female authors are issued from distinct traditions and cultures. Though Brontë and Rhys do not have the same nationality, they wrote in English. The novels that will be compared are Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). From their dates of publication, one can notice that the two literary works are produced in different periods which show that they have different modes of writing. They have been produced to reflect the society of the writers. No one doubts that many authors have been influenced by others. It can be the result of reading others' literary works. This is known as "direct influence". Postcolonial authors tend to be influenced by European texts. Brontë has an impact on Rhys's writing. This latter's work is written as a response to Brontë's canonical work which can be described as a "*tour de force*" by Rhys¹.

Countries newly gaining independence needed to rebuild and assert their identity since their cultures had been dramatically influenced by the Europeans. To achieve that purpose, they attempted contradict the colonial discourse. In other words, post-colonial discourse emerged to explore how Europeans used "discursive strategies" to exploit other nations. Thus, many authors used "rewriting" as the main feature of postcolonial literary text to dismantle the colonial ones.² They borrowed some aspects from the European text in order to contradict it.³

Brontë's *Jane Eyre* belongs to the canon that explores her own culture and traditions. She published her novel under the name of Currer Bell. Brontë's work is among the exotic literature which explored imperialism during the early nineteenth century. Brontë explores the British culture and identity and glorifies it. She portrays the period she lives in through

fictional characters. In addition, she neglects all what is related to the 'Others' and gives a negative image to non-Europeans. She is one of the European authors of that period who produced novels from a colonial perspective.

Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a postcolonial text. The author was born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams and lived as a Creole in Dominica. She left to England at the age of seventeen. Her novel attempts to give a new image of her country and "deconstruct" the interpretations about her culture. Influence is considered a crucial element in "rewriting". It allowed Rhys to show her point of view regarding Brontë. She takes some characters from Brontë text. Additionally, she explores some common themes with *Jane Eyre*. Furthermore, Rhys's use of the English language is important to give weight to her own arguments. Although they are fictional works, they are not without some historical background. The idea of "deconstructing" canonical works emerged from the postcolonial literatures in which authors tried to demonstrate that Caribbean people were victims of colonization.

Review of Literature

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* are two literary works which were written a century and a decade apart. They have been analyzed and evaluated by many critics using various literary theories. As an illustration, in his essay "*The Other Side*": *Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre*, Michael Thrope compares the two works from a postcolonial perspective. For him, Rhys's novel stands for a correction to *Jane Eyre* mainly for the stereotypical images introduced about Bertha. The critic focuses on Antoinette since he claims that "There is always the other side".⁴ Bertha and Rochester received different portrayal in Brontë's text. The critic tries to find links in the novels in which he states that there are prejudiced images in Brontë's novel.⁵ The main stereotype manifests itself in Bertha's mental illness but the author ignores her past and experiences because it serves

Brontë's use of race. However, Bertha can be pitied as a result of her illness by the British, especially Jane because of her experiences. Moreover, Thrope explains that Rhys is among the authors who appeal to the readers to understand the mental illness. The critic draws parallels between Jane and Antoinette, and focuses mainly on the common harsh experiences.⁶ In addition, explores the relationship between Antoinette and her husband which is characterized by the common misunderstanding caused by their similar "identity of personal experience".⁷ They are unable understand each other.

The other critic who compared Brontë and Rhys's texts is Wolfgang G. Müller. *The Intertextual Status of Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea: Dependence on a Victorian Classic and as a post-colonial Novel* is written from a postcolonial perspective. He focuses his analysis from "an intertextual perspective".⁸ Müller claims that even if Rhys borrowed some elements, originality in her text lies in "post-colonial fiction". *Jane Eyre* is considered as the pretext but *Wide Sargasso Sea* is both dependent and independent from it. He states that Rhys attempts to find solutions to the Jamaican Creole found in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Müller notes that the gap in Brontë's text is related to Bertha Mason's childhood and experiences. Rhys centers her novel on ethnic and hierarchical problems between the characters by showing real places and events. Additionally, he analyzes the characters in which he says: "on the level of character we again find the mixture of dependence and independence of the pretext in Rhys's revision of the Victorian classic".⁹ Moreover, Brontë's literary work is a colonial one since she includes imperialism indirectly. Rhys interprets it from her own perspective. The critic states that Jane benefits from colonialism. Intertextuality is also present in the name of the characters such as Bertha, Rochester and Grace Poole.

The other critic, who is Dennis Porter wrote *Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre*. It is an essay which deals with the feminist perspective and explores the characters that are Jane Eyre, Bertha and Mr. Rochester. The critic explains the interaction between both

Jane Eyre and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The author's target is the impact of men's oppression "in *Wide Sargasso Sea* [...] Bertha was not born mad but made so [...] by men".¹⁰ This portrays that the character Antoinette is oppressed because her husband turned her into a lunatic. Dennis Porter reveals male's domination in both novels in order to show that heroines are dehumanized. Mr. Rochester and Antoinette's husband are the two characters who consider the heroines as their sexual objects. The critic also deals with the effect of colonialism in the society because of coercion which is seen from a postcolonial perspective. Mr. Rochester is a victim in *Jane Eyre* but turns oppressor in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the first novel he is married with a mad woman, yet in the second he seeks marriage to gain wealth. Porter distinguishes the difference between Rochester in the two works. On the one hand, Brontë lets him survive at the end of the work. On the other one, Jean Rhys "sees him as unredeemable" because he married the Creole girl for her money.¹¹

Malgorata Swietlik compares the two novels in her essay called "*Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys as a postcolonial response to '*Jane Eyre*' by Charlotte Brontë". She analyzes them from a postcolonial perspective. He explains that Rhys transformed important parts of Brontë's novel. His essay centers on the reasons that led to her mental illness. Brontë narrates her own side providing stereotypes about the West Indian.¹² Swietlik informs the audience that the Antoinette "is given voice, dignity, identity and right to tell the reader her side of story".¹³ Rhys reveals what happened in the "colonized territories". Antoinette struggles to live among two communities and fails to be accepted.¹⁴ Rhys gives voice to Antoinette and invented her past to explain the reason of her insanity. The critic also shows that the unnamed husband is also a victim in Rhys's novel. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "*Three Women Text and a Critic of imperialism*" constitutes the framework in which Swietlik carries out her analysis. The critic reveals the significance of Spivak's essay which lies in the fact that the literatures of the 19th century define "European identities" and represent "the Third World".¹⁵

Swietlik states that “Jane Eyre can be easily read as Cinderella story and Wide Sargasso Sea is just the opposite of the fairy tale”.¹⁶

Issue and Working Hypothesis

From the above literature review, we can notice that Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) have been subject to study by many critics and scholars. The literary influence that connects the two writers was investigated. These critics acknowledge that Rhys’s novel is a response to *Jane Eyre*. My aim through this research paper is to carry on the same tradition and discuss the novels in terms of “writing back”, mainly in terms of similarities between the two novels. I will attempt to use techniques of “rewriting”, especially “subversion”, “displacement” and “reversal” in order to draw a comparison between the works. I will try to apply these techniques on both the characters and themes employed by the two authors.

What are the possible similarities that can be found between Brontë’s and Jean’s literary works within a rewriting framework? Rhys has borrowed some aspects from Brontë’s novel to redefine them in a way that fits her purpose. The two works are the products of two different perspectives. Rhys writes back in order to contradict the narrative introduced by Charlotte Brontë. Consequently, I will try to apply the theoretical guideline provided in Bill Ashcroft’s, Gareth Griffith’s and Helen Tiffin’s theory as they appear in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (2002). I have chosen this theory because, in my opinion, it fits my study since it centers on post-colonial authors’ strategies of “writing back”. The theory explains that writers from Africa, Asia and the West Indies answer back the European empire. They focus on the way postcolonial authors handle literature as a means of describing their cultures and countries and deconstruct the canons of imperial powers. For the postcolonial writers, it is essential to dismantle the images presented

in the canons. I shall attempt to investigate how Jean Rhys rewrites Brontë's work while using similar characters and themes.

In this dissertation, I shall follow the IMRAD methodological guidelines. In the introduction section, I have introduced the dialectic between the European and post-colonial literatures which creates the concept of "writing back". It will be followed by the review of literature written on both literary works. Then, introduce my research hypothesis. In the second section, Methods and Materials, I will provide a summary of Bill Ashcroft et al.'s theory *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (2002), followed by novel summaries of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The result section will focus on the main results of the study. Finally, the discussion section will be divided into three chapters: in the first, I will deal with the historical background of Britain and Jamaica by relating them to the novels. Then, I will study the parallels between the characters in the two novels in the second chapter. The last chapter will be devoted to compare the novels in terms of themes. The characters and themes will be analyzed according to the techniques of "writing back" theory.

Endnotes

¹ Dennis Porter, "Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre", *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn, 1976), 541, accessed in April 30, 2016.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25088673>.

² B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The post-colonial Studies and reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 95-6

³ Ibid., 97.

⁴ Michael Thrope, "The Other Side": *Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre*, ariel.ucalgary.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/1136/1110, p99.

⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁶ p103.

⁷ p106.

⁸ Wolfgang G. Müller, “*The Intertextual Status of Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea: Dependence on a Victorian Classic and Independence as a Post-Colonial Novel*”, in *Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*, p77.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁰ Porter, “*Of Heroines and Victims*”, 541.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 546.

¹² Malgorata Swietlik, “‘*Wide Sargasso Sea*’ by *Jean Rhys* as a postcolonial response to ‘*Jane Eyre*’ by *Charlotte Bronte*”, Seminar paper: Grin, <http://www.grin.com/en/e-book/170690/wide-sargasso-sea-by-jean-rhys-as-a-postcolonial-response-to-jane-eyre>, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ p6.

¹⁵ p9.

¹⁶ p10.

II. Method and materials:

a. Method:

In the light of the postcolonial theory, I have chosen Bill Ashcroft et al.'s concept of "writing back" to analyze the two literary works. B. Ashcroft et al. reflect the impact of colonial texts on the colonized and how the postcolonial authors deal with them. European writers claim that the non-Europeans contradict the norms of civilization. They had "ethnographic view" towards the 'Other'. This reflects the imperial view that all what is related to the outsider is "primitive".¹ Colonialism ended up in colonized nations being dominated through the European languages.

However, the emergence of postcolonial writers counters the power through the use of the colonizer's own language. Postcolonial authors replace the language using "abrogation" and "appropriation". "Abrogation" is defined as the "refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or "correct" usage, and its assumption".² In other words, writers reject the way certain concepts and expressions are produced in English. The concept of "abrogation" is used by writers willing to find an alternative to the authenticity claimed by the colonizer. The postcolonial authors want the language to appear "inauthentic". On the other hand, "appropriation" means the intersection between the Standard English and the "vernacular tongue".³ It means that postcolonial writers do not use the Standard English; every nation can develop its own English variety, distinct from the British. This is their approach to distinguish themselves from the others.⁴ This is illustrated in the Jamaican citizens in their use of "vernacular" and "code-switching". The theory stipulates that

[T]he appropriation which has had the most profound significant in post-colonial discourse is that of writing itself. It is through an appropriation of the power invested in writing that this discourse can take hold of the marginality

imposed on it and make hybridity and syncreticity the sours of literary and cultural redefinition.⁵

The power of appropriation is correct the image given of the colonized. In other words, postcolonial writing refuses the discourse used in the canon and attempt to give an opposite view.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, the purpose of creating a new way of expression is to assert their independence from the centre. The power of “appropriation” relies on writing that can counter the image defined by the colonizer. Postcolonial literary works are distinct from Europeans in their use of language variance. Thus, they demonstrate “difference, separation from the metropolitan norm”.⁶ In other words, the empire silences the periphery which leads the postcolonial text to refuse the language of the colonizer. Thus, the literatures include “formal subversions” or “contestation at the thematic level”.⁷

The postcolonial theory revolves around “place and displacement”. This latter is the main characteristic of postcolonial literature. It can be defined as the “crisis of identity” which occurs within the interconnection of place and self, betraying a “lack of fit”. It examines the crisis of the relationship between “language, history, and environment in the experiences of the colonized”.⁸ Many factors can lead people to experience dislocation. This takes place when there is a shift from one place to a new and unknown one. It can be either voluntarily when it is associated to immigration or involuntarily when it is related to colonialism or enslavement. Both the colonizer and the colonized are victims of dislocation when they move to a new environment. “Place and displacement” emerged in post-colonial period and pervades its literatures as the main element. Colonial domination influences both “social and linguistic alienation”.⁹ The former colonies remain theoretically colonized by the idea of ‘Englishness’ even after independence.

In fact, the problem of the postcolonial texts is the gap between the new place and language present to describe experiences. The theorists explain:

This gap occurs for those whose language seems inadequate to describe a new place, for those whose language is systematically destroyed by enslavement, and for those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power.¹⁰

We understand that the colonial power imposes its language on the natives despite being inappropriate to portray the new place they live in. As a consequence, writers face “linguistic displacement” even if they do not change the place. In this case, isolation is unavoidable unless the English language is changed by a native one or becomes known as “English”. The impact of displacement on post-colonial writings translates into difference between the word and its “signifier” in terms of “words”, “grammar”, and “codes”. This “displacement” requires from the indigenous people to flee the social practices of English.¹¹ This means that, as a result of “linguistic displacement”, postcolonial authors use the language of the colonizer within their local one. Their writings portray “language variance” in which there is an intersection between the language of the dominator and the dominated one.¹² The aim in doing so is to write back to the colonizer and show that the English language is disrupted. Even the settler needs a new language to express a sense of ‘Otherness’. Displacement for them is more bearable than imposed language.

Postcolonial theories developed in the wake of postcolonial writing. Postcolonial authors aim at showing that their culture can be universal and international. They emphasize their independence from the centre. Thus, they can acquire power by mastering the “metropolitan language”.¹³ The postcolonial authors want their dominated literatures to reverse the domination of the canonical work. They rewrite it to give the realities of Europeans from the post-colonial perspective.¹⁴

Subversion is a crucial feature in postcolonial text. According to Lashley, “subversion” is related to both “language” and “cultural assumptions on which the texts of the English canon are based”.¹⁵ In other words, authors need to decode what is inside the canon written by the centre through inverting the language and the work. Subversion of the canon can be defined as a way of:

Bringing-to-consciousness and articulation of these practices and institutions, and will result not only in the replacement of some texts by others [...], but equally crucially by the reconstruction of the so-called canonical texts through alternative reading practices.¹⁶

It appears from the passage that the canons written by Europeans follow some assumptions. Subversion takes place when a writer reformulates a canon. It offers an “alternative reading” to the canon by not only acting on the text but also transcending traditional boundaries. Subversion aims at dismantling binary divisions and therefore to answer back to the canonical work. In addition, Helen Tiffin claims that postcolonial authors use counter discourse to deconstruct the images, she says: “rereading and rewriting of the European historical and fictional record are vital and inescapable tasks”.¹⁷ Therefore, it seems that Bill Ashcroft et al.’s, theory is appropriate to compare the two literary works. This theory may be applied since it deals with writing back and how the writers can reverse the European literary works. It also deals with displacement used by authors.

b. Materials:

This part is devoted to the summary of the works. I will attempt to recap the events that took place in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It is crucial to reveal an outline of Brontë's and Rhys's writings.

Summary of the Novels

Summary of *Jane Eyre* (1848)

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* narrates the story of the protagonist, Jane Eyre. The events take place during the British imperial rule in Jamaica one of its colonies. Jane is an orphan who lives with her uncle's wife, Mrs. Reed. Since she is hated by them, she leaves to attend Lowood School at the age of ten. She studies there and works as a teacher. At eighteen, she has advertised to teach as a governess; thus, when she has received a letter from Mrs. Fairfax, she accepts to work in Thornfield.

The master of the house, Mr. Rochester, asks Jane to marry him. In Mr. Rochester's bedroom, someone sets fire at night. Grace Poole is blamed by the servants for the fire thinking that she is the one to set it. Grace is cryptic in the house. In fact, no one knows her position and job in the house. Before the wedding, Jane recounts to Mr. Rochester about the mysterious creature she has encountered. Jane cannot figure out whether it is a human being or an animal. However, Mr. Rochester does not reveal its identity claiming that it is a dream. Unfortunately Jane discovers that he has already been married to another woman. As far as Bertha is concerned, she is Mr. Rochester's first wife who has an essential role in the novel. Bertha is "hidden in the attic" so that no one can know about her since she is a lunatic from Jamaica. The name of the "madwoman" is Antoinetta Bertha Mason.

The author reveals how Mr. Rochester is deceived first by his brother and father since he does not inherit fortune and then by Bertha's brother, Richard Mason, who did not inform him about her illness. Mr. Rochester confesses to Jane the truth. He also informs her that Grace is his honest servant who accepted to keep Bertha out of sight. He is a victim because he was not aware about her mental illness. Jane escapes and is rescued by her own cousins and later on she inherits a fortune from their dead uncle, Madeira. Jane comes back to Mr. Rochester and discovers that the "lunatic", Bertha, died when the house was burning and accepts to marry him.

Summary of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also published in England. The events of the novel occur when Jamaica was a British colony. The story happens at the same period of the first novel, *Jane Eyre* but the protagonist of the novel is Antoinette Cosway. This novel is divided into three parts. The events take place in Jamaica, Dominica and eventually in England. The characters move to many places which affect their relationship. The novel is narrated from multiple viewpoints. There are some characters taken from *Jane Eyre*.

The novel opens on the period following the Emancipation Act. Antoinette feels alienated by her mother, Annette, because of her brother's illness. She experienced displacement when her mother married an Englishman, Mr. Mason, mainly after the ruin of their house at Coulibri. As a result, Antoinette's name becomes Antoinette Cosway Mason. Antoinette's brother died and Annette is locked in a house as a consequence of mental illness. Additionally, the protagonist is dislocated to a new place where she lives with her aunt Cora and then moves to the Convent school.

Through Antoinette's husband point of view, the reader is informed that Richard Mason, Antoinette's step-brother, has arranged their marriage. The unnamed husband accepts

it to gain wealth. The couple has faced displacement in which the husband travelled to the West Indies. This man starts to realize that his wife is strange. He appreciates neither the weather nor the place because it is different from England. He is told by, Daniel Cosway, Antoinette's step-brother that she is from a lunatic family and that Richard Mason fooled him. This furthers his hatred towards his wife. Antoinette is rejected and oppressed by her husband because he felt betrayed. The husband changes Antoinette's name to Bertha by force even if she does not accept it. Antoinette realizes that her husband is informed about her mother's madness. She becomes drunkard after visiting her governess, Christophine, who gives her rum to drink especially when the husband refuses to listen to her side of the story.

The husband takes Antoinette to doctors in order to diagnose her madness and takes her to England. The events of the last part take place in England. Mrs. Eff, the housekeeper, persuades Grace Poole to keep Antoinette in the room so that no one knows about her presence in the house by receiving a double wage. Mrs. Eff considers the unnamed husband as a victim. Antoinette does not believe that she is in England and dreams that she went downstairs through a passage and set fire in the house. When she wakes up, she decides to carry out the dream and makes it happen.

Endnotes:

¹ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 156.

² Ibid.,37.

³ p38.

⁴ p45.

⁵ p77.

⁶ p43.

⁷ p82.

⁸ p197.

⁹ p9.

¹⁰ p43.

¹¹p10.

¹²p38.

¹³p165.

¹⁴p32.

¹⁵p47.

¹⁶ p186-7.

¹⁷Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Post-colonial Studies and reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 95.

III. Results:

Throughout this dissertation, I tried to draw a parallel between two novels. This research paper has attempted to compare two literary works which are Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. I have relied on the notion of "writing back" and its principles to demonstrate how Rhys writes back to the canonical work. The comparison revealed that Rhys appropriated and corrected the first novel, *Jane Eyre*, to give a new image to her country. The two works are compared under the light of the theory of *The Empire Writes Back*, and the research paper was divided into three sections. I concluded that the relationship is based on the "rewriting" of the canon. Rhys has reconstructed her work by taking some assumptions from Charlotte Brontë in order to provide her own version. Rhys's narrative is written from a West Indian perspective which is in contradiction with Brontë. It is noteworthy that the writing back is carried out at the level of characters and themes. At the level of characters, I reached the conclusion that *Wide Sargasso Sea* shares some similar characters. Rhys has chosen to adopt common characters in order to "appropriate" them and "subvert" the stereotypes given in Brontë's literary work. Additionally, the novels could be compared at the level of themes. Rhys shared some themes in order to recount them from her own perspective. My research showed that each writer wants to defend her own culture. This dissertation attempted to demonstrate that there is a "writing back". English is the common language used by Rhys and Brontë in their narratives. Charlotte Brontë has written her classic from the colonial perspective giving a negative view of the Creole. But despite being influenced by the canon, Rhys has rewritten Brontë's text from her own viewpoint. We can deduce that the postcolonial author aimed at correcting the English classic.

In the first chapter, the historical context of the two novels was discussed in order to reveal the circumstances that led the writers to produce their literary works. Indeed, both writers have portrayed the conditions in their countries during the 1840s. Both novels take

place in England and Jamaica. During that period, Jamaica was a British colony. The second chapter drew a comparison between the characters of the two novels. We noticed that they share some common characters. Among *Jane Eyre's* characters, there are Bertha, Mr. Rochester, Mason, Mrs. Fairfax and Grace Poole. But, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the similar characters are Cosway Antoinette who became Bertha, her unnamed husband, Mason, Mrs. Eff and Grace Poole. I applied the concepts of "place and displacement" to investigate its effect on characters' experiences in the works and how Rhys subverts those characters.

The third chapter centered on the similar themes treated in order to examine to what extent there is subversion. First, I tackled the theme of madness which is central in both literary works. Then, the other important theme explored is the relationship between dominator and dominated. Finally, I examined slavery. Through the comparison of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys sought to revise and oppose Charlotte Bronte's work. She also contradicts it by dismantling and correcting the image of the colonized.

Discussion

Chapter 1: Historical Context of the two novels

a) Context of *Jane Eyre*

Charlotte Brontë explores the critical period of the early 19th century, and it is necessary to mention the conditions prevailing in Britain. This part is devoted to the historical context of the novel because it is crucial for the understanding of that period. Charlotte Brontë depicts the period of the 1840s when Britain had been ruling large overseas territories for a long period. Britain was then expanding its dominion and the West Indies are a good illustration of the British colony. Britain maintained a strong navy which allowed her to travel across the sea and acquire those islands beginning from the seventeenth century.¹

The presence of the character Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* is not done at random but it is because she is from Jamaica. Even if the novel takes place in the 1840s, Jamaica was acquired in the early seventeenth century.² Britain justified its expansion to a new land as Levine explains that “for an era of colonial expansion premised primarily on trade, it was a perfect justification for colonial conquest and for the appropriation of uncultivated land.”³ This means that the British knew how to manipulate people and justify imperialism. This shows that Charlotte Brontë’s use of the Jamaican Creoles is to justify colonialism.

Accordingly, slaves were taken from different countries especially the African continent.⁴ Jamaica became a British colony. However, it faced many problems such as high prices of slaves because of its location.⁵ At that time it was difficult to take slaves from Africa across the sea. Thus, this colony remained poor till the coming of the slaves.⁶ Brontë started her novel after the abolition of slavery in Jamaica and mentioned them indirectly in her text.

Bertha Mason reflects the fact that Jamaica was still a British colony and that he married during slavery.

b) Historical Context of *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Since Jean Rhys produced her literary work as a response to *Jane Eyre*, she tackled the same period of the novel. The events took place around the period of 1830s and 1840s. In the beginning of the novel, Rhys mentioned the Emancipation Act of 1838 which ended slavery but led to poverty. In fact, Jamaica was already a British colony by 1765.¹¹ Hence, it is necessary to show the condition of slaves before the Emancipation Act. The dominant black characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* who were slaves are Christophine, Baptiste, Hilda, Maillotte and Godfrey.

The British believed that slavery was a right and slaves a property. It was legal for them to own slaves, but over time this legitimacy started to wane. The slaves were not permitted to rebel against the laws imposed by the colonies. Michael Carton notes that,

They were treated as nearly as possible human animals draft animals, women as well as men. Given names that were mere labels, they were not educated or Christianized, theoretically not allowed to own even the simplest property [...] or even set up a permanent house as home.¹²

This demonstrates that slaves lived in harsh and cruel conditions imposed by their owners, which made them dehumanized. Philippa Levine enhances the idea that slaves were not considered as human beings despite being uprooted from their place of origin to work in agriculture. These colonies became a source of production of goods such as sugar and cotton which were originally from Australia.¹³ It is noteworthy that the slaves were kept unskilled to prevent them from working elsewhere. They were permitted only to learn easy tasks or what is related to plantation work so that they cannot escape or revolt.¹⁴ In the course of the slave

trade, many were transported from the African continent to the West Indies, and many slaves lost their lives before they could reach land.¹⁵

Michael Carton explains that the philanthropists believed in the fact that planters should improve the situations of the slaves in order to decrease the slave trade. Their purpose was motivated not by human considerations but by economic ones.¹⁶ According to Philippa Levine, it seems that the British did not make progress in reducing the number of deaths.¹⁷ The British encouraged pregnancies and births among the slaves in order to reduce the costs of buying new ones. For them, it was better to improve their conditions by reducing hard work but as a result became victims of “sexual abuse”.¹⁸ It means that they were the property of their owners. Laws were established to deprive them from their rights. They also faced harsh punishments. Consequently, Britain’s trade flourished with the goods produced in the plantations such as tobacco, coconuts, coffee and sugar. These products were exported to Britain because,

[T]his was big business. The seemingly endless rise in British domestic sugar consumption- unwatched by any other European nation- boosted the value of this import throughout this period.¹⁹

This explains that the goods are not for the benefit of the West Indies but rather for Britain, which benefited most from the transported products.

The West Indians aimed to regain their lost freedom. Indeed, they struggled using different means. In the early 18th century, escaping was one way of resistance. For Levine, the wars that took place between them “played havoc with Jamaica’s economy”.²⁰ The end of the war obliged the runaway slaves to return to their owners. Furthermore, the opposition of slavery came from both sides. In Europe many opposed slavery. From the late 18th century to the early 19th century, the West Indies witnessed revolts on different islands. Philippa Levine claims that “towards the close of the eighteenth century anti-slavery sentiment began to

emerge forcefully”.²¹ The roots of the abolition, indeed, rose in Britain beginning in the 1770s. On the other hand, in Jamaica, slaves were appointing leaders to help them in their fight. Hence, Leadership was understood as organizing rebels against the owners.²²

It is important to note that the black slaves organized many uprisings. The 1831-2 witnessed revolt by West Indians against the British to gain their freedom. This episode was known as the Baptist War because it started in Christmas.²³ The West Indies witnessed revolts by the slaves through rebels in 1816, 1823, 1831-2. To illustrate, Sam Sharpe led the Baptist war in 1831.²⁴ The missionaries were significant in the Baptist war mainly in St James. The missionaries preferred freedom; thus, they started to prepare for it from August about 1831.²⁵ The slaves’ resistance started just after Christmas. It manifested through their rejection to work for their masters.²⁶ This day was chosen because the whites would be “away in the towns”.²⁷ Certainly, their revolts during the early 19th century were important to show that they could no longer work and live under those conditions. Thus, the majority of the parliament agreed that they should stop slavery. They claimed that it was “morally evil, economically inefficient and politically unwise.”²⁸ For them, it was inhumane, and it would destroy their economy because of the costs. The members became more aware about the situations through the slave rebellion. However, the slave-owners opposed the freedom and claimed that the slaves lived in good conditions.

Jean Rhys referred to the Emancipation Act in her literary work in which the Cosway family and Mr. Luttrell. The slaves gained their freedom under the Emancipation Proclamation of 1833 which was considered as a ruin for the slave-owners. In fact, the slaves got their freedom in 1834. Yet, Levine declares that after the abolition of slavery,

[S]laves were required for a period of seven years to devote three quarters of their work hours to their former owners in return for food and clothing. This compensation to the slaveholders was in addition to a generous cash layout that

totaled about £2 million. The seven-year apprenticeship scheme ended early 1838.²⁹

This means that the emancipation did not signify freedom for all the Caribbean islands because they remained controlled under the apprenticeship system. The slaves remained controlled by their owners even if they were freed. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there are some who remained with the Cosway family such as Christophine and Godfrey. In contrast, the masters received indemnities for the abolition. Jean Rhys's can be viewed as a rebellion to the colonizer. She reveals that there is a continuity of revolts in her novel even after the Emancipation Act.

The period of post-emancipation in the West Indies lasted from 1838 to 1876. The ex-slaves resisted to work as free peasants and establish a sense of family according to their own cultures and traditions. During this period, Britain brought new immigrants from India and the West Indies became a place of "mixed races". Additionally, it was a period characterized by the "limited wage employment available".³⁰ The ex-slaves faced other problems which occurred as a result of "wages, availability of land" and conflict with new immigrants". What enhanced these difficulties was the economic unrest which started from the late 1840s, 1860s and mid- 1870s. According to Michael Carton, Jamaica witnessed revolts during post-emancipation "localized for the most part, but approaching islands- wide revolts in 1848 and 1859".³¹ Perhaps the revolt made by the blacks present in *Wide Sargasso Sea* when Antoinette was young is one of these revolts. In the novel, this revolt led to the destruction of their house at Coulibri, Jamaica. In fact, this latter won its independence on February, 1962.

Endnotes

¹ Philippa Levine, *The British Empire Sunshine to Sunset*, (Pearson Longman: 2007), 13.

² Michael Carton, *Empire, Enslavement and freedom in the Caribbean*, (Ian Randle Publishers: 2007), 162.

³ Levine, *British Empire*, 27.

- ⁴Ave Maria Lane, *The Expansion Of The British Empire*, (London: Cambridge University Press), 136.
- ⁵Carton, *Empire*, 162.
- ⁶Ibid., 164.
- ⁷Carton, *Empire*, 164.
- ⁸Ibid., 173.
- ⁹Levine, *British Empire*, 115
- ¹⁰ Carton, *Empire*, 173
- ¹¹Levine, *British Empire*, 16
- ¹² Carton, *Empire*, 175
- ¹³ Levine, *British Empire*, 17
- ¹⁴Ibid., 20
- ¹⁵p19
- ¹⁶p18
- ¹⁷p21
- ¹⁸Carton, *Empire*, 265.
- ¹⁹ Ibid
- ²⁰ Mary Reckored, *The Jamaica Slave Rebellion of 1831*, Oxford University Press, Past &Present, No.40 (Jul., 1968), 108, accessed in July 05, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650070>.
- ²¹ Ibid., 115.
- ²² p113.
- ²³ p114.
- ²⁴ Carton, *Empire*, 265.
- ²⁵ Levine, *British Empire*, 23-4.
- ²⁶Carton, *Empire*, 324
- ²⁷ibid., 325

Chapter two: Parallels Between the Characters of the Novels

What follows is a comparison of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* through characters. In fact, I will stress the common points between Bertha and Antoinette, Mr. Rochester and the unnamed husband, Mrs. Fairfax and Mrs. Eff, and Richard Mason and Grace Poole.

a) Parallels Between Bertha Mason and Antoinette Cosway

I start my comparison by two female characters mainly Bertha Mason and Antoinette Cosway. The two characters play crucial roles in the narratives. They are portrayed differently by the authors. Colonizers tend to impose their own cultures. The British taught the colonized their "literature, landscape and history" so as to highlight the difference between them.¹ The Imperial ideology stressed the superiority of what is British. It emphasized the idea that other nations do not fit with the British norms, qualifying them as "savage", "native" and "primitive".² This is reflected in their literatures where colonies and colonized are portrayed as inferior and marginal. It is in such context that Charlotte Brontë presents Mr. Rochester's wife. This latter is called Bertha Antoinetta Mason who came from Jamaica to England.³ Brontë portrays her through other characters rendering her voiceless but depicted by other characters. In fact, the "West Indian woman is denied the option of a dissenting voice".⁴ Bertha is a lunatic in Brontë's narrative who is defined through her physical appearance rather than her experiences. Bertha is depicted as an odd creature that remains without a name until a later stage in the novel. The narrator gives her a prejudiced image because she is not English and tries to warn against this dangerous creature. It is only when the wedding day is interrupted that Mr. Rochester invites his guests to see Bertha. this latter is portrayed as

[W]hether beast or human being one could not, at the first sight, tell. It groveled, seemingly, on all-fours; it snatched and growled like some strange

wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark grizzled hair, wild as a mane.⁵

We can notice that Jane disapproves Bertha's appearance. Dennis Porter explains that the "subhuman is explained in terms of a degenerate heredity".⁶ It seems that Brontë considers the Creole as a person incompatible with the norms of Englishness. Bertha is seen as an outsider. In her *Three Women's Texts and Imperialism*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explores Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In her essay, Spivak criticizes Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar because they "have seen Bertha Mason only in psychological term, as Jane's dark double".⁷ It means that they consider Bertha as the unconscious double of Jane Eyre and ignore the colonial dimension. Spivak says that: "I have suggested that Bertha's function in *Jane Eyre* is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby to weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law".⁸ This shows how Spivak refers to the animalistic features of Bertha. Thus, the author characterizes Bertha as inferior. If Brontë's character stands for an animal, Rhys tends to provide a contradicting image.

While postcolonial authors use postcolonial "rewriting", they subvert the canon to provide a new reading of the first.⁹ Applying this to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys contradicts the prejudiced description of Bertha by giving a new image to the protagonist. Antoinette's name changes to Antoinette Cosway Mason following her mother's marriage with Mason. When she goes to the convent school, one of the nuns tells her: "[y]ou are Antoinette Cosway, that is to say Antoinette Mason".¹⁰ Hence, Antoinette becomes bound to her English step-father's name. Additionally, her husband changed her name to Bertha. We can clearly see that Antoinette is under the influence of her British husband. Rhys subverts Brontë's character, Bertha, by changing the name over the course of the novel to eventually become Bertha Antoinetta Mason. Gayatri Spivak confirms that Antoinette's husband changes his wife's name violently depriving her as a result from her identity.¹¹ Hence, as a colonized, Antoinette

becomes confused with her identity because the British colonizer exerts his oppression on the her and shows disregard for her.

Rhys goes further to justify and explain the reasons behind Bertha's strange appearance. According to Rhys, Antoinette is rejected and oppressed not only by society but also by her husband who attempts one night to seduce the servant, Amélie.¹² The husband says: "Nor I was anxious to know what was happening behind the thin partition which divided us from my wife's bedroom".¹³ This reflects the fact that the husband does not care about his wife's feelings, very much like the little concern the colonizer has for his subjects. The purpose of the Englishman in the West Indies is to gain wealth by taking profit from laws that serve him.¹⁴ As the situation gets unbearable for Antoinette; she becomes drunken¹⁵, which leads to her depression. This image contradicts Brontë's appearance of Bertha in the sense that her madness is not inherited but the result of distress and suffering. It seems that the husband does not feel guilt about his oppression of his wife. Rhys explains that the protagonist is her husband's victim. This draws a parallel with the colonizer/colonized relationship. As a consequence, by showing that Antoinette is dehumanized, Rhys reverses the fact that this character is from a mad family. She aims to humanize her character by depicting harsh circumstances that she goes through.

Brontë continues to present Bertha using race when Jane declares to Mr. Rochester that she faced a frightful woman. She affirms that Bertha is "[f]earful and ghostly to me – oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured faced. It was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments□"¹⁶. She also appears as a "Vampire" who invokes "terror" for the colonizer. It is obvious that Brontë uses "race" as the underlying aspect for depicting her character. Susan L Meyer claims that "Brontë's figurative use of blackness in part arises from the history of British colonialism".¹⁶ It is noteworthy that Brontë tends to define Antoinette through the colour of her skin in order

to emphasize the difference between the colonizer and the colonized. In other words, the foreign race such as Bertha is criticized and dehumanized even if she is a “white Jamaican Creole”.¹⁸ For Brontë, the white Creole is similar to the natives because they cannot be accepted as equals to the British. Furthermore, Brontë stresses that Bertha is a threat by calling her a “clothed hyena”.¹⁹ Indeed, the main feature of this animal is its loud laugh, associated with danger. Bertha’s existence in the novel may reveal that colonialism brings in its wake unwanted people, like the by-product of any process. It is clear that the image given of her is also related to the fact that she is from a British colony. Bertha is always seen as “unnatural, subhuman being”. Brontë tries to put the “non-white” in the role of oppressors²¹ which means that the colonized upset the British. Brontë provides a depiction of Bertha that is lasting and cannot be altered.²² Brontë has used the colonial discourse to provide a stereotypical and unfavorable image of Bertha. Conversely, Rhys presents her in a contrasting way.

Helen Tiffin explains that postcolonial “rewriting” occurs when “a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes”.²³ In other words, many postcolonial authors borrow a character to correct the stereotypes attributed to her. Rhys recounts Antoinette’s whole life in order to “show the circumstances that led to her incarceration in an attic in Thornfield Hall”.²⁴ In fact, throughout her life, she struggles with “alienation and disintegration” notably during her childhood.²⁵ In Thornfield, Antoinette is given a voice to display the effect of her harsh conditions and portray that Brontë’s narrative is uncertain and indefinite. In England, Antoinette struggles with madness. However, when she sees herself, she says: “I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then I saw her – the ghost. The woman with the streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her”.²⁶ We can notice that Antoinette has a voice in the third part to defend

herself as well as to reverse Brontë's narrative in which she is voiceless. Spivak maintains that she recognizes herself at the end of the novel.²⁷ It seems that Antoinette portrays her appearance from a distinct context to explore "the other side" of madness. In other words, she depicts herself as a ghost because she is victimized. Antoinette's appearance is no longer horrible and frightening. Rhys provides a new and reversed perspective of the character. For Rhys, various stories matter because Brontë's "single story" provides stereotypical images about Bertha.

The concept of displacement is concerned with postcolonial studies. Ashcroft et al. wrote that a "major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement".²⁸ Rhys attempts to explain that Antoinette scrambles with displacement. In fact, she faces dislocation several times in her life. In fact, Antoinette shifts involuntarily after the setting of the fire, at Coulibri, to live with Cora. This removal detaches Antoinette from her mother. Antoinette declares:

I was going to see my mother. I had insisted that Christophine must be with me, no one else, and as I was not quiet well they had given way. I remember the dull feeling as we drove along for I did not expect to see her. She was part of Coulibri, that had gone, so she had gone, I was certain of it.²⁹

This passage explains that displacement influences the interrelation between the two characters. This kind of shift leads Antoinette to despise her present situation since she is rejected. Indeed, she separates her present life from the past because she considers her mother as a dead person. For her, Annette does not exist. Antoinette believes that she "did die when I was a child".³⁰ Antoinette narrates her experiences of displacement to reveal "the other side of the story". Rhys gives her a chance to dismantle the "single story" because of its danger. The colonized must receive a chance to reflect what she goes through.

Antoinette's husband is convinced of her mental illness and decides to take her to England. Antoinette finds herself locked up in a room. Antoinette declares: "I get out of bed

[...] to wonder why I have been brought here. For what reason? There must be a reason.”³¹ It seems that Antoinette is unable to interpret the reality of the colonizer when she becomes a prisoner. She adds:

They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don't remember, but we lost it. Was it that evening in the cabin when he found me talking to the young man who brought me my food?³²

We can understand that this character is removed from the West Indies yet involuntarily. In fact, Antoinette has not only been displaced to England by force but also locked in a room and guarded by Grace Poole. This may translate a kind of enslavement Rhys wants to denounce. It is apparent that the displacement affects her experiences negatively. Therefore, she subconsciously denies her presence in England when informed. It can also be the cause of her madness. It could be noted that her husband locks the room without explanation. Hence, Rhys's goal is to blame the colonizer for the harsh experiences Antoinette goes through in order to dismantle the stereotypical description introduced by Brontë. It seems that Antoinette's sufferings reflect the long sufferings of the colonized. We can notice that Rhys uses displacement as an important element to let her protagonist express herself. Antoinette narrates her own story in England which is different from Brontë's.

We come to the conclusion that Jean Rhys rewrites and subverts Charlotte Brontë's Bertha. Rhys recognizes the “danger of a single story” directed to Bertha. Brontë does not narrate the whole story of Bertha. She gives those descriptions because her country has power. Thus, her canonical text spreads prejudices while Rhys provides another for Brontë's story. Rhys's goal is to portray Antoinette as a victim and to show how the British dehumanize the Creole depriving her from her fortune and identity. Rhys gives voice to the voiceless Bertha to explain the experiences of her oppression. She also struggles with

displacement which causes her destruction. Rhys shows the “other side” of Antoinette’s life and experiences.

b) Parallels Between Mr. Rochester and the Unnamed Husband:

The second parallel to be drawn between characters who is Mr. Rochester and the unnamed husband of the married women from the Caribbean islands. It is crucial to study the previous female characters’ husbands in order to reveal how they are described. Charlotte Brontë and Jean Rhys aim to give distinct viewpoint about the two characters.

In *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester is an important character. Brontë introduces him as a victim who suffers from difficult circumstances especially “[f]amily troubles”.³³ He is left no money. Thus, he seeks to marry Bertha, from Jamaica, to gain “a fortune of thirty thousand pound”.³⁴ Brontë informs the reader that he is betrayed. It is noteworthy that Brontë gives voice to Rochester in order to justify himself. Thus, he declares: “My father and my brother Rowland knew all this; but they thought only of the thirty thousand pounds, and they joined the plot against me”.³⁵ He clarifies that he is deprived of his inheritance and he is not informed of his wife’s madness. Brontë defends the colonizer’s situations as troublesome. His case looks as if he is a peaceful and innocent British rather than an oppressor. Moreover, he notes his fascination with Bertha is her beauty³⁶ which fits with the English norms. This reinforces the fact that the English admire and stress certain norms of beauty while other nations are rarely associated with it. Besides, Brontë continues to show that he “was a happy man” and that “my experience has been heavenly, if you only knew it!”³⁷ It should be noted that “Charlotte Brontë, due to her conventionality tries to convince her readers that Rochester is a victim for his unlucky marriage with the mad Bertha”.³⁸ This indicates that Brontë is hiding the reality of the colonizer and his ideology. In other words, Brontë claims the fact that the colonized as the oppressor of the colonizer. Mr. Rochester is seen as dehumanized by the

West Indian. As a result, Brontë's text gives one image to depict the English in which he receives a positive image. While Brontë elevates the English husband, Rhys appears to dismantle the image.

Jean Rhys recounts Rochester's life from the West Indian perspective. The husband is unnamed in the novel. Rhys states that "I carefully haven't named the name at all".³⁹ Malgorata Swietlik explains that the husband starts his narration in the second part "without any introduction".⁴⁰ She confirms that "Rochester does not deserve to have a name" because he deprives Antoinette from hers.⁴¹ For Swietlik, the colonizer does not merit a name. She goes further to note that she does not want to make a direct link with *Jane Eyre*. Perhaps, Rhys's purpose is to reflect to the English as a whole.

In her novel, Rhys keeps some characteristics of Rochester. She does not subvert the whole character. Swietlik analyzes him from a postcolonial perspective. She states:

Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is shown as a victim of English society rules who, as a second son not inheriting anything has to go to colonies to "buy" a heiress. Showing him as a victim of the society proves that Jean Rhys struggled to develop an inevitable tragedy, not caused by people but by the rules in the post-colonial society.⁴²

We can understand from the passage that ordinary people whether from England or the colonies are all victims of colonialist system. The unnamed husband accepts the marriage arranged by his father. The husband's goal in Jamaica is to get married with Antoinette. Yet he says that "[e]very moment I made effort of I will and something I wondered that no one noticed this."⁴³ From this passage one can understand that he is following his father's wish without any objection. Even if he is a "victim" of an arranged marriage yet he deprives Antoinette from her wealth since he is interested in money. To illustrate, during Antoinette's visit to Christophine, the governess, she says that her money belongs to her husband under the "English law".⁴⁴ Rochester symbolizes the greed of the British Empire for wealth. In this way,

we can consider the husband as an oppressor in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys's portrayal of Rochester is reversal since he is in Jamaica for a known purpose. Rhys opposes Mr. Rochester through "deconstructing" his reality. Therefore, Rhys reveals the reality of the colonizer which is unknown and hidden through the colonial discourse.

Postcolonial literatures tend to celebrate their own "cultures" and "traditions". Thus, they claim that the colonizer portrays the "empire as a site of exotic".⁴⁵ In other words, exoticism is a feature of the postcolonial literatures which is associated with the way places are defined in terms of otherness by the colonizer. In this context, the husband describes the place of the honeymoon, Granbois, as exotic. He realizes that he cannot bear this place because it is: "Not only wild but menacing".⁴⁶ The West Indies is a different and distinct place from England for him. As a result, he considers it as dangerous, terrible and a "sombre place". In fact, he cannot cope with the experiences of the colonized place. According to the husband, it "was not a safe game to play-in that place" merely at night.⁴⁷ Consequently, the English colonizer is incapable of understanding the place because of its hostility to him. Rhys centers on exoticism in her literary work to cope with the Non-European place. According to *The Empire Writes Back*, the colonizer "could not feel at home in the *place* colonized".⁴⁸ As a consequence, the husband's experiences are set in the distinct place; he says "I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side".⁴⁹ Relying on this, as a result of his dislocation to the West Indies, his emotions towards the place are based on hate because it is not related to his own culture. This can reflect that his experiences there cannot fit with the new place; hence, he depicts it as variant. Grace Poole confirms that his "stay in the West Indies has changed him out of knowledge."⁵⁰ This dislocation has an impact on his personality and identity.

"Linguistic displacement" occurs not only for the indigenous people but also for the English people who experience marginalization. These latter manifests when they "begin to feel alienated within its practice".⁵¹ As far as this displacement is concerned, the postcolonial

writer applies it in order to deconstruct the English language. In this context, the unnamed husband states that “Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness”.⁵² It is apparent that Rhys uses capital letters in order to stress the terror Antoinette’s husband feels at night. Yet, this may reflect the fact that he is in an exotic place which influences his experiences and affects his language. In other words, Ashcroft et al., explain that English cannot “‘bear the burden’ of one’s cultural experience”.⁵³ We can notice that his language is unable to describe his emotions in the distinct place.

We can conclude that the two authors differ in their description of the two male characters. Both of them are influenced by Jamaica and victim of an arrange marriage. She reshapes his story to show his purpose behind marrying Antoinette and to show the difficult experiences he scrambles with are the main reasons to leads him to be strange. Brontë’s novel narrates her story to show her character from one point of view in which he receives a good image. Rhys subverts and rewrites the character from a postcolonial perspective because she realizes the impact of a “single story”.

c) Parallels between the unnamed mother and Mrs. Annette Cosway

The next parallel is between the unnamed mother and Mrs. Annette Cosway. These two characters are depicted from distinct perspectives. Rhys adopted Bertha’s mother and gives her a different and a new life. The colonizer presents the colonized as a “savage” and “primitive”.⁵⁴ In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë attempts to portray Bertha’s mother who is not given a name. We can only realize that she is a member of the Mason family. The author deprives her from a name in order to make generalizations. In other words, she wants to represent the West Indians through the unnamed mother. They are unable to speak for themselves. This helps the author to spread stereotypical images about the “Other”. Moreover, Brontë also deprives her from a chance to recount her own story. She is voiceless because Brontë believes that the colonized neither narrate nor depict their experiences. Thus, they

need to be presented by the British. In fact, the West provides a “single story” about the non-Europeans. It seems for Brontë that it is impossible for this mother to be their equals. While Brontë depict her as one thing, Rhys narrates a new story for her.

Postcolonial authors borrow some characters from the canonical text to subvert them according to their own point of view.⁵⁵ In her novel, Jean Rhys provides the mother with a different life and story because Brontë’s work is “incomplete”. The postcolonial author realizes the “danger of the single story”. Thus, Rhys tries to subvert the stereotypical images. She gives a name to the mother and calls her Mrs. Annette Cosway. Antoinette, her daughter, believes that “[n]ames matter”.⁵⁶ For Rhys, it is necessary to give names to her West Indian characters to save the colonized from the negative interpretations. Furthermore, Antoinette narrates her difficult and harsh experiences she goes through. Annette is also given the opportunity to speak and show her emotions. We deduce that Rhys uses “subversion” in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to dismantle Brontë’s narrative. She rewrites the character and gives her both a name and voice to contradict the canonical text. We can notice that she tries to make her narrative authentic by giving her a new identity.

Brontë tends to describe the mother negatively. For Mr. Rochester, she is an “infamous mother”.⁵⁷ The author claims that Bertha “came from a mad family- idiots and maniacs through three generations!”⁵⁸ In other words, she presents the whole family as lunatic. If we go back to three generations, one can deduce that the whole Creoles of this family may be mentally ill. It is because the first generations came to Jamaica in the late 17th century. Furthermore, Mr. Rochester informs his guests during the marriage: “Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard”.⁵⁹ We can notice that Bertha’s mother does not bear a name. Therefore, her madness can be associated not only with one person but also with the whole West Indian population. In other words, we can understand that the whole society is mad. They are seen as “Other” and inferior to the British. In addition, Mr. Rochester

also notes that “they were silent in family secrets before”.⁶⁰ Brontë means that her British audience ignores the reality of the West Indians and thereby it is necessary to inform them. Thus, her claim is that they are all the same. Brontë aims to show that they are mad in order to stress the fact that this society is a threat to the British. Mr. Rochester goes further to describe her saying: “My bride’s mother I had never seen: I understood she was dead. The honeymoon over, I learned my mistake, she was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum”.⁶¹ The mad were locked in asylums at that time because doctors did not succeed to diagnose their illness. They were kept so to keep the society safe. They are dangerous and oppressor for the colonizer. They cannot be equal to the colonizer. Brontë’s portrayal centers on difference of the colonized from the colonizer. Therefore, she aims to make her narrative definitive. While the mother is a threat, Rhys’s purpose is to decode these stereotypical images.

Rhys, as a postcolonial author, aims to dismantle the prejudiced image of Bertha’s mother. She goes back to her early life in order to explain the harsh experiences that led to her mental illness. The novel starts after the Emancipation Act. Antoinette claims that “my mother still planned and hoped”.⁶² She also states that “[y]es what a dancer- that night when they came home from their honeymoon in Trinidad”.⁶³ This shows that Annette was not born mad but she faces painful incidents. Antoinette narrates that “[t]he Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, ‘because she pretty like pretty self’ said Christophine”.⁶⁴ This shows that Annette is hated among her society and lives under racial oppression. Rhys confirms that she is a victim of her society. Her narration is produced to humanize this character.

Rhys goes further in her description of this character. She invents the problems that she faced in her life. She explores the alienation that Annette goes through. This latter is alienated and marginalized after the coming of the doctor. Antoinette says: “she changed. Suddenly, not gradually. She grew thin and at last she refused to leave the house at all”.⁶⁵ She alienates herself when she cannot find a solution to her child Pierre. We can notice that

alienation can also be a reason for her depression. Her situation gets worse when Mr. Mason refuses to keep his promises. He does not agree to travel to England to cure Pierre.

Rhys explains that Annette's situation worsens when she marries Mr. Mason. The author reveals the reason for his coming to the West Indies. Antoinette says that "I was remembering that woman saying 'Dance! He didn't come to the West Indies to dance- he came to make money as they all do.'"⁶⁶ He cares more about his wealth than Annette. She declares:

'How do you know that I was not harmed?' she said. 'We were so poor then,' she told him, 'we were something to laugh at. But we are not poor now,' she said. [...] They talk about us without stopping. They invent stories about you, and lies about me.⁶⁷

From this passage, we understand that the colonized does not matter for the colonizer. Rhys destroys Brontë's text. Annette gets an opportunity to talk and reveal her own experiences. Annette becomes a victim and dehumanized by the British since she is not listened to. She is also harmed after the death of her son, Pierre, and her parrot.

Displacement is a feature of "post-colonial literatures in English".⁶⁸ Rhys uses the concept of "place and displacement" to deal with Annette's experiences. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Annette struggles with involuntary displacement. She is dislocated from Coulibri when the house is burnt. Mr. Mason obliges her to leave everything she owns. Rhys aims to convince the audience that Annette was not mentally ill from her birth. After the incident, Annette could not perceive the events that took place. Antoinette claims:

What was the use of telling her that I'd been awake before and heard my mother screaming '*Qui est là? Qui est là?*' then 'Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you touch me. Coward. Hypocrite. I'll kill you.' I'd put my hands over my ears, her screams were so loud and terrible.⁶⁹

This passage shows that displacement has an effect on her feeling. Annette is viewed as a victim of her society. Therefore, Rhys explains Annette's madness from a postcolonial point

of view in order to make her story authentic. She also shows that multiple narrations are crucial. There is “always the other side”. In addition, Rhys’s aim is not only to show that she becomes mad but also to use “linguistic displacement”. She mimics her parrot saying “Qui est là?” This latter aims to disrupt English and replace it by “english”.⁷⁰ Rhys uses the intersection between French and English. She also includes adjectives which are not used in sentences in order to decode the English grammar. As a result, the language of the colonizer appears “inauthentic”.

People are aware of Annette’s illness and cannot accept it. Antoinette is often oppressed because of her mother illness. They are considered as a threat. One girl says: “Your mother walk about with no shoes and stockings on her feet, she *sans culottes*. She try to kill you too that day you go to see her. She have eyes like zombi.”⁷¹ She is viewed as a danger by the citizens of the estate. Rhys also uses “linguistic displacement” through black characters. She portrays the way black Jamaicans speak the “vernacular language”. In *The Empire Writes Back*, the colonizer’s “language seems inadequate to describe a new place”.⁷² The black girl uses the intersection between French and English to depict Annette. She also deconstructs the English grammar rules. This illustrates how postcolonial writers abrogate and refuse the language of the colonizer. They search for an alternative so that it appears “inauthentic” and disrespected.

Since madness was not known during that period, they were put in asylums. Annette lives in a “pretty little house”⁷³ in order to make people safe from her. In other words, she is kept out of sight. She is locked by a black couple to control her and avoid troubles. The black woman does not agree with Antoinette’s visit since it causes “trouble”. Rhys seems comprehensive with her Jamaican character. She uses “a pretty house” instead of an asylum. She states: “Trouble enough without that”.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Mr. Mason leaves his wife after her mental illness. Antoinette claims that “[h]e seemed to dislike Jamaica, Spanish Town in

particular, and was often away for months”.⁷⁵ He does not care about his wife. He does not look for a solution to her situation.

We can deduce that Brontë and Rhys differ in their representation of the female characters. Brontë uses the colonial discourse to describe the unnamed mother. Thus, she spreads prejudiced image about the colonized in her “single story”. It is noteworthy that her stereotype must be subverted to produce a new story for her. Rhys has brought a different story for her. She gives her character a distinct story to show her audience that various narrations are possible. She reveals the conditions that Annette goes through in order to dismantle and rewrite Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Annette is portrayed as a victim who is alienated and dehumanized by life experience.

d) Parallels Between Mason’s Idiot Boy And Cosway’s Idiot Boy

This part is devoted to draw parallels between the idiot boy in both novels. Even if both authors mention that he is an “idiot” but he receives distinct narration. The colonizer portrays the colonized as “primitive”.⁷⁶ In her text, Brontë shows that Mason’s son is a “primitive” since he is an “idiot”. Mr. Rochester claims that “[t]here was a younger brother, too- a complete dumb idiot”.⁷⁷ The author deprives him from a name to reflect the whole society. She also claims that his illness is due to heredity. Furthermore, Brontë deprives him from a chance to narrate his part. He is voiceless because of his inability to be equal with the colonizer. He is unable to speak of himself. As a consequence, Brontë stresses on difference. She put the focus on the mental illness. She gives him one image which is stereotypical. If Brontë describes him negatively, Rhys gives the opposite.

Rhys uses the concept of “subversion” to decode the prejudiced image. In *The Empire Writes Back*, this concept means the “reconstruction of the so-called canonical texts”.⁷⁵ She subverts his identity by claiming that Brontë has ignored his real name. She reveals that his

family name is Cosway. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette hears a woman saying that “the boy an idiot kept out of sight and mind”.⁷⁹ However, his mental illness is not due to heredity since his mother was not mad till his death. Rhys aims to humanize this character. He turns out to be a victim since Mr. Mason prevents Annette from seeking treatment for him in England. Annette blames the colonizer for his situation. Rhys does not give him a name to reflect that all the colonized people of the West Indians are victimized and dehumanized by the British. She also blames them since they do not care about the situation and circumstances of the colonized. Moreover, the boy dies when they are dislocated from Coulibri. In other words, Rhys tries to repair the image of the boy. She subverts the image of the mentally ill, since he is unable to protect himself.

To conclude, Rhys subverts the stereotype introduced by Brontë. Rhys’s work explains that the boy is only a victim of the colonized. He is not given health care and consideration by the colonizer. He is dehumanized by the British. Rhys seems to realize the prejudices and tries to rewrite them from a West Indian perspective.

e) Parallels Between Mrs. Fairfax and Mrs. Eff

The next parallel between characters is the housekeepers. In Brontë’s novel, Mrs. Fairfax is a housekeeper at Thornfield whereas in Rhys’s novel this role is assigned to Mrs. Eff. These two are given contradicting images. In *Jane Eyre*, Mrs. Fairfax is an important character at Thornfield yet enigmatic. Brontë gives more importance to her British character and presents her in a positive way. She fills the position of a housekeeper for one of her relatives when says: “To be sure, I am distantly related to the Rochesters”.⁸⁰ The author seems to celebrate this character since she keeps the servants at distance in order to avoid problems and to impose her authority over the servants even if she needs a companion because of her loneliness. It seems that Mrs. Fairfax is less talkative about her master which means that she

is doing well to please and obey him. Furthermore, Mrs. Fairfax tries to warn the author to be careful from Mr. Rochester. She justifies herself through the social class of her master because at that period class distinctions matter. Even if she warns Jane against the marriage, she does not know about and unable to recognize the existence of the madwoman. Mr. Rochester confirms that “she could have gained no precise knowledge as to facts.”⁸¹ This indicates the innocence of the British housekeeper who does not have a hand in imprisoning Bertha. We can notice that Brontë attempts to show the housekeeper in a positive manner. Brontë provides only one story to this character. The author stresses the qualities of managers in the English house such as honesty and loyalty. However, she receives a different image from Rhys.

According to the concept of “subversion”, postcolonial authors try to dismantle characters present in the canon. Rhys tries to redefine the housekeeper to reveal that the English housekeeper destroys Antoinette’s life. Mrs. Eff takes the responsibility to hire Grace Poole to keep Antoinette “in the attic”. One can notice that Mrs. Eff knows about the presence of Antoinette in the house and convinces Grace to get employed for the sake of money when she says:

He has grey in his hair and misery in his eyes. Don’t ask me to pity anyone who had a hand in that. I’ve said enough and too much. I am not prepared to treble your money, Grace, but I am prepared to double it. But there must be no more gossip. If there is I will dismiss you at once. I do not think it will be impossible to fill your place. I’m sure you understand.⁸²

From the passage, we understand that Rhys opposes Brontë’s Mrs. Fairfax because Mrs. Eff works for the growth of her husband’s wealth. Rhys portrays her negatively to show that she is complicit in imprisoning Antoinette in a room. Rhys attempts to reveal the real face of the British colonizer. Mrs. Eff symbolizes the colonizer who destroys the West Indians’ life.

To sum up, Rhys answers back Brontë's good British manager, Mrs. Fairfax by providing an opposite image in the person of Mrs. Eff. This latter brings Grace Poole to keep Antoinette confined "in the attic". Rhys inverts the image of Mrs. Fairfax and gives her an alternative reading. She provides a second story for this character in order to reveal the reality of the British. It is crucial for Rhys to inform about the danger of the colonizer. Rhys takes Mrs. Fairfax's role as a good and innocent housekeeper to rewrite it. Therefore, the image given is that she works for the good of the British. According to Rhys, it is not only her husband who contributes to jail Antoinette but also Mrs. Eff.

f) Parallels Between Richard Mason in the two Novels

In addition to the affinities between the two housekeepers, other parallels can be found in both Brontë's and Rhys's literary works. Some of them appear in the character of Richard Mason. The European authors consider the Non-Europeans as the 'Other' since they do not live in the same geographical boundaries and traditions. According to Brontë, at the beginning of the literary work Jane considers Mason as a "polite" person yet she doubts about his real identity because he is unknown for her.⁸³ Jane says that he is "not precisely foreign- but still not altogether English" who is from a "hot country".⁸⁴ Richard Mason is in fact from the West Indies. As a result, Brontë attempts to exclude him because of his strange appearance from being English. In other words, she stresses him as an outsider from her country. Brontë centers on difference between themselves and the "outsider". Richard Mason can never be their equal to the British because he is from the West Indies. While Brontë claims that Mason is from Jamaica, Rhys opposes her.

Rhys contradicts Brontë's novel in the sense that Richard Mason receives an opposite representation in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As a postcolonial author Rhys uses the concept of "subversion" so as to rewrite Richard. Mr. Mason and his son are considered as British in

Rhys's literary work rather than outsiders like in Brontë's novel. According to Antoinette's husband, Mason "is a good fellow, hospitable and friendly; he seemed to become attached to me and trusted me completely".⁸⁵ We can understand that their relationship is based on interests. The husband is praising Mason because he can get profits mainly from the colonized. To illustrate more, Aunt Cora blames Mason for depriving Antoinette from her fortune when Antoinette says: "It's shameful. You are handing everything the child owns to a perfect stranger [...] She should be protected legally".⁸⁶ Mason can be viewed as a means to improve the husband's wealth and benefits. The important thing for them is rise of the empire and its fortune. It is apparent that the English laws are founded to serve their interests but neglect and marginalize the colonized. As a result, Rhys provides a new image about Mason as a follower of the colonizer and its servant.

Brontë continues further to stress the fact that Richard Mason is an oppressor of the colonizer. The author criticizes him for spoiling Mr. Rochester's wedding to save his sister. He confesses about the madwoman's existence, he confirms that "[s]he is now living at Thornfield Hall," said Mason, in more articulate tones. "I saw her there last April. I am her brother".⁸⁷ I think that Brontë aims at showing that Mr. Rochester and Jane are both the victims of the Mason family. Hence, the author presents the British as unfortunate because of oppression imposed by the colonized. If Brontë's Mason oppresses both Jane and Rochester by interrupting their marriage, Rhys provides a distinct viewpoint.

Rhys applies the concept of "subversion" to contradict Brontë. In her novel, Richard Mason is Antoinette's step-brother. "Richard, Mr. Mason's son by his first marriage, was at school in Barbados. He was going to England soon", writes Rhys.⁸⁸ In fact, Mr. Mason is an English man in Rhys's novel. The author decodes and reverses his identity and turns him from an oppressor of the colonizer to the colonized. Moreover, since the novel starts from Antoinette's childhood, Rhys invents a new end to her life. In fact, there is no instance that

shows Mason's confession about Rochester's first wife. In addition, by the end of the third part of Rhys's novel there is subversion of Brontë's text. Antoinette dreams that she has stolen Grace's keys and went downstairs. She set fire in the house and died. When she wakes up, she finds Grace drunken and asleep. As a consequence, Antoinette decides to commit a suicide. Thus, she takes the opportunity and steals the keys and goes through the passage. The novel closes without any instance of her suicide. This end is opened to many interpretations to the reader in which she may or may not commit a suicide. Therefore, we can see that Bertha's end in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is different and reversal.

To conclude, Brontë and Rhys portray Richard Mason in distinct ways. Rhys relies on the concept of "subversion" to correct the image of this character. According to Rhys, Mason does not only destroy the life of the British in *Jane Eyre* but also destroys Antoinette's. She subverts Brontë's novel to narrate a second one from different perspective. For Rhys, the other story matter. Rhys's aim is not only to subvert the character but also to demonstrate that she is so using the same language of the colonizer. She shows that she can use the language and have an impact on her audience.

g) Parallels Between Grace Poole in the Two Novels

Finally, this part is devoted to draw parallels between two female characters mainly Grace Poole. They work as keeper of Bertha and Antoinette. In *Jane Eyre*, Grace Poole is seen as a strange woman in Thornfield Hall, and everyone is suspicious about her laugh. She is a mysterious character because no one knows that she is a servant. She is suspected about the strange laugh. As a result, we can consider that even Grace is a victim since she is considered as an outsider by the members of the house. After the incident when Bertha set fire in Mr. Rochester's bedroom, Jane says:

Grace Poole, and still more in pondering the problem of her position at Thornfield, and questioning why she had not been given in custody that morning, or, at the very least dismissed from her master's service [...]: what mysterious caused withheld him from accusing her?⁸⁹

We can notice that Jane has doubts about Grace's purpose of setting the fire. This latter is considered as a 'margin' since she is mysterious. Her job as a servant can be admired by the British because she succeeds in keeping Bertha out of sight and remains loyal to her master. Furthermore, Mr. Rochester informs Jane that he has hired Grace Poole because he trusts her. He says that "Grace has, on the whole, proved a good keeper"⁹⁰ since she saves him. Brontë seems to praise this servant because she appears to be a good example in Rochester's eyes. Grace Poole can be considered as an example of the British servant willing to please the master; she looks like the colonizer who helps Rochester to jail Bertha. Brontë seems to highlight Grace for taking part in the growth of the empire since Bertha is from a colonized island. Due to her, even Grace is alienated and marginalized by her society. We can deduce that she is a victim. Therefore, even this character can be seen as depressed by the colonized. Whereas Grace Poole plays a crucial to show the audience she is dehumanized, she is given a contradicting viewpoint in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

According to Helen Tiffin postcolonial authors tend to borrow some characters from a canonical work to deliver a new and different perspective.⁹¹ It appears from the novel that Mrs. Eff asks Grace Poole to work for the master so as to gain money.⁹² Grace declares that "I don't serve the devil for no money".⁹³ This character reflects that she shares the same view of the colonizer because she is fond of wealth. It appears that Rhys attempts to display the ideas of the colonizer through Grace since she loves money. Antoinette confirms:

The woman Grace sleeps in my room. At night I sometimes see her sitting at the table counting money. She holds a gold piece in her hand and smiles. Then she puts it all into a little canvas bag with a drawstring and hangs the bag round her neck so that it is hidden in her dress.⁹⁴

From this passage, we can understand that Grace Poole, as a British, aims to earn fortune throughout the colonized. She is not a victim like in *Jane Eyre* since people ignore Bertha's presence in the house. However, she is not oppressed in Rhys's work since her job, as a keeper, does not require from her to make efforts. Rhys seems to put the blame on this British character and turns her out as an oppressor of the colonized since she dehumanizes Antoinette. Moreover, Grace Poole is seen as a drunkard who gets drunken especially at night. As a result, troubles take place.

To conclude, Rhys reverses Grace Poole in her novel. Grace, in fact, works for the master to acquire fortune. Yet she is careless about her West Indian patient. Rhys attempts to rewrite this character from a postcolonial perspective to show the real nature of the colonizer. Through Rhys's narrative Grace is no more mysterious and enigmatic because her real identity is revealed. Rhys's text matters because it reveals the real story of the British character. She destroys the picture given about her British character for the whole world.

Endnotes

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- ¹¹ Chakraborty Spivak, *Three Women's Texts*, 250.
- ¹² Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 170.
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- ²³ Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 97.
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- ²⁸ Ashcroft et al., *Empire Writes Back*, 8.
- ²⁹ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 64.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 155.

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³²p213.

³³Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 155.

³⁴Ibid., 369.

³⁵p370.

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⁴³Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*,96.

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⁵⁰Ibid., 209.

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⁵⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*,371.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 353.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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⁶¹ p370.

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- ⁸¹ Ibid., 375.
- ⁸² Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 209.
- ⁸³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 227.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., 229.
- ⁸⁵ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 95.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 141.
- ⁸⁷ p216.
- ⁸⁸ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 44.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., 185.
- ⁹⁰ p375.
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Chapter three: Parallel Between the Themes

This chapter is devoted to the comparison of the common themes between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In fact, the dominant ones in the both literary works are madness, the relationship between dominator and dominated, and slavery.

a. Theme of madness

This part is devoted to discuss the mental illness since it is important to note how the two authors address this issue. Madness is explored through Brontë's Bertha and Rhys's Antoinette. The canonical works describe the colonized as an outsider. In this context, Brontë's Bertha Mason is considered as a lunatic, but "the narrative about her is annexed entirely by Rochester's patriarchal voice and vision".¹ It is noteworthy that during the nineteenth century England witnessed a rise of mental illnesses. Thus, asylums were established. They were regarded as a safe place since they imprisoned the lunatic people.² So, Brontë considers Bertha as a dangerous person and an alien to her husband and society. She considers that her illness is related to heredity and tends to focus only on her appearances rather than internal feelings and inner experience.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, postcolonial authors take some assumptions from the canonical work to reverse them and reconstruct them from an opposite perspective. Hence, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys gives voice to Antoinette in order to reveal her own experiences and the oppression that she had to undergo throughout her life, which led to her madness. Antoinette narrates her own story to reconstruct Brontë's narrative. Dennis Porter notes:

She is the mad daughter of a madwoman. But Jean Rhys takes us back to the beginnings of the journey that led from the birth in Jamaica to the attic cell at Thornfield. The thematic continuity with Jean Rhys's preceding novel resides in the fact that she affirms in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that Bertha Rochester was not born mad but made so.³

According to Rhys, Antoinette is not a lunatic from heredity; therefore, the author goes back to her own childhood and adulthood to dismantle the stereotypes produced by Brontë and shows that she was not previously a madwoman. As far as rewriting is concerned, Rhys reverses the image of Bertha by giving her a chance to narrate her experiences which are not told by Brontë.

Bertha receives a racial description by Brontë since she does not care about her as a human being because of her madness. In fact, Rochester feels himself a victim since she is deceived by Richard Mason. Brontë confirms that the madness that runs in the family is dangerous since Bertha and her mother are locked. Rochester declares: “My bride’s mother [...] was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum”.⁴ She is locked in the asylum in order to warn the Europeans about the lunatic and to show her sense of inferiority while comparing them to others. Moreover, Rochester takes his wife to the doctors who diagnosed and announced her mental illness.⁵ In doing so, what is the purpose of imprisoning Bertha “in the attic”? The mentally ill were considered as a threat to the society during that period. Bertha is a menace for the people around her. Thus, for Mr. Rochester there is a necessity to lock her in “the third story”. The “madwoman” was kept isolated from the others in order to remain secure. In other words, Brontë shows the superiority of the English compared to the Jamaican Creole. Therefore, Rochester declares that she is an “alien” who is “incapable of being led to anything higher”⁶ to marginalize and considers her as the ‘Other’. Bertha’s madness can be related to her “drinking and sexual appetites”.⁷ Rochester shows that he is the victim of his wife. While Bertha receives a stereotypical depiction by her husband, Antoinette counters it.

In fact, Rhys rewrites the story of madness in the Mason family in order to deconstruct the idea that madness that run in the family is caused by heredity. The author creates a new beginning to Antoinette's life to justify her madness. Annette, Antoinette's mother, is not presented as a madwoman whereas Brontë ignores her early life. Rhys reveals that Annette is

oppressed both by her society and her English husband. As shown throughout the novel, Jamaica is a society made up of whites and blacks and where the Creoles have difficulties to fit in and live. Therefore, Annette and her daughter struggle with alienation and oppression; Annette says: “They talk about us without stopping. They invent stories about you, and lies about me”.⁸ It appears that she hates the place because of the oppression imposed by people. For Annette, the narrative reaches its climax when she marries Mason. She is neglected by her husband especially when her house at Coulibri is burned. In fact, Rhys rewrites Annette's madness and reveals that Mason locks her in a house when her illness begins. However, he does not care about finding a solution to her insanity because she is not a human being for him. We can understand that she is a victimized and dehumanized by the British. Even if Rhys produces a reason for Annette's insanity, she continues further to claim that even Antoinette has another side.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys reconstructs Antoinette's insanity through two distinct narrative voices which manifest in both the protagonist and the husband. The author provides these voices to present how both the colonizer and the colonized define themselves differently. In fact, the unnamed husband recounts the second part in which he does not know himself about Antoinette's madness but is informed by Daniel Cosway, Antoinette's step brother. This latter sends a letter in which he writes: “Then it seems to me that it is my Christian duty to warn the gentleman that she is no girl to marry with the bad blood she have from both sides”.⁹ Therefore, Rhys dismantles Brontë's Rochester especially about his discovery of her madness. Postcolonial “rewriting” manifests on the fact that Daniel not only spreads rumors about the illness that runs in Antoinette's blood but also declares that Richard Mason has betrayed the husband. Rhys reveals the husband's reality because he believes the rumor about the mental illness and denies “the other side” which means that he tries to ignore Antoinette's perspective. As a result, we can see that Antoinette is a victim since her husband

neglects her voice because she is considered as inferior while Rhys gives her voice to rewrite this part about madness.

If Brontë has chosen to write Bertha's madness from her Rochester's perspective, Rhys includes Antoinette's viewpoint in order to rewrite it. As far as the experiences of Rhys's protagonist are concerned, Elizabeth J. Donaldson states that the novel "depicts what some might consider the causes of her madness a difficult childhood, a dangerous social climate, and her husband's ultimate betrayal".¹⁰ Antoinette shows that she was not born as a madwoman but is the victim of her husband. She says that "when he passes my door he says. "Goodnight, Bertha". He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother's name. "I hope you will sleep well, Bertha"."¹¹ He tells her: "I think of you as Bertha".¹² For Rhys, the husband made of Antoinette a lunatic and uses doctors as a tool to announce her illness and get her locked out of sight because considered as a threat for everyone.

Since Bertha's madness is related "sexual" appetite, Dennis Porter asserts that Bertha is made mad "both singly, and collectively, by men".¹³ Thus, Rhys investigates to show that she is a victim of sexual abuse. For instance, Sandi and Daniel Cosway can be viewed as good examples of men who abuse Antoinette sexually. The unnamed husband considers Antoinette as a sexual object. Thus, he declares:

Or I'd touch her face gently and touch tears. Tears-nothing! Words-less than nothing. I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think on feet as I did.¹⁴

We can understand that Antoinette is a victim of her husband's oppression and abuse. In fact, Cosway has an efficient role in destroying Antoinette's life when he confirms that she has already been sexually exploited. He asks the unnamed husband: "'Give my love to your wife-my sister,' he called after me venomously. 'You are not the first to kiss her pretty face. Pretty face, soft skin, pretty colour- not yellow like me'".¹⁵ As a result, we can perceive that Rhys

rewrites Bertha's madness by explaining that she is a victim of male oppression rather than inherited from her mother.

We can deduce that Rhys reverses her madness to correct the image, she goes back to her early life to recount Antoinette's narrative. It is apparent that Rhys's goal is to reveal a negative image given of the colonized and to show that this latter is not inherently bad or inferior but that his present condition is the result of colonization.

b. Theme of Dominator and Dominated

This part is devoted to examine the relationship between the dominator and dominated explored in both literary works. Europeans believe that they are superior. This relationship is explored in *Jane Eyre* through Mr. Rochester and Bertha Mason. This latter is dominated by her husband because she is a lunatic. Thus, Bertha is oppressed because of her inferiority.

In *The Empire Writes Back*, the theorists claim that there is a "relationship between dominated and dominating societies".¹⁶ Postcolonial literatures like the Caribbean ones tackle the issue of oppressor and oppressed to examine the "politics of domination".¹⁷ It is clear that Rhys explores the domination imposed by the British on Antoinette. Rhys reveals the fact that the husband dominates his wife through controlling her wealth. To illustrate this Antoinette declares: "You must understand that I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him".¹⁸ The author counters the colonizer and claims that the dominator's aim is to possess and deprive the colonized of his own property. The husband's marriage reflects the cruelty and harshness of colonization since he deprives her from her wealth under the "English Law". Aunt Cora blames Richard for his affair with the unnamed husband saying that he is "handing over everything the child own to a perfect stranger".¹⁹ According to Christophine, the husband has a thirst for of wealth when she says: "Your husband certainly love money".²⁰ Hence, the husband symbolizes the British colonizer whose

only motivation is expansion and greed no matter how much suffering he causes to people and try to justify this by putting the blame on the colonized who is unworthy of better treatment because inherently flawed.

Additionally, Antoinette seems oppressed by the British. The husband considers her as a “doll” because she has a “marionette quality”.²¹ It appears that he describes her in this way to convince the reader that the colonized must be dominated by the British because of his inability to do things. The husband goes further to claim that the “doll had a doll’s voice”.²² We can notice that Antoinette has no authority and cannot impose her ideas or ask for her right because she is dominated. In other words, the colonized is not given a proper right to express himself but must remain voiceless like Bertha. Thus, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* rewriting manifests itself in the fact that it departs from Brontë’s novel in that Bertha Mason is oppressed and dominated. Antoinette is oppressed and dehumanized by the British because she is from the Caribbean islands.

c. Theme of slavery

The last part is devoted to study slavery as an important theme in both Brontë’s and Rhys’s literary works. I will attempt to investigate about slavery as far as the authors explore the era of colonialism.

The novel, *Jane Eyre*, reflects the presence of British colonialism namely in Jamaica which is associated with slavery. This latter, is depicted through a minor character who is Bertha Mason. Susan L Meyer states that slavery is mentioned in the novel indirectly because Brontë has left the dates unknown. According to Meyer, the events of the novel are “set before emancipation”.²³ In fact, Brontë ended her literary work in 1846, and by the end of the novel, Jane informs the reader that her marriage to Rochester took place ten years earlier. Thus, it can be deduced that it was around 1836.²⁴ Furthermore, Rochester declares to Jane

the previous year that he is already married with a Creole who has been confined “in the attic” for ten years at Thornfield; hence, their coming to England is in 1825. However, their marriage is four years before; perhaps in 1821.²⁵ We can notice that Rochester’s marriage with Bertha is for imperial purposes because his goal is to acquire slaves and land. Therefore, we can understand that the imperial dimension is significant for the British at that time. Yet it coincided with the abolition of slavery. Meyer explains that Brontë includes slavery in *Jane Eyre* to reflect “economic oppression”.²⁶ In other words, the abolition of slavery caused Britain to struggle with economic crises because Jamaica used to be of paramount economic importance to England. Bertha’s setting of fire at Thornfield can be seen as the symbol of a revolt against the empire.²⁷ In other words, even if slave rebellions ended years earlier by the Emancipation Act, Bertha can be seen as a sign for the continuity of slave revolts.

Rhys also explores slavery in her novel to reflect British colonialism and its impact on Jamaica. It is noteworthy that she mentions the Emancipation Act which abolished slavery. Therefore, the author attempts to present the circumstances that occurred in the island in order to answer back Brontë’s “economic oppression”. To illustrate this, the Cosway family and Mr. Luttrell become poor after the abolition of slavery. In the beginning of the novel, Antoinette declares:

How could she know that Mr. Luttrell would be the first who grew tired of waiting? One calm evening he shot his dog, swam out to sea and was gone for always. No agent came from England to look after his property [...] and strangers from Spanish Town rode up to gossip and discuss the tragedy.²⁸

From this passage we can understand the little concern Britain has for the state and conditions of the people in their colonies. They witnessed poverty because they lost their fortunes and did not receive compensations. In fact, Rhys goes further to give image to the reader about slaves’ conditions who remained working for their master; the leading figures are Christophine, Godfrey and Baptiste. The main reason is that they are not skilled at any trade.

Rhys goes further to narrate the conditions of the freed slaves. She claims that the blacks revolt against their owners even after the Emancipation Act. In the beginning of the novel, Annette's horse dies. Godfrey justifies himself saying:

‘I can't watch the horse night and day. I too old now. When the old time go, let it go[...]. The Lord make no distinction between black and white, black and white the same for Him. Rest yourself in peace for the righteous are not forsaken.’²⁹

From the passage one can notice that the blacks are abused by the white. Godfrey is not working seriously to disobey the master. It appears that he appeals for equality between the different races. This can be considered as the case of all the blacks. In fact, it is related to history since blacks' rebellion lasted.

In addition to this, Rhys contradicts the British Empire through one character who is Mr. Mason. In the novel, he is hated because of his harshness towards the blacks when he fires them and acquires new white servants. Rhys seems to criticize the British rule in the colonies and to answer back Brontë and show the reasons that lead blacks and Jamaicans to revolt. Antoinette recounts:

‘There is no reason to be alarmed,’ my stepfather was saying as I came in. ‘A handful of drunken negroes.’ He opened the door leading to the *glacis* and walked out. ‘What is all this,’ he shouted. ‘What do you want?’ A horrible noise swelled up, like animals howling, but worse. We heard stones falling on to the *glacis*.³⁰

From the passage, we can perceive that Rhys portrays the necessity for the blacks to rebel against Mason because he does not look for solutions to their conditions. The rebellion leads to the ruin of Coulibri. For Rhys, it is time for the blacks to act through violence because it is useless to remain peaceful with the colonizer. Furthermore, she shows that black rebellions did not end by the Emancipation Act. They continue their revolts to reveal the harsh conditions they do through.

Ashcroft et al., explore displacement in postcolonial literatures. In Rhys's novel, it manifest in those slaves who are uprooted from Africa to the West Indies involuntarily. They are enslaved and exploited by Europeans. Those Africans scramble with linguistic displacement because they use the intersection between their mother tongue and the imposed language. To illustrate, Christophine encounters this kind of displacement when the unnamed husband says: "I can't say I like her language".³¹ Christophine says:

And too besides I give you bellyache like you never see bellyache. Perhaps you lie along time with the bellyache I give you. Perhaps you lie along time with the bellyache I give you. Perhaps you don't get up again with the bellyache I give you. So keep yourself quiet and decent. You hear me?³²

We can say that Christophine uses the "english language" and avoids her mother's tongue, because the English language is imposed on her. Rhys's goal is to show that the colonized nations are deprived of their language. Thus, she benefits from this to take a revenge on the language of the colonizer in order to render it inauthentic. Linguistic displacement is not only associated with Christophine but also Daniel Cosway who says that she "have no money and she have no friend".³³ Therefore, Rhys dismantles through "deconstructing" her English grammar. The postcolonial author includes "linguistic displacement" in order to write back to the colonizer. Therefore, Rhys displays the experiences of the colonized. We can also understand that Rhys uses "linguistic displacement" to reveal that the slaves cannot use the language of colonizer. This can be perceived as a revolt through language.

Endnotes

¹Parama Roy, "Unaccommodated Woman and the Poetics of Property in *Jane Eyre*", The Hopknis University Press, in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Nineteenth Century(Autumn, 1989), p720, accessed in June, 10, 2016 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/450608>.

²Simon Jarrett, *Disability in time and place*, in English Heritage Disability History Web Content (2012), p28 <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/research/disability-in-time-and-place.pdf>.

³ Dennis Porter, “*Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre*”, in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Autumn, 1976), p541, accessed in April 30, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25088673>.

⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847), (Toronto and New York: Nelson), 370.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Elizabeth J. Donaldson, “*The Corpus of the Madwoman: Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Embodiment and Mental Illness*”, *The Johns Hopkins University Press, NWSA Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 3, *Feminist Disability Studies* (Autumn, 2002), p106, accessed in June 13, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4316926>.

⁸ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), (Longman: Publishing for the Caribbean, 2006), 44.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁰ J. Donaldson, “*Embodiment and Mental Illness*”, 100.

¹¹ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 139.

¹² *Ibid.*, 162.

¹³ Porter, “*Of Heroines and Victims*”, 541.

¹⁴ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 113.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 152-3.

¹⁶ Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 136.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁰ p140.

²¹p180.

²²p202.

²³Susan L. Meyer, “*Colonialism and the Figurative Strategy of "Jane Eyre"*”, Indiana University Press, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter, 1990), p254, accessed in June 10, 2016. <http://wPww.jstor.org/stable/3828358>

²⁴Ibid., 255.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶p256

²⁷p255.

²⁹ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 30.

³⁰ Ibid., 29.

³¹Ibid., 51.

³²p105.

³³p125.

IV. Conclusion

The present research paper deals with “writing back” to the canon and focused on Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Rhys writes as a response to Brontë because of literary influence. Rhys’s country, Jamaica, experienced colonialism. Hence, this impact is felt throughout her novel. Rhys aims at providing contradicting images to the canon in order to defend Jamaica’s identity and culture. As a result, she wants to deliver the difficult experiences of the West Indians so as to oppose Brontë’s text. In this context, it is noteworthy that the post-colonial theory as illustrated in *The Empire Writes Back* shows how she controverts the prejudiced images introduced by Brontë. In doing so, she counters the colonial discourse by decoding and dismantling the main assumptions of the canon. Then, she borrows them to reconstruct and redefine those assumptions from the colonized viewpoint. Therefore, Rhys corrects the misrepresentations made about her country and the colonized people.

The previous studies explored the novels from different perspectives. I carried on the tradition to focus mainly on postcolonial “rewriting”. I attempted to analyze how Rhys subverted the main elements of the Brontë’s novel. Rhys uses “subversion”, “abrogation and appropriation”, “displacement” and “rewriting” to dismantle the stereotypical images. One can conclude that Rhys used the above concepts to reconstructs the main characters of *Jane Eyre* and to show the contrast of Brontë’s ones. She redefines them by giving them new images. I also found that Rhys has borrowed some themes to deal with them from the postcolonial perspective.

These two novels can further be subjected to new analyses and perspectives to provide more insight on the works of Rhys in particular and postcolonial authors in general in their attempts to write back. Further research can be continued in the same tradition. Students can explore a study on race and gender.

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