CHAPTER FOUR

Madness Written Back: Challenging the Cannon Through Wide Sargasso Sea

4.1 Jean Rhys’s Writings in the Postcolonial Context

Though Rhys was born in Roseau in Dominica, she spent her life in England. As a Caribbean woman in England, she experienced racial differences throughout her life. She changed her name as Jean Rhys from her original name Ella Williams and adapted herself to English education and culture. She takes up the subject of alienation caused from the cultural differences in her novels. Her novel Voyage in the Dark (1934) presents a Caribbean protagonist Anna Morgan in relation to postcolonial identity crises. Her other novels After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie (1931) and Good Morning, Midnight (1939) explore women and the quest for their identity. Her well-received novel Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) gives a powerful picture of colonization and its impact. The present chapter tries to peruse the methods Rhys uses in her novel to represent the Caribbean protagonist as an innocent wife, England as a prison, labels of madness and witchcraft. The chapter highlights how Rhys makes the protagonist come out of the image of a mad woman.

Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys’s most successful novel, presents a complex relation between powerlessness and domination, and sexuality and submission of a woman to alcohol due to betrayal, and her final revenge. Rhys’s portraiture of an abandoned wife frames the simple narrative of Wide Sargasso Sea. However, the simple story of a deserted wife is given negative shades in a Victorian text, where Rhys takes the challenge to rewrite such text in trying to authenticate the character’s sanity. Resistance to written injustice can be spelt only through
writing. Jean Rhys seems to realize this injustice in the writing of a European writer and addresses the ignored aspects through her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This novel not only can be taken as a postcolonial prequel to Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), but also as a different mechanism of resisting many questions relating to gender, race, sexuality and identity. *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes the readers to delve into the lives of white Caribbean women giving many tangible details of their lives and sufferings. The characters in the novel reveal their desires, identity crises and provide a positive view of their lives and sufferings. The places and incidents in *Wide Sargasso Sea* clarify the general labels of madness and alcoholism attributed to the long-time-viewed antagonist of *Jane Eyre*.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* questions the madness attributed to Rochester’s first wife Bertha Mason and her family and narrates how Bertha is forcefully locked up in the attic of Thornfield Hall. Using the tropes of symbols and images of Caribbean island, Rhys provides the story of Antoinette, referred to as Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette, the protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who hates being called Bertha, gives much scope for understanding her character, her fears and longings, her life being victimized in Brontë’s narrative. Rhys employs different techniques to challenge Brontë’s narrative, in the way of privileging Bertha in exhibiting the Englishness dominating the Caribbean territorial landscapes. She redefines the trauma of an abandoned wife.

Rhys's most famous work depends upon and yet forever alters the prior text—*Jane Eyre* is never the same upon rereading, after one experiences the critique of imperialism mounted by *Wide Sargasso Sea*—for Rhys's novel problematizes the hierarchies of "originary" and "secondary," "colonizer" and "colonized," "subject" and "object" in modes of analysis that resonate in the current critical climate. (Simpson 1)
Rhys makes *Wide Sargasso Sea* a necessity to rethink the questions of identity and representation. Both the texts tell the story of madness, but with different connotations.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* corrects the madness of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Bertha is many times portrayed as an object mostly pronounced as “it”, often referred as a maniac and a violent curser. “It was a discoloured face--it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!” (Brontë 283). Rhys tries to humanize the wild descriptions in Brontë’s narrative as, “The creature of an over-stimulated brain;”…. (Brontë 283), and makes her more passive than all the characters at this intertextual narrative. Rhys keeps Antoinette in a situation where her turmoil is explicated, relieving her from the animal imagery attributed in *Jane Eyre* as, “What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal;”…. (Brontë 292). As Dennis Porter observes, Rhys gives an assertive answer through her portraiture of Bertha Mason’s character in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

…[t]he 'creature' was once an ordinary woman, who had the misfortune to be raised in Jamaica in the 1830s and 1840s, a white planter's white daughter, who discovered she did not belong where she was born and had no place else to go, a woman put up for sale by one man and purchased for his own purposes by another. In the light of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the mad Bertha Rochester of *Jane Eyre* can be seen as a living image of Rochester's shame and guilt that he can neither destroy nor forget though he has the power to lock it away out of sight of the world. As a member of the colonial nouveauxriches, she is felt to be inferior to England's fine old families; as a daughter of a former slave-owning plantation-owner, she is a living reminder of the sordid origins of his affluence; as an exotic and beautiful woman raised on a tropical island, she is associated with a sensuality
that both tempts and torments Rochester; as a Creole, the racial purity of her blood will always remain suspect in Rochester’s eyes. (Porter 44)

Antoinette’s life is connected to the history of colonization which Rhys tries to stress in her depiction. Antoinette’s life, before being locked up in Thornfield, is presented in a highly passionate way making her appearance delicate, a woman with fears and hopes, an innocent bride of many desires. Rhys is cautious in giving explanations, which come naturally in the plot without deviating from the main plot of *Jane Eyre*. In re-writing the classical text of Victorian age and giving new approaches to view the characters of a classical English novel, Rhys positions her plot powerfully interlinked to racial differences, colonial history and personal turmoil of displacement.

4.2 Antoinette’s Childhood: Trauma and Isolation

Antoinette’s childhood is marked by rejection and ambiguity. She witnesses discrimination of being a daughter of a mad woman. Her mother Annette is secluded for her madness and treated brutally by the society. Through Annette’s sufferings, Rhys answers Rochester’s claims against Bertha’s mother in *Jane Eyre*. The portrayal of madness in *Jane Eyre* is inherited and far away from dreams- violent and savaged. Rhys’s definition of madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a state of vengeance to speak against the injustice, a trope of accepting suffering and a reality to understand cruelty. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is about solitude of two women society betrayed for their vulnerability. Annette and her daughter Antoinette are presented as two women uncertain about their identity, unsure of their race sharing similar opposition from the society as mad women.
Rhys critiques the idea of inheriting madness contrasting in the characters of Annette and Antoinette. Both of them are related to each other in their mutual hatred. Annette never loves Antoinette while Antoinette tries to forget her mother. Similar to Elizabeth’s ambiguous relation with her mother in *A Question of Power*, Antoinette too experiences uncertain relation with her mother; like Elizabeth, she loses her mother when Annette kills herself after a few years of seclusion. Elizabeth’s mother is considered a mad woman kept in asylum. Annette too is ill-treated as a mad woman under the supervision of a strange family and she dies helpless. Similar to her mother’s imprisonment for being insane, Antoinette too is secluded in Rochester’s attic for several years. However, Antoinette becomes strong enough to oppose her imprisonment. Hence, she fires her prison.

Antoinette is frustrated to be discriminated in her country, explicated in the first few lines of the novel. “They say when trouble come close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, ‘because she pretty like pretty self’ Christophine said” (Rhys 3). Antoinette and her mother are never welcomed in the Jamaican community; at the same time never treated as equitant to the European community. Antoinette grows up listening to the comments of black people on her as “white cockroach”, and tries to accept their hostility. She grows up as an isolated child tolerating people who betray her.

Antoinette is deprived of her mother’s love, which she craves to have. “…[s]he pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her” (Rhys 5). Her physically challenged brother Pierre gets all her mother’s attention. Christophine, the Martinique woman and wedding presence to Annette, replaces her solitariness. The sad songs Christophine sings, the Patois words and the context of deserted love
fill her isolation. Antoinette finds Christophine’s companionship as an alternative to her mother’s love. Antoinette hates people and their rejection of her. “…[i]f the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think ‘It’s better than people’” (Rhys 12). Antoinette feels she has been disappointed by the people all through these years. Her childhood leaves traces of bitter memories; hence, she could not live in the past or manage the present.

Antoinette’s another solace in childhood is to dream. However, those dreams too betray her, wounding her psychologically. Her dreams are fragmented, leaving her fragments of hatred and sadness in the rest of her life. “…[t]he Orientalist is required to present the Orient by a series of representative fragments, fragments republished, explicated, annotated, and surrounded with still more fragments” (Said 129). Rhys presents Antoinette’s story in fragments substituted by three fragmentary dreams. Antoinette’s three dreams are horrifying, sad and ambiguous. Each dream deciphers her unconscious fear and insecurity resulting from suffering and betrayal. The three dreams make her realize her fears and insecurity, which she remembers in awakening. She thinks that feeling love can replace those negative images. Her thirst for love takes roots through her fragmentary dreams; the final dream joins with the plot of Jane Eyre, often subverted as madness. Rhys typically portrays Antoinette firing the house as a fragmentary dream, much away from madness.

Antoinette’s first dream is when her mother gets angry for wearing an unclean dress. She has a violent dream and her mother gets angry again for disturbing Pierre. Her first dream has a significant impact. She dreams hatred chasing her like a shadow. “I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying” (Rhys 11). Antoinette also narrates a Negro girl obstructing her way to home singing “go away
cockroach” similar to this dream. In this dream too, she gets a similar experience, but in a wild space. Her subconscious correlation towards the rejection and the ambiguity of her identity result in this fragmented dream. Her dream is broken when she could not move out of her bed, and when she starts crying. She could not win in her dream and she accepts defeat and cries.

In Antoinette’s second dream too, she walks towards the forest in a dark night with a man who hates her. She moves in the forest with difficulty and refuses to move further. She is unable and unwilling to move. The second dream too is about moving; this time too she could not move, though she struggles to move a little: “I think I will not go any further. The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off. Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years. ‘Here, in here,’ a strange voice said, and the tree stopped swaying and jerking” (Rhys 40-41). The third dream is to fire the house in England and she acts upon it. Antoinette’s final dream actually makes her move. In her final dream, she is moved by her dream, but the geography is not a forest, but an unfamiliar place. In her second dream, she walks in the forest a strange man accompanying her and hatred marking their interaction. In her final dream, the second dream comes to reality as she walks in the strange house in England, remembering her hatred towards Rochester. Antoinette invests on her dream reality, the reality for the others, often leaving the options for possible interpretations on her revenge, helplessness, or hatred. The end of the first part of this novel which is divided into three parts also suggests how her first two dreams are less harmful. The third dream in the third part is crucial on Antoinette’s questioning self.

Jane too has three fragmentary dreams in Jane Eyre. In her third dream, half dream and half reality, she sees her wedding veil torn by Antoinette. For Antoinette too, it is half dream and half reality. Antoinette is able to recognize the reality in her dream and attempts to kill Rochester. Antoinette’s dreams are about the ability to move, while Jane Eyre dreams of her
wedding being interrupted, suggestive of her dream about her torn wedding veil. Rhys presents Antoinette’s three dreams starting from childhood to denote the unfavorable circumstances where Antoinette lives. All the three dreams are about rejection, which Antoinette starts to experience from her childhood.

The images of water, eyes and looking glass too work in this novel for telling the little moments of secrets, untold hopes and expectations. “I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped – perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass” (Rhys 3-4). Antoinette is solitary and she did not yet learn to hide it, similar to her mother. Like Elizabeth, who was warned by her headmaster that she would also be insane like her mother in A Question of Power, Antoinette is repeatedly abused in reference to her madness. On her way to the convent, a black boy and black girl interrupt her and accuse her of inheriting madness from her mother.

Half-way up they closed in on me and started talking. The girl said, ‘Look the crazy girl, you crazy like your mother. Your aunt frightened to have you in the house. She send you for the nuns to lock up. Your mother walk about with no shoes and stockings on her feet, she sans culottes. She try to kill her husband and she try to kill you too that day you go to see her. She have eyes like zombie and you have eyes like zombie too. Why you won’t look at me. ’The boy only said, ‘One day I catch you alone, you wait, one day I catch you alone.’ (Rhys 31)

Her cousin Sandi rescues her. Still, the memory of this humiliation makes Antoinette shattered. Antoinette is presented as a hypersensitive girl deeply shattered by others’ hostility, while
Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* and, Tambu and Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* do not display weaker emotions; they never cry in the series of defeats.

Antoinette’s mother Annette too has similar trauma and isolation. She is insecure in Coulibri. She insists that they should leave Coulibri. Mr. Mason, her second husband, disagrees to it. Annette tries hard to explain how she was facing problems as a poor widow, left with two children before getting married to Mr. Mason. Nevertheless, Mason disagrees with her in all aspects.

‘Annette, be reasonable. You were the widow of a slave-owner, the daughter of a slave-owner, and you had been living here alone, with two children, for nearly five years when we met. Things were at their worst then. But you were never molested, never harmed.’

‘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. ‘You are not a poor woman. Do you suppose that they don’t know all about your estate in Trinidad? And the Antigua property?’ (Rhys 16)

These details suggest the property belonged to Antoinette inherited from her mother, and how she has been forced to disown the hold of her own property and becomes secondary to her husband’s domination, similar to her mother’s lack of economic freedom. Mason accuses Annette, “You imagine enmity which doesn’t exist” (Rhys 16). The enmity is found by Antoinette too, she constantly tries to lower its intensity, trying to comfort herself in fulfilling others emotional needs.

Annette’s predictions come to reality as their house is on fire and they could not get to the horses, surrounded by the black people, laughing at them. Annette wants to save her parrot
from the fire, she does not even want her jewel case. The people laugh at her for this choice. Pierre dies at this tragedy and Annette completely loses her sense of thinking. She curses Mason, could not tolerate the helpless death of her son. She threatens Mason of murder, accusing him responsible for her son’s tragic death. People start weaving the stories on her madness when she tries to show her anger, her response to the death of her loving son. Annette’s madness is constructed at her son’s death, loss of security, fear of being brutally killed and the loss of all her past experiences. This fire tragedy marks a new chapter in Annette’s life, making her victimized. Rhys portrays the irony of fire marking Antoinette’s revenge. Where her mother loses herself, she defines her vengeance.

Annette does not acknowledge the living of Antoinette and keeps crying about the death of her son Pierre. Antoinette says, she is alive, “‘But I am here, I am here,’ I said, and she said, ‘No,’ quietly. Then ‘No no no’ very loudly and flung me from her. I fell against the partition and hurt myself” (Rhys 30). Antoinette’s first encounter with ambiguity of her existence gets roots from this counter incident with her mother’s refusal. Annette loves her son more than she loves her daughter. Her son’s death ruins her completely. She could not accept anybody else at the traumatic situation. Annette is considered insane for being tragic for her son’s death. Rhys portrays how instead of helping a broken mother, people make her more traumatic with the labels of madness.

As Christophine aptly says, Annette is driven to madness by the people.

When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husband he go off, he leave her. They won’t let me see her. I try, but no. They
won’t let Antoinette see her. In the end – mad I don’t know – she give up, she care for nothing. That man who is in charge of her he take her whenever he want and his woman talk. That man, and others. Then they have her. (Rhys 124)

This observation suggests how injustice and cruelty are imposed on her. Annette is sexually exploited. People took advantage in labeling her mad. Christophine is scared that Antoinette too will have the same fate. Antoinette too, hateful of the concept justice, questions her English husband Rochester, whether she will have any justice, which her mother was completely deprived of.

‘Justice,’ she said. ‘I’ve heard that word. It’s a cold word. I tried it out,’ she said, still speaking in a low voice. ‘I wrote it down. I wrote it down several times and always it looked like a damn cold lie to me. There is no justice.’ She drank some more rum and went on, ‘My mother whom you all talk about, what justice did she have? My mother sitting in the rocking-chair speaking about dead horses and dead grooms and a black devil kissing her sad mouth. Like you kissed mine,’ she said. (Rhys 115)

Annette lives many years losing sense of space, time and people. She could not recognize herself, her daughter or other acquaintances. Rhys gives much scope in arguing the injustice done to Annette whom Rochester in Jane Eyre calls as, “Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!”…. (Brontë 291). Annette’s tragic death and losing sense of reason because of the imposed grief explicates how madness is used as a label to suppress a mother’s anger. Annette could not fight for justice. She could not take revenge over the people responsible for her son’s premature death. In Annette’s story, madness is forced on her to suppress her
revenge. However, Antoinette fights for justice. She chooses a method to destroy the place of her estrangement, the place which locked her asserting Rochester’s power.

The first sense of estrangement with place occurs to Antoinette when she was ill for the six weeks after their house is fired. She wants to know what happened to her and where she is now. “‘I got up because I wanted to know where I was’” (Rhys 28). When she spends many years in England, she is confronted with the same question where is she and why she was brought there. In the first incident which was a bitter reality, her house was set on fire; in the second incident, a dream, she starts lighting the house. That Antoinette is conscious of the fire mark on her face, hoping for its banishment suggests how she pleads to erase the memories of the forceful event. “‘Will I have a mark on my forehead?’ ‘No, no.’ She smiled for the first time. ‘That is healing very nicely. It won’t spoil you on your wedding day,’ she said” (Rhys 29). The reference to the wedding day, which left many marks of injury, is predicted with this incident. This fire mark on her face also alludes to the fire mark in Rochester’s forehead in Jane Eyre. “…[p]ity to see your eyes--and the scar of fire on your forehead:”…. (Brontë 440). Fire is represented in both the novels, however with concreteness in Wide Sargasso Sea.

Antoinette asks her caregiver Aunt Cora, at this crucial time to sing for her. The songs she chooses are about sorrow and loss. “She sat near me and sang very softly, ‘Before I was set free.’ I heard as far as ‘The sorrow that my heart feels for –’ I didn’t hear the end but I heard that before I slept, ‘The sorrow that my heart feels for!’” (Rhys 29). Antoinette embraces the sadness closer and closer while becoming younger. The English convent makes her psychologically matured. This convent is different from the convent described in Jane Eyre, where Jane and her friend complain of unhealthy environment. In the convent, her stepfather often visits her,
presents her gifts and takes her for holidays, trying his best to keep her cheerful. However, Antoinette remains sorrowful being a victim of her dreams and pressure.

Antoinette’s childhood leaves her bitter memories haunting throughout her life. In her final dream, she remembers her childhood, her island, her playmate and becomes disillusioned to join the childhood landscape. The trauma of being the victim of fire injury shatters her. Her mother’s abandonment and tragic death make her fluctuated with different extremes of emotions. The label of madness over her mother’s anger frames her estrangement with people. The childhood trauma and isolation become significant in Antoinette’s future life.

4.3 Antoinette’s Failed Marriage: Between Lovesickness and Being Rejected

In the second and third parts of the novel, Rhys projects the fading love between Antoinette and Rochester. Through the explanation about their lives in their honeymoon followed by Rochester’s anger towards Antoinette, Rhys highlights how Antoinette is victimized by several unfavorable circumstances. The second part of the novel is narrated by Rochester. This particular choice of narration enables Rhys to give equal importance to Rochester who also provides the details about his character. Rochester, never named, is attributed this name through Jane Eyre. “In Wide Sargasso Sea the husband is not named, an effective retort by Rhys to the renaming or erasure of names performed by colonialists and planters” (Savory The Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys 79). Anne B. Simpson goes further and equates Rochester to all colonial men.

Rhys’s character Rochester is never named, which has the effect of making him in some sense generic: he stands in for all English, all men, all Englishmen, in his exploitation of
anyone—native, woman—over whom he has power, both the political and the sexual.

(114)

Rochester tries to dominate Antoinette sexually and racially.

Rochester narrates his story to Jane in *Jane Eyre*, and Rhys does not deprive this in her text too. His conversations with Antoinette are plain, while those with Jane were philosophical and meditative. The conversations between Antoinette and Rochester explicate the diversity of their lives and perceptions. He feels superior for being an English man. He never accepts Antoinette as an English woman. He sees blankness in her eyes. Her eyes become mystery to Rochester. He refers, “She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either” (Rhys 46). The bookshelf of Antoinette’s home makes another observation of the European literature. “I looked at the books, Byron’s poems, novels of Sir Walter Scott, Confessions of an opium Eater, some shabby brown volumes, and on the last shelf, Life and Letters of … The rest was eaten away” (Rhys 54). The incomplete details about the library containing English classics in Antoinette’s home suggests Rhys’s method of decoding incomplete details in a classical text and how those incomplete details in turn are manipulated negatively.

Rochester insists on getting married to Antoinette, not prepared to harm his ego of being a suitor from England. “I did not relish going back to England in the role of rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl” (Rhys 56). Rhys provides more logical account on the marriage with Antoinette as Rochester’s own arrangement, as he continuously writes to his father about the marriage, in contrast with his innocence in *Jane Eyre*, where he confesses to Jane that his father purposefully plotted against him for the marriage with rich Antoinette. Rochester convinces
Antoinette for the marriage, making her believe his innocence and tender nature. Soon after the marriage, Antoinette learns how his promises are made to make her accept the marriage.

Rochester never adapts to the local culture, but insists on his own customs. This typical way of colonizer, insisting on flourishing his traditional values, is evident in making Antoinette subject to the marriage arranged on the backdrop of money, making her property subjected to English law. Elaine Savory critically remarks, “Rhys’s rewriting of Bronte not only privileges the Caribbean but does a great deal to move Rochester out of the realm of the Gothic romance and explain his capacity for cruelty.” (The Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys 135). Rochester comes out of Brontë’s narrative privilege of the loving hero.

Rhys stresses on Antoinette’s romantic appeal as she spends some happy time with Rochester. She tells him her story getting frightened on the full moon night. He notices the strangeness in her eyes. Songs become significant in this novel too, representing the fairies and mysteries, as Rochester sings: “‘Hail to the queen of the silent night, Shine bright, shine bright Robin as you die’ ” (Rhys 61) for her. Antoinette tries to teach him her songs. He finds the mysterious island resting in her talk, loneliness, and her unusual laughter. She is insecure and always wants someone to say “you are safe”. Her feeling of insecurity in her own country, her mysterious sadness makes Rochester to be away from her.

Barbara Schaff in the article titled “The Strange After-Lives of Jane Eyre” says, “[I]n the context of postcolonialism, the subject of the mad wife has, of course, evoked the most extensive criticism, serving as an ideal example for colonial repression and anxieties” (26). Barbara Schaff’s further claims are made on Gilbert and Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic, which gives a feminist appeal to the characters Jane and Bertha, but fails in connecting it with
postcolonial overtones. Rhys has taken the colonial context, refigured the historical context and fitted it into the plight of the victimized. Antoinette’s fears and her feeling of insecurity can be read as her plight of losing her own property, name, herself, her culture and her history.

Added to the Antoinette’s feeling of insecurity that disturbs her relationship with Rochester, a letter addressed to him rifts their relationship completely. The letter is written by Antoinette’s half-brother Daniel Cosway, unhappy for his poverty and resentful of his father. The letter makes many remarks on Antoinette’s family. “There is madness in that family. Old Cosway die raving like his father before him” (Rhys 71). The letter also leaves more suspicion in Rochester’s mind, giving the thoughts on Annette’s madness.

[s]he can’t lift a hand for herself and soon the madness that is in her, and in all these white Creoles, come out. She shuts herself away, laughing and talking to nobody as many can bear witness. As for the little girl, Antoinette, as soon as she can walk she hide herself if she see anybody. (Rhys 72)

The letter further claims that, “The madness gets worse and she has to be shut away for she try to kill her husband – madness not being all either” (Rhys 72). The letter is carefully written, appearing to the truth, Rochester is forced to accept its contents like “…[n]o money can pay for a crazy wife in your bed” (Rhys 73). Rochester is not surprised by the contents of the letter and admits that he is expecting this kind of a letter. He suggests how he is filled with preconceived ideas on Antoinette’s family and their inheritance of madness.

Rochester starts believing that Antoinette is a mad woman and treats her as a woman incapable of love and reason. Rochester is convinced of the letter. He does not even try for any explanation from Antoinette about her family, particularly about her mother and about her death.
Rhys projects how madness as a label can be attributed to any individual and how everybody believes the label without questions. Rhys shows how gossiping about madness is another way of degrading the person. Daniel’s letter is aimed at ruining Antoinette’s marriage; madness is used as a label for that purpose. The letter is framed out of anger; Rochester is not interested to locate the actual reason.

Rhys also portrays how Rochester is unfaithful to his wife. Soon after being convinced of Antoinette’s madness, he gets involved in a sexual relationship with Antoinette’s servant Amélie. Amélie, a black woman, constantly abuses Antoinette as “white cockroach”. Being ill-treated by her servant, Antoinette becomes angry and sad. “She took a pair of scissors from the round table, cut through the hem and tore the sheet in half, then each half into strips” (Rhys 75). This particular incident appeals closer to Jane’s wedding veil torn into two pieces in *Jane Eyre*. “…[i]t removed my veil from its gaunt head, rent it in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them” (Brontë 283). In both the incidents, tearing of clothes is portrayed, suggesting signs of mental imbalance. However, Rhys makes it more emotional, as Antoinette becomes physically weak, and does not display any signs of injuring others.

Amélie has no relevance to the text *Jane Eyre*, but becomes significant in torturing Antoinette psychologically. Her acceptance of Rochester, to satisfy his sexual needs can be read as her inferior psyche that provokes her to please her master. Her enmity with Antoinette, abusing her psychologically, can also be read as her way of accepting Rochester’s authority over her physical self, her insistence of taking Antoinette’s position at the household. Antoinette finds Amélie as her rival, which in fact reduces her anger on Rochester, thinking of his infidelity as a general characteristic of patriarchal superiority. “‘Is she so much prettier than I am? Don’t you love me at all?’ ‘No, I do not,’ I said at the same time remembering Amélie saying, ‘Do you like
my hair? Isn’t it prettier than hers?” (Rhys 115-116). Antoinette and Amélie in a struggle to win Rochester’s love, reduce their trust and respect and victimize themselves.

Rochester finds more ways to insert his ego in his relation with Antoinette. As Delia Caparoso Konzett observes in *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation*, “[I]n the character of Rochester, the disintegration of the colonial mind is shown in its ultimate logical and structural absurdity when he attempts to live up to his own standards of racial purity and superiority” (140), Rochester finds Amélie as another advantageous tool to fragment Antoinette’s psyche. In *Jane Eyre* too, Rochester’s authoritarian attitude is evident as he threatens Antoinette’s brother Richard and commands him to be silent about the secret of the attic. “…[i]t will be at the peril of your life if you speak to her.”… (Brontë 206). Rochester is capable of inserting his authority over the people whom he thinks inferior of him.

As a rejected wife, Antoinette becomes completely aloof spending more time in isolation. Her anger and agony for losing Rochester’s love make her ill. Not being able to tolerate Antoinette’s descent to alcoholism and her degradation, her black servant Christophine insists that Antoinette should leave her husband and walk away from the institution of marriage. Nevertheless, Antoinette is lovesick and refuses to listen to Christophine. “…[s]ometimes he does not speak to me for hours and I cannot endure it any more, I cannot. What shall I do?” (Rhys 82). Christophine is deeply regretful of the women she sees, and their love sickness. “When man don’t love you, more you try, more he hate you, man like that. If you love them they treat you bad, if you don’t love them they after you night and day bothering your soul case out” (Rhys 82). Being sick of prototype women she resentfully says, “‘All women, all colours,
nothing but fools” (Rhys 83). Christophine’s generalized statement invokes the idea that women choose ill fate in spite of education and richness.

Christophine is certain of Antoinette’s freedom, which can relieve her from all the present sufferings. Perhaps, she wants to see Antoinette married again or as a free woman. However, Antoinette still tries to re-construct her past happiness. She is unable to subside the trauma of being an abandoned wife. She is certain that her mother abandoned her. Her stepfather, her aunt, Christophine, her half-brother Richard, all could not substitute Rochester, and is not prepared to accept Rochester’s abandonment. The trauma of being refused makes Antoinette fragmented physically and psychologically as she pleads for more and more alcohol for forgetting and sleep. She is lovesick and her physical conditions too fall in this categorization. “Her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen. Her feet were bare. However when she spoke her voice was low, almost inaudible” (Rhys 114).

Rhys also shows the relevance in the reversal of order, in showing Antoinette’s relation with her cousin Sandi and her refusal to go with him, as her mistrust of men. “By turning destructive impulses inward, the lovesick woman acts upon the only sphere she can harm without feelings of guilt or social retribution. Revenge is thus achieved through self-punishment, in which masochism acts as a displaced form of aggression” (Dawson 14). Antoinette does not act masochistically; her attempts can be understood as a way of defying sexual hierarchy.

Antoinette’s lovesickness, which derives from the description of her physical self, her attempt to win Rochester’s love and her repeated pleading for his love, take a reshape in anger, revenge and contest over superiority and emphasis on her own sexual gratification. Antoinette decides to get pleased, after a considerate pleasing of others, and her final dream to reach the
pool of Coulibri, can be read as her way of self-gratification. In giving two opposite ways of mechanisms, Antoinette’s destruction of the attic has two dimensions of revenge and self-gratification. However, in the method of self-destruction, Antoinette’s gratification takes maximum fulfillment in her unconscious revenge drive. Antoinette ruins her Salpêtrière, in creating her own self.

Rhys makes all possible ways to vanish the lovely image of Rochester of Jane Eyre, who pleads Jane for love. Rhys repositions Antoinette as a prudent seeker of love and Rochester as a betrayer. Jane never thinks of Antoinette’s helplessness in the attic, Rochester’s cruelty, or his faithlessness towards her. Jane could not question Rochester. Wide Sargasso Sea confirms Jane to a passive lover, an unintelligible woman who does not question Bertha’s madness. Jane’s sense of forgiving and her refusal to accept the injustice done to Rochester’s first wife are revealed clearly through Wide Sargasso Sea.

As Victoria Burrows observes in Whiteness and Trauma, The Mother-Daughter Knot in the Fiction of Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison,

It seems to me that in her attempt to construct Antoinette Cosway as driven mad by trauma - as opposed to inheriting the presupposed white female creole traits of sexual depravity and manic drunkenness of the Bronte narrative - Rhys gets caught up in the thematics that such a reading implies. Her narrative of historical trauma reconfigured as individualised trauma actually participates in side-stepping the history of the more traumatised other, or examining the ways in which white and black histories of the West Indies overlap and interconnect. (30)
Rhys leaves Antoinette in a stranded position fading towards a traumatic history of death and forgetting. As a rejected wife, Antoinette’s lovesickness is left untreated.

4.4 Confronting the Witchcraft Label

Rhys gives a detailed account of witchcraft myth through Christophine’s character. The lovesick Antoinette repeatedly pleases Christophine to perform magic to make Rochester love her again. Whether Christophine is capable of performing witchcraft is ambiguous in the text as she mostly uses her power to threaten people. Christophine confronts Amélie with the threat of giving a miserable bellyache if Amélie continues abusing Antoinette and Amélie is frightened. To please Antoinette, Christophine disowns her black community.

Christophine do not fit in the role of a witch performer, but people associate her with magic practices. She continues such practices to threaten her rivals. Antoinette believes in her magic, and pleads Christophine to perform a magic that turns Rochester’s love towards her. “But Christophine, if he, my husband, could come to me one night. Once more. I would make him love me’” (Rhys 85). Christophine criticizes Antoinette’s pleading for magic, but accepts to do so on Antoinette’s continued pleading. Antoinette is confident of Christophine’s ability that, she could make people love or hate, even die. However, Christophine disapproves Antoinette and questions her and colonizers who often associate the colonized with superstitions, and black magic. “‘So you believe in that tim-tim story about obeah, you hear when you so high? All the foolishness and folly” (Rhys 85). Christophine, believed to practice obeah, who is jailed for this practice sometime ago, calls it a foolishness, leaving to the judgment of the interpreters. Rhys explains how Christophine is forced to perform the magic. “Then she took a sharp stick and drew
lines and circles on the earth under the tree, then rubbed them out with her foot” (Rhys 88). Christophine’s refusal to take money also suggests how she is not willing to perform the magic.

Christophine’s character is chosen to unfold myths, secrecy, and ambiguity of obeah. Joseph J. Williams, S.J. in Voodoos and Obeahs: Phases of West India Witchcraft gives a sketch of obeah as a practice of witchcraft, mainly originated in Jamaica, often attributed to poisoning by death. His study also does not position Christophine as a typical Obeah woman. The descriptions that were given in this book are often violent while describing Obeah people. Obeah is done to make people die. Another practice called Myalism was used for less harmful purposes. Christophine too performs magic to make Antoinette happy with the love from Rochester.

The Obeah man introduced a dance called Myal dance and formed a secret society, the members of which were to be made invulnerable, or if they died, life was to be restored. Belief in this miracle was secured by a trick. A mixture was given in rum, of a character, which presently induced sleep so profound, as, by the uninitiated and alarmed, to be mistaken for death. (Williams, S.J 147)

Whether Christophine involves Rochester and Antoinette in her Myalism, or whether she really does anything for this purpose is ambiguous. She herself dismisses the idea of magic, her appearance and her way of dealing with people question the inaccuracy of her obeah, thereby making the text a forum for critiquing the Western idea of witchcraft.

Several acts were implemented to prevent the practice of obeah. Those acts also considered keeping certain materials like eggshells, teeth of animals, feathers, plumage at home, and using them for the purpose of changing the minds of others as offence. Christophine’s room also contains these materials. Antoinette also hints at the practice of using them for Obeah.
There was a dead man’s dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly. Drop by drop of blood was falling into a red basin and I imagined I could hear it. No one had ever spoken to me about obeah – but I knew what I would find if I dared to look. (Rhys 15)

Christophine is punished under this law, but her mastery over witchcraft can be questioned on the resultant incidents and her powerlessness over several things. It also gives the idea that, Christophine projects herself before others as an obeah woman, making them terrified or needed of her. As Williams paraphrases, “…[e]very writer in Jamaica has something to say about Obeah which still remains, however, a great enigma to be explained according to each individual's point of view” (184), Rhys too gives an ambiguous picture of the enigmatic practice obeah, and places her characters circled by this small portion.

Jane M. Ussher in Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness? asserts that, madness is a clear form of misogyny, similar to other misogynistic practices like Sati in Indian culture, foot binding in Chinese culture, making women subjected to chastity belts, circumcision and labeling women as witches as means of making them helpless. She finds madness too as one of the men’s imaginative phases in making women secluded, justifying her argument with the instances of calling mad men as criminals, and women if purport violence, restricted to hospitalization. If a woman is resentful, aloof, angry, she will be labeled as a witch, same thing happens with madness too. Christophine is harsh with others; Antoinette is aloof and disowns the world and people. Annette is grief stricken and violent. While Annette and Antoinette are locked away as mad women, Christophine is imprisoned for performing witchcraft. Madness and witchcraft can be seen as misogynistic practices with the substantial arguments presented in Ussher’s works and also Antoinette’s belief in Christophine’s magic to bring back the initial love
life with Rochester can be understood as her obsession for Rochester’s acceptance of her as his potential wife, not as a trope of madness or witch performer.

Some of the ascriptions of labels of madness to those in other cultures are clearly reflections of xenophobia or racism, and a diagnosis of madness acts as a means of both dismissing behavior, and controlling what is 'normal’ in a given society. Thus women can be labeled mad for not conforming to stereotypes of femininity, and immigrants labeled mad for not becoming part of their host culture. (Ussher 139)

Ussher confirms that madness is a label ascribed to non-conformist women, like Antoinette; a way of protesting their rebellious attitude. Both Antoinette and Christophine have their own methods of resistance; but Antoinette is left severely heartbroken.

Rochester believes that he has been poisoned, a victim of Christophine’s witchcraft. Antoinette talking about the white powder to Rochester as a way to deal with cockroaches, suggests that, Christophine gave a magical powder to make Rochester love Antoinette again. The next day, Rochester comes to the conclusion that he would have got poisoned by Christophine. He reads many books about obeah; with the witness of Christophine’s accusations on obeah, he decides to separate Christophine from Antoinette. Rochester tries to imprison Christophine again for performing obeah. Being separated from Christophine, Antoinette is deprived of a loving companionship.

Antoinette’s pleading to perform magic for winning Rochester’s love can be seen as her extreme lovesick melancholy where she is ready to sacrifice her sense of reason. Rochester’s belief of being subjected to Christophine’s witchcraft can be understood as his way of attributing blackness with magic. Through Christophine’s dismissal of her magic, Rhys severely criticizes
the witchcraft myth associated with the black people. Christophine is projected as a strong woman who argues with Antoinette, “Woman must have spunks to live in this wicked world” (Rhys 75), pleading Antoinette to leave her English husband and remarry and stay happy. Antoinette refuses and finds how no magic can be worked for winning Rochester’s love.

The prominent anti-psychiatrist Thomas Szasz regards psychiatry as a pseudo-science in the preface to his work *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*. He declares, “I maintain that mental illness is a metaphorical disease….” (x), substituting his arguments with his experience of being a psychiatrist. In the chapter “Theology, Witchcraft, and Hysteria” he writes:

The notion that so-called witches were mentally ill persons discredits the entire theological world view underlying the belief in witchcraft and enthrones the concept of mental illness as an explanatory theory of wide scope and unchallenged power. (183)

He is suggesting how performing witchcraft and mental illness were attributed to the same individual. Szasz clarifies how poor and uneducated women were convicted of performing witchcraft from the eighteenth century. Christophine’s social rank refers to her state of dependency over her white mistress. However, her attempts can be understood as her way of pleasing her pathetic mistress. Antoinette pleads Rochester to believe her sanity, sometimes arguing about her sense of reason and her life being subjected to several misfortunes. She never considers herself insane, but Rochester does not try to accept her sanity. Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre* confirms Antoinette to an insane position. Christophine too does not consider herself as a witch. Both of them are regarded as possessed by evil spirits and madness. Szasz explains how this feeling of being regarded by the world as someone else affects such individuals as he writes,
“The alleged sufferer (especially the "psychotic") considers himself neither sick nor disabled; but others insist that he is both. The role of mental patient is thus often imposed on persons against their will” (187). The attributions of witchcraft and madness are imposed on Christophine and Antoinette. In spite of their striking differences in social and economic class, Antoinette and Christophine share the similarity of rejection by their own people. The gender too plays a vital role in defining their conduct as Szasz says, “Most people accused of witchcraft were women. The word "witch" implies "woman," as did the word "hysteric"” (188), suggesting how Christophine and Antoinette are easily put under the category of mental illness and witchcraft as they are women who try to oppose social inequalities. Rhys comparatively showcases how mental illness and witchcraft labels are ascribed to women, irrespective of their intellect and ability to think well.

4.5 Antoinette’s Struggle for Identity

Antoinette is deeply concerned of her identity, her culture and her country.

…[w]hite cockroach. That’s me. That’s what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I’ve heard English women call us white niggers. So between you 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 76-77)

Antoinette’s mixed identity, similar to Rhys, provokes her to explore on different geographies. Antoinette wants to go far and see England, she comes across in her geography book.

I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me … England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports, coal, iron, wool. Then Imports and Character of
Antoinette predicts the difference of herself, when she will be relocated to a different country, which is an enterprising country and imagines being a happy person with strangeness. However, she becomes forceful in the country, ambitious to fulfill the violent dream of setting fire to the attic. For Antoinette, England is a dream, for Rochester Antoinette and her island are dreams.

‘Is it true,’ she said, ‘that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.’

‘Well,’ I answered annoyed, ‘that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.’ (Rhys 58)

Antoinette further questions,

‘But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?’

‘And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?’

‘More easily,’ she said, ‘much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.’

‘No, this is unreal and like a dream,’ I thought. (Rhys 58)

Antoinette feels England as a dream, suggests how when relocated to England, she feels disconnected to reality. Antoinette’s passion to visit England grows stronger and intensified in her repeated assumptions about England.
She often questioned me about England and listened attentively to my answers, but I was certain that nothing I said made much difference. Her mind was already made up. Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song, a waltz, some note of music, and her ideas were fixed. About England and about Europe. (Rhys 69-70)

Rhys portrays how England is an exotic landscape to Antoinette’s psyche. In her conversation with Christophine, she expresses England as a romantic landscape with hills, grass, trees and flowers- a charming country. Her readings, and all other medium where she gets knowledge on England becomes reality for her, what Rochester says about England and the real England, become a dream for her. She believes in her idea of England and refuses the real England. When Antoinette is imprisoned in England, she could not become part of the English landscape. Her final act of firing can be read as her recall of her original landscape of her displaced island.

As Thomas Loe in the wide study of landscape and characters in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* proposes the idea of landscape being interlinked with the characters in both the novels supplemented through the essay, “Landscape and Character in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*” claims,

Imprisoning Antoinette in an attic room where only an alien landscape can be glimpsed separates her from the sources of formulation of self in the same way that renaming her and referring to her as "Bertha" does. It is a strategy of negation and subjugation through spatial dislocations meant to create a state of self-inexpressibility. It is also worth observing that in her attic room, at the very end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is only through recalling the landscapes of her early life at Coulibri that Antoinette can regain enough of her sense of identity to rouse herself into purpose and action. (Loe 57)
Antoinette gains her identity from an erased self, from a different name and from a different location. She finds her association with Coulibri island, her aunt Cora, her friend Tea and her surrogate mother Christophine—all of them who helped and betrayed her once. Rhys’s depiction concludes that Antoinette jumps from the roof of the attic, in remembrance of her identity, not in madness.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane observes Thornfield as the castle of Bluebeard, relatively; Rochester becomes cruel and mysterious like Bluebeard through both texts. He betrays Antoinette’s love and uses Amélie to gratify his sexual needs in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, tries to win the love of Vairance in *Jane Eyre* and makes Ms. Ingram a tool to raise jealousy in Jane to get attached more towards him. Like Bluebeard, he keeps his marriage a secret from his new lover and repeats to Jane about himself as an “old bachelor”. While *Jane Eyre* presents Rochester as pleasing for his governess’s love, *Wide Sargasso Sea* presents him as a wise master over the island, which Antoinette connects herself. In one of the conversations, he tells Jane to get employed in the island, which can be read as fearful and mysterious in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Because of Rochester’s rejection, Antoinette feels that her own house has betrayed her. She feels the injury and bitter memories of Rochester connected with each move in her own house. She feels insecure and laments at lose of its original warmth and comfort. She confronts, “I loved this place and you have made into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it” (Rhys 115). Colonizer first occupies the territory, then leaves its inhabitants distant from the geography of it and owns the country. Rochester too makes his attempts to make Antoinette deprived of her money, property and makes her disconnected from her house. He puts her in a different house, possesses a master key of that house and locks her up for years together, for her to lose her mind.
Antoinette is also unhappy that, Rochester calls her Bertha. “‘Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name” (Rhys 115). In *Jean Rhys*, Elaine Savory states, “He insists on calling Antoinette Bertha, because that signifies his authority to name and control her (it is significant that Rhys never gives this man a name: he is only by inference Rochester from *Jane Eyre)*” (145). This renaming can also be read as the dislocation that physically happens in Antoinette’s mind, and her insistence to bring back her original force to control this shift. He also calls Jane Eyre Janet; he alters the names of his possessions, in a way of displacing their original selves. In the essay “The Intertextual Status of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Dependence on a Victorian Classic and Independence as a Post-Colonial Novel” Wolfgang G. Müller says,

In Rochester's attempt to force a new name on Antoinette and assign to her a new identity, she is put on the way of becoming the "Bertha Mason" of *Jane Eyre*. We paradoxically witness the genesis of "Bertha Mason", the madwoman in *Jane Eyre*, as a result of the pressure and manipulation to which her husband subjects her in Rhys's novel. From this point of view Rhys seems to provide a (fictional) explanation for the madness which is attributed to Bertha Mason in Charlotte Bronte's novel. (71)

Taking the sources available from *Jane Eyre*, Rhys expands the scope of fragmented self of Antoinette and gives a logical explanation to her revenge or her factual escape in firing the attic.

Calling Antoinette Bertha also can be read Rochester’s attempt to subject her to namelessness. Antoinette becomes nameless in most of the time in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys clearly portrays Antoinette’s trauma of being into someone else’s name, which means namelessness to her. Antoinette and Annette were named as madwomen in *Jane Eyre*, the madness gets a reshape
in actual sense as an annihilation in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette is separated from her madness. She never accepts it. Her incoherent statements in the final part give the view that she lives continuously in proving her sanity and tired of it, blurs the lines between the standard psychological state and long continued trauma. Antoinette insists on being called with her original name, indicating her quest for identity. She completely rejects being treated as someone else, not prepared to embrace someone else’s identity.

Christophine tries to assert Antoinette’s identity as a rich woman with the ability to think properly. Christophine is a strong rival to Rochester. She questions him, points at his weaknesses, and pleads him to leave Antoinette. She makes critical remarks on Rochester, “You want her money but you don’t want her. It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. I know it. The doctors say what you tell them to say” (Rhys 127). Christophine concludes at Rochester’s inability to believe Antoinette as a sane woman, and also his story of the medical history as he tells to Jane, “…[f]or the doctors now discovered that my wife was mad--her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity:”…. (Brontë 306). Rochester fails to confront Christophine, who appears equal to him in his logic, who says that he is jealous of Antoinette, and erases from his master position. Christophine, a woman who does not know how to read and write, criticizes the English law, which denies equal right to the inherited property of married women. She wants Antoinette to be financially independent. She could not tolerate Rochester taking away Antoinette’s property. Aunt Cora also is hateful of this marriage, an English man taking away the property of Antoinette. However, Richard Mason, her half-brother, gets this marriage arranged, without thinking of his half-sister. Antoinette’s future is predictable to Christophine and aunt Cora as miserable and helpless, but they were unable to fight back for their own helplessness.
Christophine also reminds Rochester that, Antoinette did not come to England asking him to marry her, but Rochester came to Antoinette’s place and pleaded for the marriage. Christophine also expresses her wish of getting Antoinette married again. Rochester becomes furious and takes away Antoinette to England. Rochester prevents her getting married again and leaves her in miserable conditions. Rhys portrays Rochester’s jealousy in naming Antoinette as madwoman, framing her position as “The Mad Woman in the Attic”.

Daniel meets Rochester and poisons Rochester’s mind about Christophine’s obeah and Antoinette’s unfaithful relationship with Sandi. Antoinette is sure of Daniel’s actions, and predicts what he has told Rochester. She says to Rochester, “‘I know what he told you. That my mother was mad and an infamous woman and that my little brother who died was born a cretin, an idiot, and that I am a mad girl too” (Rhys 99). Antoinette is much aware of the construction of madness around her, but she could not succeed in revealing the construction to Rochester. Rochester convinces himself that Antoinette is no sane woman.

She thirsts for anyone – not for me … She’ll loosen her black hair, and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl. She’ll not care who she’s loving). She’ll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would – or could. Or could. Then lie so still, still as this cloudy day. A lunatic who always knows the time. But never does. Till she’s drunk so deep, played her games so often that the lowest shrug and jeer at her. (Rhys 130-131)

Rochester fails to understand Antoinette’s love towards him and is unable to comprehend her anxieties of being an abandoned wife. He wants to own her, with the illusory feeling of owning her madness, as he repeatedly claims that, “my lunatic”, “my mad girl”. Rochester takes away
her, her identity, her name, her acquaintances, her songs, her stories, her culture, her language, and makes her someone else in his attic.

Alcohol becomes another companion for Antoinette. Rochester tries hard to prevent her from taking it:

I managed to hold her wrist with one hand and the rum with the other, but when I felt her teeth in my arm I dropped the bottle. The smell filled the room. But I was angry now and she saw it. She smashed another bottle against the wall and stood with the broken glass in her hand and murder in her eyes. (Rhys 116)

When she is heartbroken, she drinks lots and lots of alcohol, finds it again in the attic and filled with revenge, she tastes it again before acting up on her third, the most important dream. Throughout the novel, Antoinette struggles to prove her sanity. She tries to prove her English husband how she feels helpless as a heart-broken wife. However, Rochester takes her with him to England and locks her in his attic, making her existence invisible. Her revenge can be seen as her attempt to assert her identity as Rochester’s wife, to make her existence visible to the world.

4.6 Madness or Revenge: Antoinette’s Final Dream

Antoinette lives in Rochester’s attic for several years in helplessness. She is locked under the attendance of Grace Poole, referring to the actual Grace Poole of Jane Eyre. Grace Poole has no respect on Antoinette; she too treats her as a helpless figure in both the texts. Grace Poole abuses her as a fool and a poor creature. Grace Poole learns how Antoinette sold her locket and bought the knife, with which she attacked her brother Richard. Antoinette tells how she identified her brother, who could not recognize her. Her incoherent talk suggests many incidents, which she did not forget even after living ten years in the attic. She is unhappy with her brother,
as she knows pretty well that, Richard got her married to an English man, trusting him completely. She knows Aunt Cora arguing with Richard against the marriage with Rochester. Antoinette’s hatred towards her brother provides the key idea of her attacking her brother, which is mentioned in *Jane Eyre*. “The flesh on the shoulder is torn as well as cut. This wound was not done with a knife: there have been teeth here! “She bit me,” he murmured. “She worried me like a tigress, when Rochester got the knife from her”’ (Brontë 209). Antoinette is unhappy with Richard, she even confesses that, her brother never existed. ‘‘I have no brother.’ A long long way my mind reached back” (Rhys 145). Her idea of perishing the relations is a counter-attack on the people who could not help her from the coldness and darkness of the attic. In a letter dated, April 9th 1958 to Selma Vaz Dias, Rhys tells her intention of explicating antoinette’s sense of estrangement with England and her attempt to seek warmth against the coldness of the country. “She is cold and fire is the only warmth she knows in England)” (Rhys Selected Letters 137), Rhys equates warmth and coldness with the differences that exist between the two countries. Hence Antoinette’s act of firing can be seen in this context as the method of destroying the colonial rule.

Antoinette has no intention to kill Jane. She only tries to kill Rochester and fire her attic. Rhys finds justice in whatever Antoinette does. Rhys does not seem satisfied with the punishment that a few people thought, as, “Some say it was a just judgment on him for keeping his first marriage secret, and wanting to take another wife while he had one living;”…. (Brontë 432), and Rhys makes Rochester left in the position of a cruel egoist. Rhys’s judgment in punishing Rochester is accentuated through Antoinette’s reasonable mind. Rhys uncovers Antoinette’s image from madness and makes her free of her own judgment. Antoinette’s self-
judgment to the injustice done to her and the injustice done to her mother is interpreted through the desire of getting her dream into reality.

Rochester insensitively says to wounded Richard, “…[w]hen you get back to Spanish Town, you may think of her as dead and buried--or rather, you need not think of her at all” (Brontë 210), suggests how Rochester actually thinks she is dead and tries to make others believe of her death in psychological sense. The final version of Antoinette proves her actual life, she wishes to live without being assimilated. Richard becomes pathetic to see his sister and says, “Let her be taken care of; let her be treated as tenderly as may be: let her”-- he stopped and burst into tears.

“I do my best; and have done it, and will do it,” was the answer” (Brontë 212). The better ways Rochester promises, is questioned in Wide Sargasso Sea, when Grace Poole remarks on the food that was served to Antoinette. “…[e]at your food. Here’s your grey wrapper. Why they can’t give you anything better is more than I can understand. They’re rich enough” (Rhys 149). Antoinette is ill-treated in the attic, without proper food and living. She becomes a figure to be angrily sympathized and gossiped about. “…[p]eople even for some years was not absolutely certain of her existence. No one saw her:”…. (Brontë 430). Antoinette too did not see anybody, but was driven into madness and put to the death. “…[d]ead as the stones on which her brains and blood were scattered” (Brontë 432). Rhys articulates the actual death of constructed madness through Wide Sargasso Sea. Asserting Antoinette’s life through the childhood and short-lived happiness of marriage, Rhys makes Antoinette as a microcosm of happy women, and the outrage resulting from the rejection.
As Wolfgang G. M. Miller writes, “The dilemma of the lovers in Jane Eyre can only be solved by the death of Rochester's Jamaican wife. Bertha Mason's self-destruction in an act of lunacy is thus part of the logic of a plot which is targeted at a happy ending” (66), Rhys breaks the shell that was created for Bertha Mason of Jane Eyre, for a happy ending of a romantic love story of Jane Eyre and Rochester. Rhys makes Bertha Mason the central figure and Rochester the antagonist for her happy life. Brontë does not give any thoughts for Jane’s after life or Bertha’s before life, though both lives are central to Thornfield Hall. Rhys writes back the madness imposed on Bertha Mason through Wide Sargasso Sea. To rewrite madness, Rhys first challenges the mainstream text and then deconstructs the idea of inheritance of madness. She also critiques the conceptualization of the postcolonial witch and mocks at the society for embracing the colonial ideologies. This novel is complete outbreak towards redefining the cannon.

The looking glass becomes a fragmentary image haunting Antoinette. “There is no looking-glass here and I don’t know what I am like now” (Rhys 143), she says when she is locked in England. Looking glass, is a way of criticizing its association with women, and a concealment of her identity in a strange place question her inability to accept her victimization. Looking glass, as Lee Erwin observes, becomes a significant motif to describe Antoinette’s struggle with identity.

The image of the looking-glass, a motif running throughout all of Rhys's fiction, has a particular resonance in Wide Sargasso Sea, where questions of identity are given the racial and national complications that can only act as a subtext in Rhys's 'English' novels. Here the image splits into its own reversal infinitely, as the identity Antoinette claims is also simultaneously the recognition of an unbridgeable difference. That is, even as she
claims to be seeing 'herself', she is simultaneously seeing the other, that which only
defines the self by its separation from it, in this case literally by means of a cut. (Erwin
73-74)

Antoinette sees a different person in the looking glass, and is unable to see that person, the
another self of her, when she is locked in the attic. In this context, her reason to destroy the attic
can be understood as her way of revealing the another self which she wishes to have. Antoinette
struggles to come out of the image of the woman who couldn’t see herself through a looking
glass, hence fires the attic which prevented her to see her real self.

Antoinette becomes miserable in the attic and requests Rochester to give her
independence. “I will not trouble you again if you will let me go. But he never came”’ (Rhys
142). Antoinette pleads Rochester to free her in vain. Rochester acts as a typical colonizer, who
locks the freedom of a country and uses the complete force to oppress any sort of resistance. Her
question “…[w]ho am I?” (Rhys 144), is important as she loses her sense of identity. “They tell
me I am in England but I don’t believe them. We lost our way to England” (Rhys 144).
Antoinette is unwilling to accept that she is locked in England. For her, England is a promising
place to give her a unique experience; she never thinks that the country would take away her
freedom and lock her up. Hence, she could not associate England with brutal confinement.

Antoinette gets the dream for the third time, and it was easy for her to act. She starts
lighting the candles and starts enjoying the redness of the fire, where her life contains, which
resembles her red dress when she met Sandi for the last time. She spreads the fire to the
tablecloths, the curtains and it reaches each floor from the dropping the candles. Her
understanding of, “…[a]t last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do” (Rhys 152),
is acted in firing, her revenge in the terrible red scape. Antoinette wins her battle. She ruins her attic. “...[n]o roof, no battlements, no chimneys--all had crashed in” (Brontë 428). Antoinette’s act of firing shows her anger and revenge towards the injustice she was subjected to, the injustice that lead to her mother’s death, rather than being in the state of unreason.

Patricia Moran, in her comparative study of Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys in the well-received book *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma*, concludes that, “Antoinette is poised to immolate herself in a conclusion we know is inevitable from its fulfillment in *Jane Eyre*;” .... (147), suggesting the other protagonists of Rhys’s works too have this kind of fulfillment. It can be commented on the endings that, “Such endings radically refuse closure even as they gesture toward the final closure of psychic, if not physical, death” (Moran 147), the death has many phases as Antoinette talks of two deaths: the actual one, and the psychological one. Antoinette’s death contrasts with Rochester’s death, as he admits, the death in his way than in her way referring to the sexual fulfillment. Antoinette loves Rochester to the extent of killing herself. Her physical death referred to in *Jane Eyre* can also be read as her fulfillment in pleasing him. “You wouldn’t have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don’t believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die.’ ‘Die then! Die!’ I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers” (Rhys 68). Antoinette’s fulfillment of her dream can be read as her conscious struggle to erase the methods that changed her name, relocated her physical self, shifted her identity and replaced her with other women.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane hears a mournful laugh suggesting the sadness of long lived solitary life of Antoinette. “It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless” (Brontë 102), and further describing “…[t]he laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard;” .... (Brontë 102). Antoinette’s unhappiness is used to provoke mystery in *Jane Eyre*. The mystery of her
madness gets unfolded in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Richard Mason’s visit, his fight over death, being bitten and his blood suck by Antoinette suggests the wildness accentuated in the canonical representation. Nevertheless, Rhys presents every act of Antoinette as reasonable. Rochester never confronts Antoinette; he often stays away from Thornfield. The misery that he inflicted ruins him.

As Victoria Burrows questions, “…[h]ow much of Rhys’s displacement and disavowal of the ambivalence of the white creole position is projected as a covert longing for blackness?” (64), the belongingness to blackness as Antoinette finds a surrogate mother in Christophine, and as she finds the solace of secrecy in Sandi, Rochester finds a substitute to Antoinette in Amélie, as Annette finds richness and the way of eliminating her own alienation through Mr. Mason Rhys’s repositioning of relations, the dislocated identities, constantly question her attributions to racial differences. Rhys is criticized for telling the story of her white protagonist. However, in positioning Antoinette’s helplessness in England and accentuating her revenge method, Rhys metaphorizes madness as a false idea.

Rhys presents Antoinette as a hypersensitive woman, a lovesick helpless soul, an unprotected childlike woman who never harms anyone, always getting hurt by the others. This kind of weaker image is attributed to Antoinette, as to contradict Bronte’s portrayal of a cruel, savaged, and violent image. However, in this process, Antoinette’s image gets distorted and gives a vague impression to the readers. In a way of sentimentalizing Bertha’s story, Rhys disprivileges the fulfillment of asserting native power. However, As Anne B. Simpson claims, “*Jane Eyre* is not erased by *Wide Sargasso Sea*” (137). The attempt to erase Bertha’s madness is done in showing the reasons for her revenge.
As Paul Ricoeur says, “Literature precisely does confront us with discourse where several things are meant at the same time, without the reader being required to choose between them” (91). *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* stand as antipodal texts to make the reader confirm one version of the story. Both the texts are independent with the interdependent sources misread and misplaced at several occasions. Both the texts treat madness involving the reader to confirm the meaning or negative attribution to it. Both Bronte and Rhys have an equal tendency to reflect on the lives of women. In one of her letters, dated 27th September 1959 to Francis Wyndham, Rhys writes how she admires Bronte sisters. “I did not mean to be impertinent about Charlotte Bronte. I admire her greatly. Emily also. And I envy them both more than I can say” (Rhys Selected Letters 137). Rhys’s attempt to rewrite the story of Bertha Mason can be read as her way of decoding Bronte’s text, presenting it in the backdrop of the colonial history. Madness is inserted in the plot of the two romantic stories, to denote the self as a psychological expansion. It is Antoinette’s madness that ruined her attic, written as a dialogue against Bertha Mason’s loss of reason that ruined Rochester’s attic. Hence, *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be seen as a movement, not merely as a text, a living not as a story, an exploration of racial and gender contours, not an expression of race and gender equalities, a reshape of classical narrative, not as a prequel to the original text.
Notes

1 *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier portraying Bertha’s character, Emma Tennant's work *Adele* showing Bertha’s madness, Kimberley A. Bennett’s work *Jane Rochester* making Jane experience the imprisonment what once Bertha had, Mrs. Rochester by Hilary Bailey in taking revenge on Rochester about the injustice done to Bertha through Bertha’s sister Madame Justine Roland, D.M. Thomas's work Charlotte in introducing Robert Rochester as the son of Rochester and Antoinette whose blackness indicates Antoinette’s unfaithfulness and ruined their marriage, somehow deal with the some of the aspects in the life of Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre*.

2 In 13th century, lovesickness was feminized. The relation of mind and bodily sickness like insomnia, fatigue, and melancholia was shown through several characters in Caxton’s *The Golden Legend*, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, Heurodis in *Morte ’D Arthur*, and characters in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. The suicidal tendencies of Ophelia in Hamlet, Cathy in *Wuthering Heights* are also read as lovesick melancholy.
Works Cited


Müller, Wolfgang G. “*The Intertextual Status of Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea: Dependence*


