

“Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era” A Study of the Female Voice in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to analyze the mediums and effects of voice and silence in the life of a female character of the re-written post-colonial text Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The analysis shows how a re-written text can give a new meaning to a character and story of a novel, where the character of Antoinette tells the untold story of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. The method of investigation for this research is analytical and descriptive; the research was completed by analyzing the events, actions and the interactions of the female character, Antoinette with the other major characters in the novel in order to identify how the character of Antoinette was portrayed throughout the novel. It is understood through the study of the text, that the post-colonial novel gave the female voice much more importance than its previous counterpart. This represents the early post-colonial times during which women were starting to gain liberation but had still not completely moved on from the notions of patriarchal societies that they had grown up in.

Key words: Creole, Voice, Silence, Madness, Colors, Sex, Expression, Identity, Other, Origin

INTRODUCTION

When I read Jane Eyre as a child, I thought why should [Bronte] think Creole woman are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester’s first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I’d write the story as it might have readily been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I’d write her a life. (Vreeland, 1979: 235)

The study thoroughly analyzes how the female character in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* is given a voice in the novel during the post-colonial era and also how much of the voice she is able to use independently and powerfully. Although *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a re-writing of *Jane Eyre*, Rhys explores several issues which were left untouched by Bronte, such as patriarchal oppression and racial complexities leading to an individual’s loss of self and identity, as the circumstances demanded during that time. But what connects both the novels is the idea of the ‘other’. In Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is a symbol of the racial other and as such she is isolated and rejected. The re-writing of Bertha Mason in the form of Antoinette is an attempt by Jean Rhys to give Bertha a voice and enable her to speak for the other side from the perspective of being caught between her English colonial identity and that of the Jamaican native as Gilman explains: “the anxiety present in the self-concerning its control over the world engenders a need for a clear and a hard line of difference between the self and the other.” (Gilman, 1985:27) She further explains, “the hard line is skin colour, but stereotypes, like commonplaces, carry entire realms of associations that form a subtext within the world of fiction.” (Gilman, 1985:27).

The “other” in this matter stems from Antoinette’s racial background; she is a daughter of one of the slave owner and so her race is a mixture of her father’s white colour and her mother’s West Indian background. Due to her colour, Antoinette has been unable to keep in touch with her European relatives and at the same time, facing difficulty in being a pure West – Indian Creole. The struggle for Antoinette to be a part of one society forces her to adapt a new identity, as she becomes the other in the eyes of both the societies. In Antoinette’s case her racial background and skin colour becomes a cause for her being termed the other in the society and thus the start of the conflict is born which is between herself and the other. And so, the character of Antoinette works as the other of Bronte’s Bertha. The ambiguity that Antoinette suffers from is just a manifestation of a society that fails to comprehend the other.

“Ever since early Western thought equated good with notions of self-identity and sameness, the experience of evil has often been linked with notions of exteriority. Almost invariably otherness was considered in terms of estrangement which contaminates the pure unity of the soul.” (Kearney, 2003:65). To analyze this one may argue that the other is a threat to what is considered as the original as the other has the potential of destroying the original. When a society is faced with this threat of the other, their strong mode of defense is attacking or alienating them from the society. In this case, Antoinette becomes a mode of alienation as she is unable to fit in the society and the society fears that being the other she has the potential of destroying the whole notion of identity that a society is based on.

Research Structure and Hypothesis

This paper will analyze gaps and silences in Antoinette's narration and her struggle to find her other self in connection with some of the most important events in her life. Antoinette's struggle for finding her other self will be analyzed mainly through her use of voice and silence in crucial parts of her life. At first, the paper will analyze how Antoinette's voice and silence works in her childhood, at the time of her convent days and during her conflicting relationship with her mother. Moreover, it will analyze the second crucial stage of Antoinette's life where her voice and silence takes a different turn. It will further analyze how after her marriage to Rochester, Antoinette uses sexuality and madness as a replacement to voice and silence in order to find her other self in her marriage as well as in the society.

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Rhys, 1966), a re-writing of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, gives voice to the voiceless Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* who was locked up in the attic by her husband, Edward Rochester, because of her extremely violent ways and madness. Rhys explores the Creole character, Bertha, by giving her an opportunity to tell her side of the story. It may be argued that, even though Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written a hundred years later than that of *Jane Eyre*, it works as a prequel as it provides Bertha's back-story and the reason behind her insanity. Rhys' attempts to bring forth to the readers the other side of Bertha in the form of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Rhys felt that Bronte fails to pay attention to the Creole lady, Bertha, and so Rhys desired to tell the other side of the story. While in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha was defined by her animalistic noises and laughter (madness) throughout the novel, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is defined by her multiple forms of expressions through the use of both voice and silence.

Methods and Methodology

This paper will use feminist theory to frame a textual analysis of Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Specifically, it will analyze the characterization of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* with the aim of gaining insight into her use of silence and voice. As such, the paper attempts what can be termed as a formalist criticism of the text as it is primarily concerned with the text itself in its analysis of characterization. However, the nature of the novel and the concern for gender in this paper's analysis means that there are elements of gender and sociological criticism in the paper as well.

This paper will be analyzing the independence and modes of expression of the character of Antoinette and further challenging that the significance of Antoinette's character as a feminist broadly focusing on the theory of feminism –post colonialism and argue how the *feminist outlook* of the character depended on the manner in which she was able to cope with dominating male pressure as the notion of a woman's place changed during the post-colonial era.

The reason for choosing Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is mainly because the post-colonial text gives the female character a completely new point of view from the original that it is based on as it tries to bring out the other, feminine side

to the story that went unnoticed previously. Rhys' re-writing of *Jane Eyre* goes much further than an explanatory prequel as it creates a discourse, which suggests the possibility of fundamental change in mentality.

ANALYSIS

In order to analyze the gaps between the *female* voice and silence of the main character in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and to illustrate the effect of the patriarchal society on the voice of Antoinette, the discussion will shift to the story of Antoinette from her childhood to marital life as her struggle to find her identity continues. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* portrays different aspects the character of Antoinette as she chooses to use a combination of narrative voice, silence and gaps to deal with her situation and tell her story. This combination of the opposite extremes of voice and silence seems to be her most beloved tool of self-expression. Antoinette's attraction to the opposites of silence and voice seems to stem from a general fascination by oppositeness itself. The feeling of oppositeness or otherness seems to have always captivated Antoinette's mind and this feeling came to light in her subtle description of the atmosphere at the convent when she says:

"Everything was brightness or dark. The walls, the blazing colours of the flowers in the garden, the nuns' habits were bright, but their veils, the crucifix hanging from their waists, the shadow of the trees, were black. That was how it was light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell, for one of the nuns knew all about Hell and who does not?" (Rhys, 1966:48)

The "Two Extremes"

Antoinette's description of the two binary opposites sheds light on Antoinette's dual thoughts and confusion. The narration of the atmosphere by Antoinette makes clear her struggles with being stuck between two things and not being able to belong to either. It felt as if the silent atmosphere is a reflection of Antoinette's mind as she could perfectly read through the gaps and fill it with her own analysis.

The reader can also see Antoinette's struggle to fill the gaps in the madness and silence of her mother in her childhood days. By showing Annette's madness and coldness towards her daughter Antoinette, Rhys in a way tries to exemplify how the absence of a mother's love and affection contributes greatly to Antoinette's fractured identity and how she later inherits her mother's madness in the novel. Antoinette craves her mother's love and care, which she is deprived of, as her brother, Pierre, gets his share of the attention. Despite her mother's ignorance, Antoinette only has love and respect for her mother in every possible manner as Antoinette remarks about her mother -

"I hated this frown and once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. She wanted me to sit with Pierre and walk where she pleased without being pestered, she wanted peace and quiet. I was old enough to look after myself. 'Oh let me alone' she would say, 'let me alone,' and

after I knew that she talked to herself and I was a little afraid of her.” (Rhys, 1966:17)

It is hard for Antoinette to fill the gaps in her mother’s silence and voice her opinion on why her mother behaves in a certain manner. The gaps, untold stories and emotions present in Antoinette’s mother’s personality becomes a part of how Antoinette chooses to express herself too. This is clear from the gaps and emotions present in Antoinette’s narration. For example, Antoinette often mentions her cousin Sandy; her comments point to a possibility of a sexual relationship between Antoinette and Sandy as hinted by both Amelia and Daniel Cosway later. At that point, this theory can still be discounted because of both of their selfish interests in discrediting Antoinette. However, in part three, Antoinette discloses that she and Sandy met frequently and that they were in love. This needs to be mentioned because it shows how Antoinette has control over what she wants to disclose and what she wants to hide depending on the person she is conversing with. Thus, it seems that Antoinette’s narration, her voice in the first part of the novel, is also full of silences, gaps and undisclosed emotions.

The Struggle

Antoinette’s long-time struggle to find her own voice takes a turn after her marriage to Rochester as she begins to doubt her whole sense of individuality and existence. In the beginning of their marriage, Antoinette’s beauty attracted Rochester as he is seldom used to seeing such kind of beauty. While riding together he remarks: “Looking up smiling, she might have been any pretty English girl.” (Rhys, 1966:60). This remark of Rochester shows how he perceives his wife, Antoinette, to be like any other perfect English girl, which is to be a girl with subtle and soft lady-like manners unlike the Creole personality that Antoinette engendered as she has a more direct and careless way of expressing herself. On the other hand, when insanity takes over Antoinette’s mind and she starts acting crazy, Rochester’s whole perception about her changes and instead of coming across as a beautiful swan, that same Antoinette comes across as a madwoman in Rochester’s eyes. When he sees her in that state for the first time he says - “Her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen.” (Rhys, 1966:120). By describing Antoinette’s appearance in a negative way, Rochester in a way puts down Antoinette as a whole since his attraction to Antoinette is based on her appearance.

Although, it is obvious from his words that Rochester feels a certain attraction towards this Creole girl because of her appearance, he disregards her emotions in his narration, “I woke next morning in the green-yellow light, feeling uneasy as though someone were watching me. She must have been awake for some time. Her hair was plaited and she wore a fresh white chemise.” (Rhys, 1966:70). Rochester’s descriptions of Antoinette clearly shows that she becomes a physical object for him, an object whose every physical detail he notices but whose existence and identity doesn’t have a place in his mind:

“And her skin was darker, her lips thicker than I had thought. She was sleeping very soundly and quietly but there

was awareness in her eyes when she opened them, and after a moment suppressed laughter. I felt satisfied and peaceful, but not gay as she did, no, by God, not gay. I had no wish to touch her and she knew it, for she got up at once and began to dress. A very graceful dress, I said and she showed me the many ways it could be worn, trailing on the floor, lifted to show a lace petticoat, or hitched up far above the knee.” (Rhys, 1966:115-116)

Use of Colours – Self Expression

Antoinette herself becomes aware of Rochester’s fascination with her physicality and for that reason Antoinette chooses to use it as a method of expressing herself and reaching out to Rochester. Colors’ play an important part to become a medium of expression for Antoinette and she is seen to be fascinated by the color Red. Red can be linked to female sensuality, passion, and emotion and it may showcase courage, danger and a sense of power within women. Antoinette has an obsession for the colour red as she thinks that it attracts the eyes of her husband Rochester, “I took the red dress down and put it against myself: ‘Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?’ I said.” (Rhys, 1966:152). But unlike her misconception the red dress has an adverse effect on Rochester’s mind as to him it makes her look like a desperate woman who is apprehensive of the dangerous warning that comes with red as it is a sign of rebellion. On the other hand, the colour white has a desirable effect in Rochester’s mind as it makes Antoinette look chaste and pure as white is thought to symbolize virginity and chastity. The colour white arouses desire in Rochester. However, Antoinette has a different personality than that of what Rochester wants her to be and so she sticks to the colour red, which she believes makes her presence felt in a stronger way, “Antoinette changes from the virginal bride wearing a white dress into the ‘rejected scarlet woman’ in a red dress.” (Olaussen, 1992,:67). It can be said that colours work as metaphor for Antoinette’s identity and individuality and it also works as a form of expression for Antoinette as it exemplifies the fact that Antoinette is independent as a woman and chooses to express herself in the way that is comfortable for her and suits her.

Individuality

Antoinette manages to express herself in parts despite Rochester’s constant attempts to not give her a space to voice her opinions. The essence of Antoinette’s personality comes to light when she ends up voicing her story to Rochester in order to defend her troubled childhood, which turns out to be a futile attempt:

“No, I said I was always happy in the morning, not always in the afternoon and never after sunset, for after sunset, the house was haunted, some places are. Then there was that day when she saw I was growing up like a white nigger and she was ashamed of me, it was after that day that everything changed. Yes, it was my fault that she started to plan and work in frenzy, in a fever to change our lives. Then people came to see us again and though I still hated them and was afraid of their cool, teasing eyes, I learned to hide it.” (Rhys, 1966:109)

This clearly reflects Antoinette's life-long struggle to find her individual place in a society. As Spivak explains, Antoinette "is caught between the English imperialist and the black native." (Spivak, 1985:243-261) Antoinette's description of her childhood portrays Antoinette's struggle to find a separate identity, being caught up between the English and the black communities. There is a pain in Antoinette's voice as she describes her childhood when she was a shy, lonely girl, filled with the fear of rejection.

It can also be argued that Antoinette's remembrance of her past is a deliberate attempt on Antoinette's part to give an indication of her impending madness. The fact that her voice oppresses so much that she bursts out after holding in her emotions for years, is indicative that she is reaching her breaking point and will end up insane just like her mother did.

Rochester's refusal to acknowledge Antoinette by her name in a way is a refusal to accept and recognize her identity and uniqueness as an individual. Antoinette constantly voices her displeasure at Rochester's ignorance - "My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha." (Rhys, 1966:111) In reply to which Rochester would say, "Because it's a name I am particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha." (Rhys, 1966:111). If one may recall, Bertha was the name of the madwoman in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, who was shown as the insane Creole wife of Edward Rochester. In fact the name of Antoinette is generally associated with the queen of France during the French revolution, Marie Antoinette. The name is associated with elegance and high status.

Use of Sex

As verbal communication is decreasing between Antoinette and Rochester, sex becomes a form of communication and bonding between them - "men rob love with sex." (Angier, 1990:543). As they lack mental connection, words fail and the only thing that attracts Rochester towards Antoinette is her physicality and physical communion plays an important part in his mind in this relationship. On the other hand, Antoinette's way of communicating and feeling important and loved is through lovemaking. It feels as if, sex is the only form of love that exists with them. Rochester responds to her sexually like he never did before, as for some men, sex is the best form of communal bond between husband and wife.

Antoinette starts to use her physical attributes to lure Rochester and fulfill her desire for affection. Antoinette's cry for sex is her cry for attention. Sex becomes a mode of expression in Antoinette's life. Even though it gives Rochester the idea that she is not a proper lady, lacking the ladylike qualities and being influenced by her West-Indian mad manners as he once commented how he felt sick and disgusted by Antoinette's behavior. Silence becomes prominent in Antoinette's life. As the power of her voice has no effect on Rochester, Antoinette uses the silent power of sex as a way of getting the love that she feels she deserves.

"Rhys resists the ideal of female sexuality" (Widdowson, Selden. & Brooker, 1997:139) by describing Antoinette's sexual desire in a more direct and matter of fact manner as she is seen begging to Rochester for sex - "She'll moan and

cry and give herself as no woman would- or could...Then lie so still, still as this cloudy day." (Rhys, 1966:120). According to Rochester's description, Antoinette pushes herself towards Rochester unlike any other woman would, as her madness keeps overpowering her. Antoinette feels a feeling of abandonment as she gives herself up to Rochester. In Antoinette's mind, sex gives her the feeling of importance that she craves for.

Rochester wants to overpower Antoinette's sexuality and beauty by oppressing her and making her a victim. However, he keeps falling for her sensuality and beauty and this failure to control himself drills a sense of fear into him. Antoinette's means of using silence and sex as ways of getting her husband's attention work better than her use of her voice and her words. Her silent methods seem to have much more power when it comes to her relationship with Rochester than her voice.

Antoinette and Rochester may have been driven towards fulfilling their desires but the sexual connection between Rochester and Antoinette works in favor of Antoinette, as she is able to control Rochester and makes herself heard, through her silence and her sexuality.

Use of Ventriloquism

As Antoinette's relationship with her husband, Rochester, deteriorates further, confusion starts to take over Antoinette's mind. Jean Rhys makes use of ventriloquism when Antoinette chooses silence over voice, and gives her husband, Rochester, the narrative authority. The whole of the section where Antoinette was silent, Rochester spoke for her and she acted like a mere puppet in the hands of Rochester. Her feeling of a lack of control results in her starting to question her own identity - "I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys, 1966:85). Antoinette wants to belong to a single place or person and her struggle for belonging continues.

The idea of voice is also related to the idea of ventriloquism. The word comes from the Latin - to speak from the stomach, i.e. venter (belly) and loqui (speak) (Dictionaries, 1984:1192). It is an act in which a person changes his or her own voice to appear as if it is coming from somewhere else, usually a dummy. When a character has someone else speaking for them it is usually called ventriloquism. It means that particular character lacks a voice of his own and hence is a mere puppet in the hands of the ventriloquist. The job of the ventriloquist is to speak for another character. Thus, the essence of the identity of the character rests on the voice of the ventriloquist. Ventriloquism in literature happens when someone other than the character himself describes a character's life, actions and emotions. The consequence of this is the loss of identity and voice to another individual who can represent the character however he wants to the readers. Ventriloquism can be seen in *Jane Eyre*, where the character of Bertha is described by her husband, Rochester. As the narrator, Rochester has complete power over how Bertha comes across to the readers. Her voice is lost.

Madness

The feeling of an absence of her own identity, her own voice, drives Antoinette to desperation. As Antoinette begins to lose touch with reality, madness overpowers her mind and body. Madness begins to feel real for her because it makes her feel alive. The attention she receives from madness makes her feel like she still exists. Madness gives her the power to make her voice heard to people who will not listen otherwise; power that she has been craving for since childhood. Madness is not a symptom of her constant feeling of a lack of voice and need to be heard; madness is a cure.

On the other thing the argument is that the madness which takes over Antoinette is significantly caused by her husband Rochester's opinion regarding her from the beginning of the marriage as he always thinks of Antoinette as this mad, creole girl as Chesler stated that, "in a patriarchal society, men assign features of madness to women when they do not act and behave according to one's sex-role stereotype." (Chesler, 1972:57) Rochester soon forms the idea that Antoinette is behaving strangely and it comes from the fact that she has this Creole background.

In one instance, when Antoinette and Rochester are seen discussing Daniel Cosway's letter, Antoinette gets fiercely hurt and upset at the wrong allegations that Daniel makes regarding her and her mother Annette and how Rochester didn't believe her version of the story as she screams and throws a wine bottle at Rochester - "then she cursed me comprehensively, my eyes, my mouth, every member of my body, and it was like a dream in the large un-furnished room with the candles flickering and this red-eyed, white-haired stranger who was my wife shouting obscenities at me." (Rhys, 1966:122). One can argue that Antoinette's rage is her own way of rejecting and resisting Rochester's dominance. Antoinette is scared that she will end up having the same fate like her mother Antoinette ends up being mad after years of being oppressed and dominated by others in the society as Anja Loomba stated, "within the framework of psychoanalytic discourse, anti-colonial resistance is coded as madness." (Loomba, 2005:119). Antoinette understands and realizes that her husband Rochester's intention is to empower her, dominate and change her sense of identity and in order to stop that Antoinette has no other way other than retorting to madness and rejecting his wishes.

Deliberately Silenced

As Rochester continues to refuse to acknowledge Antoinette's voice, she decides to push herself into a world of silence, in which madness takes control of her mind. She chooses to be seen as a madwoman in front of the society as her mad silence succeeds in providing her curiosity and attention from her husband and society and thus, the feeling of being significant.

Antoinette's silence is dangerous, since it is hard to figure out what Antoinette is actually thinking or feeling about the whole situation. The silent Antoinette is much more powerful than the silent Bertha as she can use her sexuality or beauty as a means of attracting the opposite sex, which in

this case is her husband, Rochester. She can also be silent and still use madness to gain attention and express herself in a world where no one has the capacity to understand who she really is:

"She had mounted and he went over to her. When she stretched her hand out he took it and still holding it spoke to her very earnestly. I did not hear what he said but I thought she would cry then. No, the doll's smile came back-nailed to her face. Even if she had wept like Magdalene, it would have made no difference. I was exhausted. All the mad conflicting emotions had gone and left me wearied and empty. Sane." (Rhys, 1966:140)

Antoinette's sudden silence becomes too much for Rochester to handle and he is not able to deal with the whole place and situation anymore as he continues to fail to understand his wife:

"She lifted her eyes. Black lovely eyes. Mad eyes. A mad girl. I don't know what I have said or done; She had followed me and she answered. I scarcely recognized her voice. No warmth, not sweetness. The doll had a doll's voice, a breathless but curiously indifferent voice." (Rhys, 1966:140)

Rochester described Antoinette as being a doll several times in his description, which means that Rochester has relegated Antoinette to a mere doll or an object now because of her madness. Here one can notice the indirect use of ventriloquism as in ventriloquism one is merely a puppet in the hands of the ventriloquist and again, Antoinette is represented as a doll in the narrative hands of Rochester. For Rochester, Antoinette's eyes, voice, smile and everything else are as unexpressive as those of a doll and he is unable to see the struggle and pain behind the doll's face. He fails to understand that this mad expression of Antoinette's inner-self is a result of years and years of ignorance (Torment). Her voice is neglected. All throughout her life, no one understood her, no one heard her silent cries - "Antoinette is a child of silence, to whom communication, words, speech bring only unhappiness and rejection...She is silenced first by her mother, who denies her existence, and then by Rochester who refuses to be the reader of her story." (Mezei, 1987:195-209). Antoinette's mad behavior is her way of expressing and putting forward her thoughts in order to gain attention and even though she doesn't succeed in keeping Rochester in a state of confusion as to him, she is nothing more than a mad, insane object.

Regaining the "Voice"

Antoinette finds her voice again in the final part of the novel. Unlike Bertha in *Jane Eyre* who could only speak through her insanity, Antoinette is given a chance to put her insanity and madness into words by Jean Rhys in the third part of the novel. It feels as if Antoinette speaks to the looking glass even though there is no looking-glass in her room but in Antoinette's mind there is the presence of looking glass as it is only through the existence of the mirror that she can feel her own existence as she states:

"There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself

yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us- hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I?" (Rhys, 1966:147)

The silence that Antoinette drowns herself in for so long finally reaches its breaking point. Antoinette's mind is not able to handle the depression, sadness and confusion anymore. It becomes impossible for her to keep quiet at this point. Silence of a whole life's worth has taken its toll on Antoinette's mind. The only way for her to survive and make her voice heard is to break out and demand that people listen. Madness is her key of gaining attention, speaking, expressing and being heard. At this point, madness becomes Antoinette's loudest weapon:

"At last I was in the hall where a lamp was burning. I remember that when I came. A lamp and the dark staircase and the veil over my face. They think I don't remember but I do. There was a door to the right. I opened it and went in. It was a large room with a red carpet and red curtains. Everything else was white. I sat down on a couch to look at it and it seemed sad and cold and empty to me, like a church without an altar. I wished to see it clearly so I lit all the candles, and there were many. I lit them carefully from the one I was carrying but I couldn't reach up to the chandelier. Then I looked around for the altar for with so many candles and so much red, the room reminded me of a church. Then I heard of a clock- ticking and it was made of gold. Gold is the idol they worship." (Rhys, 1966:153)

Freedom & Identity

Here, there is a ray of hope in Antoinette's voice and it feels as if she can see the light to her road to freedom. "Someone screamed and I thought, 'Why did I scream?' I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke up." (Rhys, 1966:155) Antoinette's thoughts reflect the mad state of her mind as it shows how Antoinette really feels inside on different issues such as dreams, death. Antoinette is always fascinated by dreams and reality as she can differentiate between the two and her connection with dreams can best be seen when she finally has a voice to talk about it as she states,

"That was the third time I had my dream, and it ended. I know now that the flight of steps leads to this room where I lie watching the woman asleep with her head on her arms. In my dream I waited till she began to snore, then I got up, took the eyes and let myself out with a candle in my hand. It was easier this time than ever before and I walked as though I were flying." (Rhys, 1966:153)

Antoinette's struggle to find her own voice and to free herself takes an ultimate turn when she finally chooses death as a means of freedom:

"Grace Poole was sitting at the table but she had screamed too, for she said, 'What was that?' She got up, came over and looked at me, I lay still, breathing evenly with my eyes shut. 'I must have been dreaming,' she said. Then she went back, not to the table but to her bed. I waited a long time after I heard her snore, then I got up, took the keys and unlocked the door. I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know

why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and burned it up again to light me along the dark passage." (Rhys, 1966:155)

Two of the most important symbols of freedom can be argued to be the birdcage and fire. While the birdcage can be thought to be that of a caged woman who is trapped inside, the fire resembles the anger and rage of being trapped in a cage for all her life. Through the burning of Thornfield, Antoinette is finally escaping from the physical and mental torture that she is enduring for so long. Although she may be killed in the fire, it also gives her an opportunity to free herself and her soul:

"Antoinette's choice is finally that between death by fire and the non-life which is in such painful opposition with that life of freedom, pantheistic union with luxuriant, even lush, nature, a life of total participation in all the dualistic continuities of existence. Hers is no act of despair – but a final aggressive act of assertion, reaffirmation, and self-liberation." (Anderson, 1982:57-65)

Antoinette's drastic step towards finding her own freedom may be termed as her insanity but it can also be argued that through burning the whole palace down, Antoinette takes control over the people around her, finds her path to freedom and finds her lost voice. During her final split from reality, the narrator says, "I've got out at last, in spite of you and Jane." (Gilman, 2013:803). Now she is free from the constraints of her marriage, her society and her efforts to repress her mind. Similarly, Antoinette has to lose herself in the burning of fire in order to find her soul again and to finally be able to make her voice heard.

It is important to read a text through its gaps and silence, for otherwise, the hidden messages can never be uncovered. For this reason, it is important to look at *Jane Eyre* through the absent voice of Bertha, to highlight her situation in the colonial text and to prove that the forces that oppressed Jane are less complicated because they were quite clear, while Antoinette's obstacles is more complicated and difficult to deal with. Jane, in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, can be thought to be a Victorian female in terms of the way she dresses or the way she addresses or speaks to others following the traditional norms of the society regarding how a woman must behave in a society. Both the authors offer two different ideologies and representations of the society and its reality as a whole. Bronte stuck to the normal ideology of a white lady being a heroine of the novel and the main voice to tell the story while Jean Rhys took the bold stand of giving the silenced Creole lady a voice to tell the story from a different perspective. Jean Rhys is successfully able to fill gaps between voice and silence and give a new outlook on the complexities of self-expression.

CONCLUSION

Antoinette's life is defined by a constant struggle between voice and silence. It is a struggle to find her identity and to express it in the most effective way; in a way that can be heard by others. In *Jane Eyre* Bronte's essence is just her mad silence. However, Antoinette's essence can be defined

by both voice and silence. Jean Rhys gives this Creole character a new twist by giving her character a constant attraction to the extreme sides of everything. Antoinette believes in extremes and there is nothing mediocre in the manner in which she thinks and perceives things and people and for that reason, when she wants to say something, she uses extreme forms of expression. Antoinette, the Creole lady in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, spent her entire life trying to be understood. The battles with her environment and her own demons leads to her constant shifting between different forms of expressions in order to make herself heard. And eventually, she succeeds.

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