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**MADWOMAN: FEMALE VOICES IN THE POST-  
COLONIAL ERA**

by

Nushrat Azam

A supervised research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Masters of Arts in Literature

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School of Language, Arts and Media

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**Declaration**

**Statement by Author**

I, Nushrat Azam, declare that the supervised researched project titled “Madwoman: Female Voices in the Post-colonial Era” is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published, or substantially overlapping with material submitted for the award of any other degree at any institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

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**Statement by Supervisor**

The research for this project was performed under my supervision and to my knowledge is the sole work of Ms. Nushrat Azam.

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## Abstract

This research paper will be an analysis of the mediums and effects of voice and silence in the lives of the female characters of the two re-written post-colonial texts: Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*. The paper provides detailed analyses of the representation of female characters in the post-colonial era by analyzing *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*, which are prime examples of post-colonial literature. This paper also shows how a re-written text can give a new meaning to a character and story of a novel, such as in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where the character of Antoinette tells the untold story of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* and in *Foe* where the character of Susan Barton gives readers a feminine outlook on the famous tale known as *Robinson Crusoe*. The paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is a brief introduction to the theory of voice with regards to feminism. The second chapter is an analysis of the gaps in narration and mediums of expression of the female narrator, Antoinette, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The third chapter deals with the voice of the female protagonist of *Foe*, Susan Barton, and her power struggles with men in defining herself and figuring out her identity. The fourth chapter is a comparative study of the similarities and differences between these two post-colonial novels, in regards to the representation of the female protagonists. The final chapter reviews the conclusions that can be reached from the discussions in the previous chapters. After analyzing female voices from the two texts, it can be concluded that these two post-colonial novels gave the female voice much more importance than their previous counterparts. While the female characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* had more authority to voice their feelings and to portray themselves as unique and independent individuals than in literature of previous eras, both Antoinette and Susan Barton were still dependent on men to define their identity and satisfaction with life. This represents the early post-colonial times in which these novels were written, when 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.

## Table of Contents

	Pg.
Acknowledgment.....	(i)
Abstract.....	(ii)
Table of Contents.....	(iii)
Introduction.....	1
<b>Chapter 1: A Study of the Female Voice in Jean Rhys' <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 2: A Study of the Female Voice in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Foe</i>.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Comparison of Portrayals of Feminine Voices in <i>Foe</i> and <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>.....</b>	<b>38</b>
Conclusion.....	45
Bibliography.....	48

## Introduction

There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.<sup>1</sup>

The above quote expresses the fact that there is voice in everyone. Although it is sometimes heard and sometimes ignored, voice is still one of the strongest means of expressing oneself. The importance of voice is second to none with regards to representing oneself in society. Voice establishes individuality among people through the use of one's unique dialogue, accent and vocabulary. It provides a person with the tools to communicate thoughts, feelings, opinions and emotions to others in a specific and comprehensive manner. It acts as the prime insight into one's personality. However, expressions of moods and thoughts are not limited to vocal powers. In some situations, silence can be an equally powerful medium to express one's moods and opinions especially when combined with posture and facial expressions. Silence can be the result of oppression or an independent choice. Silence can signify freedom as much as it can signify compromise. Thus, voice and silence can both be an indication of liberation. However, in literature, without cues such as body language, silence makes it very hard for readers to completely understand a character. The medium of communication in literature is language, and without language, characters are mostly left helpless in communicating their motives and sentiments. Voice is the narrative medium through which a character is portrayed in a text. The main way for readers to identify with the thoughts and emotions of a character is through his or her voice.

There are different mediums and elements related to one's voice; one of those being the vocal dialogue. Through dialogue a character is able to share his innermost feelings not

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<sup>1</sup>Arundhati Roy, "Arundhati Roy - The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture" (speech, Sydney, Australia, November 4, 2004), The University of Sydney, <http://sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=279>.



only to the reader but also to another character in the novel and more often than not the vocal dialogue between two or more characters in a novel, prose or drama gives readers a major insight into the characteristics of the characters involved and their dominance or submissiveness related to each other. This is seen in Henrik Ibsen's popular feminist work, *A Doll's House*, where through the dialogues between the lead characters, Nora and Helmer, one can form a clear idea about how Helmer controls his wife Nora's eating, dressing, decision making and sometimes her heart and mind as well and in spite of getting a chance to express herself through her voice, Nora's husband, Helmer, seems to be overpowering her in their conversations.

A character's actions also play a major role in working as a medium for expression in certain times as actions are clear representatives of the opinions that the character holds. Thus, actions are major contributors to the strength of the voice of a character in a novel since the actions of the oppressed would be different from those that have liberated voices. Action is also related to silence. Silent actions can act as expressions of all sorts of different emotions. At the climax of Gilman Perkins' *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator is seen crawling and creeping after tearing off the paper. This action of tearing off the paper is clearly indicative of her gaining freedom and speaks just as loud as words could in this situation.

History is another major element in how one uses voice. It plays a big part in effecting the voice of an individual. A character's past experiences shape his personality and thought process. Past experiences are also responsible for the opinions the character holds, for the emotions he feels and for how that certain character is comfortably expressing. A character would be more comfortable in expressing through a medium that has worked well in the past and less comfortable expressing in a medium that did not do so well previously. For instance, if a character has not spoken or been given the chance to speak for a long time, he will lose the capacity, skills and confidence to speak when finally given an opportunity, as Laurie Halse Anderson stated in her insightful novel,

*Speak*, “when people don’t express themselves, they die one piece at a time.”<sup>2</sup> In the novel the author showed her main protagonist Melinda’s struggle to regain her voice, which was silenced for a long time. When she was finally given a voice of her own, she found it difficult to speak, as she had not done it for so long that she had forgotten how to use it.

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).<sup>3</sup> 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.

It can be argued that the voice of an individual is related to his or hers uniqueness as each and every character may have a unique voice. One can analyze the voice of a character in different elements. The uniqueness of a voice can be analyzed or understood by the manner in which a character expresses or speaks the use of word or vocabulary and the use of tone. The tone of a voice establishes if a character is loud or soft-spoken, in short the nature of a character as well as his or her mood whether he is angry or upset.

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<sup>2</sup>Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak* (New York: Square Fish, 2011), 122.

<sup>3</sup>Oxford Dictionaries, *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1192.

On the other hand, the uniqueness of a voice also depends on how a character communicates with other characters in a sense the certain method which the character uses to voice himself. Generally one can point out that there are two methods of expression, one is the direct method and the other is the indirect method.

The uniqueness of the character lies in the direct or indirect manner that the character uses to express himself or herself; for example, whether some characters use metaphors when they communicate or speak, putting their view point in an indirect manner while other characters use the direct approach and may voice their opinion in a more straightforward manner. Every character has a manner or approach of saying or expressing themselves which makes their voice unique and makes it stand out and heard.

Another thing to be argued while analyzing and understanding the concept of voice is whether it is directly related to language. In this regard, it can be said that, some characters can be mute but still their voices can be heard in terms of their actions in certain situations and things. On the contrary, in some cases, the strong point of a character can be his way of using language and the manner in which he or she uses language to put forward their opinions and viewpoints makes them heard and understood by other characters very strongly.

If one has to conclude on the essence and importance of having a voice, then one can say that, if a certain individual doesn't have a voice of her own then it's like not having one's sense of self or identity. The loss of one's voice is similar to the loss of one's own name and a person without a name has no place in a society because it is the name that defines the identity of that character. Since identity is what makes a person distinct, it gives a character substance and makes it significant. Identity provides a character with a certain importance in a novel. Putting someone's voice down or deliberately silencing a character is like taking away that character's existence as a whole.

This paper will analyze female voice and silence based on the two post-colonial texts: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Since *Wide Sargasso Sea*

and *Foe* are rewritings of the earlier canonical novels *Jane Eyre* and *Robinson Crusoe* from a feminine perspective, this study will give us an insight into the new and evolved outlook that the female characters enjoyed in literature during the post-colonial era.

In order to understand female voices one needs to have an idea on the theory of feminism and post-colonialism. Feminism is strongly related to having a voice. It seeks to give woman a medium of communication through which she can express herself, connect with society as an individual and establish her own unique identity.

Thus, a feminine voice is largely based on the freedom of voice for women - "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will."<sup>4</sup> The quotation establishes the fact that feminism seeks to give woman her own identity by not only making her financially independent but also giving her a mind of her own. Feminism has given a voice to the woman, a voice of her own, and a voice that represents her unique self and is the symbol of who she really is as an individual as well as a human being.

On the other hand, post-colonialism emerged as a counter attack to colonialism, which is basically the exploitation of one country by another country through the use of torture and abuse over the native people. The idea of post-colonialism is a challenge to the notions and tradition of establishing power through conquest. Post-colonialism also aimed at understanding different cultures and the relationships between them. It attempts to establish equality in terms of material wealth, political liberation and cultural identity, a culture where every individual will have their own language to speak, own customs and traditions and own lifestyle. The inter-relations between cultures are what post-colonialism mainly attempts to establish in a society.

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<sup>4</sup>Charlotte Bronte, Anne Bronte, and Emily Bronte, "Jane Eyre," in *Selected Works of the Bronte Sisters* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2005), 203.

Post-colonial theory focuses on taking a dark and mysterious culture which has been explored less compared to other countries or culture such as Africa and giving them an opportunity to tell their own voices and stories as Stephen Lynn states in *Texts and Contexts* that, post-colonial studies are, “in-depth examinations of the various relationships between dominant and subjugated cultures, races and ethnic groups.”<sup>5</sup> One of the prime focuses of post-colonial theory is that it analyzes the impact of the colonization and power used by the colonizers to colonize and dominate other countries that are less powerful or developed than them. A thing to be mentioned regarding the post-colonial theory is that, it is in some instance influenced by the feminist theory in a sense that one can merge it together in terms of their motives and focuses. A major thing that feminist theory focuses on is that, it analyzes how a certain female character is portrayed when it comes to analyzing literature as in the power struggle between men and women - “They also focus on the power imbalance between men and women where men are dominant and women are subordinate.”<sup>6</sup>

It is during the post-colonial era that women started emerging as strong-independent individuals, not just in society but in terms of literature as well. Female voices soon gained ground and could strongly be heard in novels and fictions. Female characters, struggling to find a place and a unique identity for themselves, finally fought to break through the notions of patriarchal societies that tried to entrap them within the four walls of the house and became powerful and significant.

As mentioned above about the both post-colonial and feminism theory having the same focuses; both the theories are focused on how men and women are treated in colonized territory and other places. The theory of post-colonial and feminism primarily focuses on the women’s lack of power and oppression as stated by McLeod regarding the theories

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<sup>5</sup>Steven Lynn, *Texts and Contexts: Writing About Literature with Critical Theory* (Westford: Pearson Education, 2011; reprint, Sixth), 156.

<sup>6</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000.), 173.

of post-colonialism and feminism in that they “share the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression.”<sup>7</sup>

The theories analyze how men and women are positioned in a male dominated patriarchal society and the post-colonial feminist perspective makes it easy for the readers to understand the status of both the genders in a society in terms of political, financial and personal aspects as in the case of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Susan Barton in *Foe*.

Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* are prime examples of the representation of female voices in post-colonial literature. In this paper, I will be analyzing the independence and modes of expression of female voices in both the novels. I will also be examining how much narrative power female characters have how their identities are defined and how they cope with dominating male pressure. The notion of a woman’s place in literature changed during the post-colonial era. It brought out the “other” of the feminine, which had remained completely hidden and dormant in the original versions of the text. The “other” is the opposite of the idea that was initially considered. The “other” acts as conceptual opposite of the same. The “other” played an important role in both the novels; in this sense the “other” meaning the other side of the story. The reason for choosing *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is mainly because the two texts gave the female characters whole new points of view from the originals that they are based on. The texts try to bring out the other, feminine side to the stories that went unnoticed previously. Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* has Antoinette as the “other” of Bertha. The idea of the “other” is what Rhys explores in the novel. As Rhys fills in Bertha’s past, she reveals another side, the “other” point of view that is absent in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys’ re-writing of *Jane Eyre* goes much further than an explanatory prequel as it creates a counter discourse, which suggests the possibility of a fundamental change of mentality. Similarly, in *Foe*, Susan Barton tells the famous adventure story of Crusoe from the “other”, feminine perspective. As *Foe* is a re-writing of Defoe’s *Robinson*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 174.

*Crusoe*, it is interesting to see a woman trying to explore Crusoe's island and being the author of her story. The female castaway, Susan Barton, decides to depend on Foe for the telling of her story and it results in conflicts of power, as Foe is not interested in telling the "other" feminine side of the story while that is Susan's main purpose. This research project will look in depth into the struggles of the female characters with making their others shine through.

Finally it can be stated that, this paper will discuss not only how the female characters in the novels got a voice in the post-colonial era but also how much of the voice they were able to use independently and powerfully. The effect and power of one's voice and silence and their results on one's struggle to find one's own identity are the main essences of the female characters of *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and this research paper will thoroughly analyze their voices and how it affected them.

## Chapter 1:

### A Study of the Female Voice in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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.<sup>8</sup>

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 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 more than a hundred years later than that of *Jane Eyre* as *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847 while *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published in 1966, 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 failed to pay attention to the Creole lady, Bertha, and so Rhys desired to tell the other side of the story as stated by Antoinette in the beginning of the novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. 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.

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<sup>8</sup> Jean Rhys, "The Art of Fiction No. 64," interview by Elizabeth Vreeland, *The Paris Review*, 1979: 218- 37.



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 was 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."<sup>9</sup> (The other is usually defined by sex, class, or racial origins and differences in these categories of the other with the original is what give the other a different role in a story). 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."<sup>10</sup>

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 had 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 became the other in the eyes of both the society. In Antoinette's case her racial background and skin colour became a cause for her being termed the other in the society and thus the start of the conflict was born which between herself and the other. And so, the character of Antoinette works as the other of

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<sup>9</sup>Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 27.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

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.”<sup>11</sup> 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 became a mode of alienation as she was unable to fit in the society and the society feared that being the other she has the potential of destroying the whole notion of identity that a society is based on.

This chapter 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 chapter will analyze how Antoinette's voice and silence worked 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 took a different turn. It will analyze how after her marriage to Rochester, Antoinette used 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.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette 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

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London: Routledge, 2002), 65.

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?<sup>12</sup>

Antoinette's description of the two binary opposites sheds light on Antoinette's dual thoughts and confusion. Antoinette struggled to belong to a single community because of her mixed race and always felt as if she was floating somewhere in the middle. 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 was a reflection of Antoinette's mind as she could perfectly read through the gaps and fill it with her own analysis.

The reader could 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 tried to exemplify how the absence of a mother's love and affection contributed greatly to Antoinette's fractured identity and how she later inherited her mother's madness in the novel. There were gaps in Annette and Antoinette's communication in spite of having a silent bond, silent affection and a silent love between the two people. Antoinette craved her mother's love

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<sup>12</sup>Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), 48.

and care, which she was deprived of, as her brother, Pierre, got her share of the attention. Despite her mother's ignorance, Antoinette only had 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. (WSS 17)

It was hard for Antoinette to fill the gaps in her mother's silence and voice her opinion on why her mother behaved in a certain manner. The gaps, untold stories and emotions present in Antoinette's mother's personality seem to have become a part of how Antoinette chose 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 could 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 had control over what she wanted to disclose and what she wanted to hide depending on the person she was 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.

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 was seldom used to seeing such kind of beauty. While riding together he remarks: "Looking up smiling, she might have been any pretty English girl." (WSS 60) This remark of Rochester showed how he perceived 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 had 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." (WSS 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 was based on her appearance.

Rochester relegated Antoinette to an object, disregarding her sense of self and individuality by constantly describing Antoinette in terms of her physical appearance:

The two doors on the veranda stood open but there was no wind. The flames burned straight. She was sitting on the sofa and I wondered why I had never realized how beautiful she was. Her hair was combed away from her face and fell smoothly far below her waist. I could see the red and gold lights in it. (WSS 67)

Although, it is obvious from his words that Rochester felt a certain attraction towards this Creole girl because of her appearance, her emotions are mostly disregarded 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." (WSS 70) Rochester's descriptions of Antoinette clearly show that she had become a physical object for him, an object whose

every physical detail he noticed but whose existence and identity didn'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. (WSS 115-116)

The mention of the petticoat hitching up far above the knee in Rochester's narration reflects the extreme sense of physical urge and sensuality that he felt towards Antoinette as he doesn't fail to notice even the position of her petticoat.

Antoinette herself became 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 played an important part in becoming a medium of expression for Antoinette, especially the colour red, which Antoinette was fascinated by. Red could be linked to female sensuality, passion, and emotion and it may showcase courage, danger and a sense of power within women. Antoinette had an obsession for the colour red as she thought that it attracted 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." (WSS 152) But unlike her misconception the red dress had an adverse affect on Rochester's mind as to him it made her look like a desperate woman who was apprehensive of the dangerous warning that comes with red as it is a sign of rebellion. On the other hand, the colour white had a desirable effect in Rochester's mind as it made Antoinette look chaste and pure as white is thought to symbolize virginity and chastity. The colour white aroused desire in Rochester. However, Antoinette had a different

personality than that of what Rochester wanted her to be and so she stuck to the colour red, which she thought made 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.”<sup>13</sup> It can be said that colours worked as metaphor for Antoinette’s identity and individuality and it also worked as a form of expression for Antoinette as it exemplified the fact that Antoinette was independent as a woman and chose to express herself in the way that was comfortable for her and suited her.

In a way it can be assumed that clothes and colour played a significant role in working as a form of expression for Antoinette. Her clothing and colour reflected her inner feelings and it was clearly conveyed to her husband Rochester. The colour red symbolized Antoinette’s passion for desire and love as well as of her strength and power and on the other hand the hitched up petticoat was a way of getting the attention of Rochester. It can be termed that both the clothing and the colour worked as a proxy to Antoinette’s voice.

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 having to voice 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

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<sup>13</sup>Maria Olausson, *Three Types of Feminist Criticism and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea* (Institute of Women's Studies at Åbo akademi University, 1992), 67.

and though I still hated them and was afraid of their cool, teasing eyes, I learned to hide it. (WSS 109)

This clearly reflects Antoinette's life-long struggle to find her individual place in a society. As Gayatri Spivak explains, Antoinette "is caught between the English imperialist and the black native."<sup>14</sup> 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. Despite Rochester's prejudiced thoughts about Antoinette and her mother, Antoinette tries hard to defend her mother and herself:

Don't forget that. For five years. Isn't it quick to say. And isn't it long to live. And lonely. She was so lonely that she grew away from other people. That happens. It happened to me too but it was easier for me because I hardly remembered anything else. For her it was strange and frightening. And then she was so lovely. I used to think that every time she looked in the glass she must have hoped and pretended. I pretended too. Different things of course. You can pretend for a long time, but one day it falls away and you are alone. We were alone in the most beautiful place in the world; it is not possible that there can be anywhere else so beautiful as Coulibri. (WSS 107-108)

Here, Antoinette's voice expresses her struggles with being isolated from the community because of which she and her mother were left with nothing but loneliness. This is the first and only time that Antoinette describes her history to someone else and talks about her struggles, emotions and loneliness while growing up, which were essential to her being. She went on to express how she had always suffered in silence throughout her

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<sup>14</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Race, Writing, and Difference* 12, no. 1 (1985): 250.



life. This must have been a cathartic moment for Antoinette as explained in Freud Revisited:

Remembering, therefore, often involves a degree of mourning for the past that one now remembers. For remembering leads to letting go, just as forgetting involved being identified with the thing that is forgotten. This is one of the most dazzling paradoxes at the centre of Freud's thought: by forgetting, we cling; by remembering, we become free.<sup>15</sup>

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

Rochester's refusal to call Antoinette by her name infuriates Antoinette to the core. When Rochester refers to Antoinette as Bertha she states - "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name." (WSS 121) McLeod states that names are often central to our sense of identity.<sup>16</sup> Rochester's use of words while referring to Antoinette such as, "doll", "marionette" can be termed as a form of patriarchal oppression as Rochester as Calvo and Weber argues that when Rochester calls Antoinette by other names, he is really imposing an alien pattern upon her true self.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Roger Horrocks, *Freud Revisited: Psychoanalytic Themes in the Postmodern Age* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 62.

<sup>16</sup> McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 167.

<sup>17</sup> Calvo Clara and Jean Jacques Weber, *The Literature Workbook* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 122.

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 voiced her displeasure at Rochester's ignorance - "My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha." (WSS 111) In reply to which Rochester would say, "Because it's a name I am particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha." (WSS 111) If one may recall, Bertha was the name of the madwoman in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, who was shown as the insane Creole wife of Edward Rochester. In Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette became Bertha and that is how Rochester chose to identify her – as a madwoman. 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. Rochester's refusal to call Antoinette by her name maybe because he failed to see past her Creole background and could not see Antoinette as an elegant and sophisticated lady.

A thing to be mentioned in this regard is that it is Rochester who doesn't have a name of his own as his name is never mentioned in the novel, unlike in *Jane Eyre*. One can call him Rochester, as Rochester was the husband of Bertha in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. But in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys never mentions Rochester's name and in spite of that, it is Rochester who ends up doubting Antoinette. As mentioned earlier, *Wide Sargasso Sea* works as a prequel to *Jane Eyre* and if the reader had read *Jane Eyre* before reading *Wide Sargasso Sea*, they will get an idea that the Englishman husband of Antoinette that Rhys refers to in her text is none other than Rochester. Even though there was no specific description of Rochester given by the author unlike Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the reader will think of Rochester as someone who badly treated his wife Antoinette.

As verbal communication was decreasing between Antoinette and Rochester, sex became a form of communication and bonding between them - "men rob love with sex."<sup>18</sup> As they lacked mental connection, words failed and the only thing that attracted

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<sup>18</sup>Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* ( London: André Deutsch Ltd, 1990), 543.

Rochester towards Antoinette was her physicality and physical communion played an important part in his mind in this relationship. On the other hand, Antoinette's way of communicating and feeling important and loved was through lovemaking. It felt as if, sex was the only form of love that existed with them. Rochester responded 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 as she keeps believing that if she had sex with Rochester one more time, then she could make him love her. 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 had no effect on Rochester, Antoinette uses the silent power of sex as a way of getting the love that she felt she deserved. Thus, she resorts to expressing herself through the silent influence of sex. Michel Foucault says about sexuality:

It has become a means of acquiring knowledge and power, a way of seeing reality, a way of communicating about reality; one might even say a way of being a self.<sup>19</sup>

Rhys resists the ideal of female sexuality<sup>20</sup> 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." (WSS 120) According to Rochester's description, Antoinette pushed herself towards Rochester unlike any other woman would, as her madness kept

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<sup>19</sup>Horrocks, *Freud Revisited: Psychoanalytic Themes in the Postmodern Age*.

<sup>20</sup>Peter Widdowson, Raman Selden, and Pete Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall, 1997), 139.

overpowering her. Antoinette felt a feeling of abandonment as she gave herself up to Rochester. In Antoinette's mind, sex gave her the feeling of importance that she craved for.

In Rochester's eyes, Antoinette is nothing more than an object that he wants to picture acting the way his notion of a perfect English woman should and the only part of Antoinette which matters to him is her physicality as he doesn't treat her as a wife; instead he finds a way to punish her for being different such as by withholding sex. Angier emphasizes the victimizing of women through their sexuality; she says that the passion of men such as Rochester is aroused by "passive innocent girls, whom they can imagine, and then turn into, the sad victims of men."<sup>21</sup> As Rochester gets more attached to her physicality, the simple sight of Antoinette's dress catches Rochester's attention and arouses the unwanted passions within him as he says, "I was thirsty for her, but that is not love I felt very little tenderness for her, she was always a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think and feel as I did." (WSS 78) It was only sexual feelings that Rochester had towards Antoinette and the most significant emergence of unwanted passions inside Rochester takes the shape of the forbidden, as well as irresistible sexual desire he feels for his wife (despite blaming it on her mad coaxing) in the passionate nights together and in the torrid lazy afternoons; a need so extreme that even a dress stretched on the floor makes him feel savage with desire.

Rochester wanted to overpower Antoinette's sexuality and beauty by oppressing her and making her a victim. However, he kept falling for her sensuality and beauty and this failure to control himself drilled 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. Both Antoinette and Rochester may have been driven towards fulfilling their desires but the sexual connection between

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<sup>21</sup>Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, 565.

Rochester and Antoinette worked in favor of Antoinette, as she was able to control Rochester and make herself heard, through her silence and her sexuality.

In Antoinette's mind she thought that the sexual connection gave her the edge in the relationship and a medium to express to her husband as Rochester feels that he has control over his feelings but he was unable to control Antoinette's behavior and her attitude towards sex. On the other hand, it can be argued that in Rochester's mind it is his way of exercising his power by having control over her body as stated by Jackson and Jones who argued that, "having sexual encounters with natives is also a way that colonizers show power and authority of the patriarchy."<sup>22</sup> So the above statement that Antoinette had control over Rochester when it came to their sexual relationship is a statement that is contradictory but yet it might be true in some sense.

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" (WSS 85). Antoinette wanted to belong to a single place or person and her struggle for belonging continued.

The feeling of an absence of her own identity, her own voice, drives Antoinette to desperation. Antoinette's cries to make her voice heard now bursts out in a whole new form of self-expression, which is madness. 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

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<sup>22</sup> Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, *Contemporary Feminist Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 100-06.

like she still existed. Madness gives her the power to make her voice heard to people who would not listen otherwise; power that she had been craving for since childhood. Madness was not a symptom of her constant feeling of a lack of voice and need to be heard; madness was a cure.

On the other thing it can argued that the madness that took over Antoinette was significantly caused by her husband Rochester's opinion regarding her from the beginning of the marriage as he always thought of Antoinette as this mad, creole girl as Chesler states 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."<sup>23</sup> Rochester soon formed this idea that Antoinette was behaving strangely and it comes from the fact that she had this Creole background.

In one instance, when Antoinette and Rochester is seen discussing Daniel Cosway's letter, Antoinette gets fiercely hurt and upset at the wrong allegations that Daniel made regarding her and her mother Annette and how Rochester didn't believe her version of the story as she screamed and threw 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." (WSS 122) One can argue that Antoinette's rage is her own way of rejecting and resisting Rochester's dominance. Antoinette was scared that she will end up having the same fate like her mother Annette who ended 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."<sup>24</sup> Antoinette understands and realizes that her husband Rochester's intention is to empower her,

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<sup>23</sup> Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), 57.

<sup>24</sup> Anja Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism the New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge Second Edition, 2005), 119.

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.

As Rochester continued to refuse to acknowledge Antoinette's voice, she decides to push herself into a world of silence, in which madness took 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 was dangerous, since it was hard to figure out what Antoinette was actually thinking or feeling about the whole situation. The silent Antoinette was much more powerful than the silent Bertha as she could use her sexuality or beauty as a means of attracting the opposite sex, which in this case was her husband, Rochester. She could also be silent and still use madness to gain attention and express herself in a world where no one had the capacity to understand who she really was:

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. (WSS 140)

Antoinette's sudden silence became too much for Rochester to handle and he couldn't deal with the whole place and situation anymore as he continued 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. (WSS 140)

Rochester describes Antoinette as being a doll several times in his description, which means that Rochester had 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 was 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."<sup>25</sup> Antoinette's mad behavior was her way of expressing and putting forward her thoughts in order to gain attention and even though she did succeed in keeping Rochester in a state of confusion, to him, she was nothing more than a mad, insane object.

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 was 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 spoke to the looking glass even though there was no looking-glass in her room but in Antoinette's mind there was the presence of looking glass as it was only through the existence of the mirror she could feel her own existence as she states:

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<sup>25</sup>Kathy Mezei, "'And It Kept Its Secret': Narration, Memory, and Madness in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 28, no. 4 (1987): 199.



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? (WSS 147)

G.C. Spivak has examined the theme of identity in connection with the recurrent images of mirrors in the novel. When Antoinette sees herself in the mirror she gets a touch of her own existence. Spivak also suggests that scenes of mirroring in *Wide Sargasso Sea* may be considered as a rewriting of the myth of Narcissus: "In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus's madness is disclosed when he recognizes his Other as his self ... Rhys makes Antoinette see herself as her Other."<sup>26</sup>

The silence that Antoinette drowned herself in for so long had finally reached its breaking point. Antoinette's mind could not handle the depression, sadness and confusion anymore. It had become impossible for her to keep quiet at this point. Silence of a whole life's worth had taken its toll on Antoinette's mind. The only way for her to survive and make her voice heard was to break out and demand that people listen. Madness was her key to gaining attention, speaking, expressing and being heard. At this point, madness became 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

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<sup>26</sup>Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," 248.

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. (WSS 153)

Here, there is a ray of hope in Antoinette's voice and it feels as if she could 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." (WSS 155) Antoinette's thoughts reflect the mad state of her mind as it shows how Antoinette really felt inside on different issues such as dreams, death. Antoinette was always fascinated by dreams and reality as she couldn't differentiate between the two and her connection with dreams could best be seen when she finally had a voice to talk about it as she stated,

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. (WSS 153)

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

Grace Poole was sitting at the table but she had scream 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. (WSS 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 was finally escaping from the physical and mental torture that she had endured 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.<sup>27</sup>

Antoinette's drastic step towards finding her own freedom may be termed as her insanity but it could also be argued that through burning the whole palace down, Antoinette took control over the people around her, found her path to freedom and found her lost voice, just like the narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, when the narrator finally identifies herself with the women trapped in the wallpaper, she is able to see that other women are forced to creep and hide behind the domestic patterns of their lives and that she herself is the one in need of rescue. The horror of the story is that the

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<sup>27</sup>Paula Grace Anderson, "Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: The Other Side/"Both Sides Now," *Caribbean Quarterly* 28, no. 1/2 (1982): 60.

narrator must lose herself to understand herself. She had untangled the patterns of her life, but she tore herself apart in getting free at last. During her final split from reality, the narrator says, "I've got out at last, in spite of you and Jane."<sup>28</sup> Now she was free from the constraints of her marriage, her society and her efforts to repress her mind. Similarly, Antoinette had 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 were 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 was successfully able to fill gaps between voice and silence and give a new outlook on the complexities of self-expression.

To conclude, it can be said that, Antoinette's life was defined by a constant struggle between voice and silence. It was a struggle to find her identity and to express it in the most effective way; in a way that could be heard by others. In *Jane Eyre* Bronte's essence was just her mad silence. However, Antoinette's essence could be defined by both voice and silence. Jean Rhys gave this Creole character a new twist by giving her character a constant attraction to the extreme sides of everything. Antoinette believed in

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<sup>28</sup>Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Hollywood: Simon & Brown, 2013), 28.

extremes and there was nothing mediocre in the manner in which she thought and perceived things and people and for that reason, when she wanted to say something, she used 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 led to her constant shifting between different forms of expressions in order to make herself heard. And eventually, she succeeded.

## Chapter 2:

### A Study of the Female Voice in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*

“In *Foe* the struggles between Susan and Crusoe, and Susan and Foe, at bottom have to do with who gets to establish and maintain the narrative framework and with who is going to seduce (and/or compel) whom into living inside his or her story world.”<sup>29</sup>

J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* is a re-writing of Daniel Defoe's influential acclaimed work *Robinson Crusoe*. Coetzee sets sail on a new challenge by replacing the legendary character of Crusoe as a narrator with the female voice of Susan Barton, providing a completely different dimension to the storytelling. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe's narrative was mostly concentrated on his adventurous journey, focusing on his shifts from a desire for personal comfort to a lust for new challenges, while in Coetzee's, Susan Barton's main focus of interest was for her story of being stuck in the island with Crusoe to be published. While societal norms might have restricted Defoe from using a female character as the main focus and narrator for a tale of adventure, the rise of feminism in the post-colonial times allowed Coetzee to provide a unique, female perspective of the famous tale. Even though Coetzee's initial intention might have been to tell the story of how a woman can have powerful stories and be an influential storyteller, he bases Susan's story completely on her interactions with three men who have a major influence on her sense of identity.

This chapter will analyze how the three male characters in the novel influenced Susan's sense of identity and freedom of voice in *Foe*.

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<sup>29</sup>Lewis MacLeod, "'Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story?' Or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence, and Discourse in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 1 (2006): 3.

In J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Coetzee creates a character, Susan Barton, who is determined to bring across her story to the reader and for that reason she realizes that she has to seek the help of an experienced author, namely Foe, as she knows that in the field of being a story-teller she is as experienced and knowledgeable as compared to Foe and one could see the drive and ambition in her to be read by the readers as Derek Attridge stated:

Every writer who desires to be read...has to seek admittance to the canon- or precisely, a canon, since any group approval of a text is an instance of canonization....canons are not monolithic entities but complex, interrelated, and constantly changing systems....Awareness of this necessity, conscious or not, governs the act of writing quite as much as the need for self-expression or the wish to communicate....unless we are read, we are nothing.<sup>30</sup>

But as Susan Barton continued to depend on another individual to find the right expression to tell her story, she starts getting detached from her own sense of self and identity as the whole process of writing her own story became a bone of doubt on her existence and individuality:

She has an obscure sense that her experience will remain lacking in reality until it is told as publicly validated narrative....but the longer she waits, the more conscious she becomes that to depend for her identity on a process of writing is to cast doubt on that identity.<sup>31</sup>

Susan's troubles with voice are first seen in the novel when she meets Friday. Friday is a character that never talks and Susan seems to be deeply affected by his lack of voice. Susan feels an irresistible urge to give Friday a voice; to give his silence some meaning

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<sup>30</sup>Derek Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 75.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

as she describes his tongue as a “buttonhole, carefully cross-stitched around, but empty, waiting for the button.”<sup>32</sup>The button is Susan’s acts of interpretation regarding Friday. She does not seem to be concerned about Friday losing his individuality by her interpreting his silent ways in her own style, since she is most interested in his voice being heard rather than it being unique. Susan seems to have “no problem with subjecting people to narrative manipulation; she just wants to be the one doing the manipulating.”<sup>33</sup>This drives Susan to try to explain Friday using her own voice and is a constant feature throughout the novel.

Susan’s description of Friday reveals not only about Friday, but also about the voice and character of Susan herself. Susan’s description of her and Friday’s rescue from the island, for example, reveals the way that her imperialist ideology causes her to misread Friday’s character and relate his lack of voice to his lack of knowledge:

‘There is another person on the island,’ I told the ship’s master. ‘He is a Negro slave, his name is Friday....Nothing you can say will persuade him to yield himself up, for he has no understanding of words or power of speech....Friday is a slave and a child, it is our duty to care for him in all the things, and not abandon him to solitude worse than death.’(Foe 39)

Susan’s analysis of Friday as having no understanding of “words of speech” seems unlikely to be true, as he has certainly listened and understands the language of both Crusoe and Susan. This attempt by Susan to explain away the lack of voice of a person using mere technicalities reflects her own troubles with the lack of a strong voice and her instinctual reaction to try to make sense of them in her head using technicalities.

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<sup>32</sup>J.M. Coetzee, *Foe* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 121.

<sup>33</sup>MacLeod, "'Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story?' Or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence, and Discourse in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*," 5.



This confusion seems to be a constant for Susan as she struggles with helping Friday find his voice. In the beginning of the novel, Susan realizes that as long as Friday could express himself through other forms, they don't need any language between themselves - "if there was any language accessible to Friday, it would be the language of music." (Foe 96) At that time Susan stressed on how music could work as medium of communication between the two:

When Friday fell silent awhile, I came downstairs to the kitchen. 'So, Friday,' I said and smiled- 'we are musicians together.' And I raised my flute and blew his tune again, till a kind of contentment came over me. I thought: It is true, I am not conversing with Friday, but this is not as good? Is conversation not simply a species of music in which first the one takes up the refrain and then the other...As long as I have music in common with Friday, perhaps he and I will need no language.(Foe 96)

However, Susan's thoughts about music seem to change later as she started to believe that speech was an essential component of communication and music couldn't take its place. When after repeated attempts by both Foe and her, she fails to give Friday his voice, frustration takes over and the very notion of music working as a form of communication becomes inferior to her –

All my efforts to bring Friday to speech, or to bring speech to Friday, have failed.' She continues, 'He utters himself only in music and dancing, which are to speech as cries and shouts are to words. There are times when I ask myself whether in his earlier life he had the slightest mastery of language, whether he knows what kind of thing language is. (Foe 142)

Eventually, the use of speech to express oneself seems to become Susan's main concern. She started to fear that the lack of speech for so many years might affect Friday to the extent of him forgetting the very idea of speech - "What I fear most is that after years of speechlessness the very notion of speech maybe lost him."(Foe 57) Susan's fears

for Friday also seem like a cover for her fears for herself and her own voice - "As to Friday, how can Friday know what freedom means when he barely knows his name?" (Foe 149) By attempting to give Friday his voice, Susan overlooks the fact that it was also an attempt to look into her inner self, trying to find her voice, her identity. She falls into the usual misconception of a society in which,

Silence is generally deplored, because it is taken to be a result and a symbol of passivity and powerlessness: Those who are denied speech cannot make their experience known and thus cannot influence the course of their lives or of history.<sup>34</sup>

However, it was Susan that was in confusion about her identity, and not Friday. Her powers of speech did not seem to be of as much help for Friday. Susan's fascinations relating to speech when it comes to Friday having a voice and expressing it reveal the significance of the power of voice to Susan.

The presence of Friday in Susan's story is completely dependent on Susan and her struggles with trying to understand his silence. Through Friday's presence as a silence in the text, and Susan and Foe's attempts to impose meaning on that silence, Coetzee develops the theme of appropriation through language.<sup>35</sup> She acts as a ventriloquist and although it results in Friday losing his individuality, it is the main force behind us getting to know and understand the character of Friday. On the other hand, as Susan continued to become Friday's voice in front of the reader she started losing her grip on

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<sup>34</sup>Susan Gal, "Between Speech and Silence: The Problematics of Research on Language and Gender," in *The Women and Language Debate: A Sourcebook*, ed. Suzanne Juhasz Camille Roman, Cristanne Miller (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 407.

<sup>35</sup>Sue Kossew, *Pen and Power: A Post-Colonial Reading of J.M. Coetzee and André Brink* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 162.

her own individuality as she gets more and more confused in understanding her own self and own potential.

While, Susan acted as the dominating figure in her relationship with Friday, her relationship with his master, Cruso, was a completely different story. The character of Cruso is central to Susan Barton's story. From the start, Susan assumes the submissive role, seeing Cruso as the dominant leader of the island as she watches him "on the Bluff, with the sun behind him all red and purple, staring out to see...I thought: He is a truly kingly figure; he is the true king of the island" (Foe 37). Susan's instinctive submission to a dominant man is proof of the fact that she might have wanted to see herself as "a free woman" but in her heart she could not get herself out of the tendency to bow down to a strong, masculine figure. It could be argued that bowing down to the opposite gender who is physically more stronger is that Susan acquired from the society as she thought this is what is supposed to do, be a submissive women in front of a man.

Susan's submissiveness to Cruso comes forward more clearly when it seems as if she wants to tell Cruso's story to Foe and not that of her own as she says to him, "Do you think of me, Mr. Foe, as Mrs. Cruso or as a bold adventures? Think what you may, it was I who shared Cruso's bed, closed Cruso's eyes" (Foe 45). There seems to be an innate sense of pride in Susan's words for having been a part of Cruso's story. Her individuality and voice seems to drown in insignificance when it came to Cruso. She herself admits to being Cruso's subject saying, "I presented myself to Cruso, in the days when he still ruled over the island, and became his second subject, the first being his manservant Friday." (Foe11)

Cruso had the kind of power over Susan that made her want to please him no matter what, even giving her sexuality away to him just because it would please him. One night, as she was sleeping, Cruso's sexuality takes over. Susan described the event saying, "I pushed his hand away and made to rise, but he held me. No doubt I might have freed myself, for I was stronger than he." (Foe 30) Even though she could've freed

herself, Susan chose to submit to Cruso's will, without uttering a single word. Her voice was lost in her admiration for the male figure she saw as the king of the island, her king. Not only does she let Cruso have his way with her, she even proceeds to make excuses for Cruso by saying, "he has not known a woman for fifteen years, why should he not have his desires?" (Foe 30) Again, Susan comes across as someone who, in her mind, wants to be a feminist, wants to be independent, wants to be recognized as an unique individual with an unique story but the deep-rooted tendencies to submit to male domination drilled into her by society all her life always seem to take over as she inevitably ends up willingly losing her voice in the face of a dominant male character.

Susan's sexual submission to Cruso continues as he lay on his deathbed. Susan spends nights with him, trying to use her sexuality to connect with him, to keep him alive. She describes the nights saying, "I lie against Cruso; with the tip of my tongue I follow the hairy whorl of his ear. I rub my cheeks against his harsh whiskers, I spread myself over him, I stroke his body with my thighs. 'I am swimming in you, my Cruso.'" (Foe 44) Susan's use of sexuality to gain the acceptance of men and to feel significant is clearly reflective of the fact that she is somehow subservient to the male species. She is willing to give up her sexuality, to give up anything, to feel connected to a man; even though nowhere in the novel does she reveal any sexual attraction towards Cruso. Cruso seems to have had a long-term effect on Susan just by being a dominating male species to whom she could submit. Even when she was with Foe, she ended up comparing it with her sexual relation with Cruso saying,

Then he was upon me, and I might have thought myself in Cruso's arms again; for they were men of the same time of life, and heavy in the lower body, though neither was stout; and their way with a woman too was much the same. I closed my eyes, trying to find my way back to the island, to the wind, and wave-roar, but no, the island was lost, cut off from me by a thousand leagues of watery waste. (Foe 139)

Even though she had no voice in her relationship with Cruso, in her mind, she fondly remembers and tries to get back to her life with Foe, completely accepting her lack of voice and power in the relationship.

Through her interactions with Cruso, both at the start, and the end of the novel, we see Susan as a woman who submits to the desires of men; by obeying to Cruso's orders and surrendering herself to him physically. Her voice becomes mute and insignificant, if doing that somehow makes her feel like she is connecting with a dominant male character. She comes across as a person whose identity is defined by her interactions with men much more than from a strong sense of self.

This sense of individual identity falls into further question when we analyze Susan's interactions with Foe. Susan's fascination with Foe is revealed in the beginning of the novel, when she is seen expressing her views to Foe in the form of letters in which her highly held opinion of Foe come to light - "I think of you as a steersman steering the great hulk of the house through the nights and days, peering ahead for signs of storm." (Foe 50) The use of the word "steersman" is related to ship which gives an indication that even though Susan left Cruso's island, she was still connected with it and the effect of Cruso was still there on her mind. This initial description of Foe shows a strong sense of admiration and respect. Susan seems to think of Foe as the leader of a patriarchal family who is looking out for signs of trouble, leading and protecting his loved ones. This description probably comes from deep-rooted gender assumptions on Susan's part and her admiration for Foe continues to be a constant source of confusion throughout the novel as she struggles to assert her authority and use her voice against the man who seems to have a lot of power over her.

Initially, Susan seems to try too hard to seem confident in front of Foe and let him know that she has power over her story and that her voice could not be controlled or manipulated by any man. She tells Foe –

I am not a story, Mr. Foe. I may impress you as a story because I began my account of myself without preamble, slipping overboard into the water and striking out for the shore. But my life did not begin in the waves. There was a life before the water which stretched back to my desolate searchings in Brazil, thence to the years when my daughter was still with me, and so on back to the day I was born. All of which makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Crusoe and Friday and what we three did there: for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire. (Foe 131)

This inaugural speech to Foe by Susan reflects a deep need to be recognized as a unique individual. Stemming from a sense of fear of losing her individual voice in her own story, Susan aggressively points out the fact that she does not need to explain herself to anyone as she is “a free woman”. Susan does not describe herself just as a “free person”, but as “a free woman”. It is representative of Susan’s need to rise above the power men held over women, especially when it came to narrative during that period. Susan seems to be persistent on proving that just because she is a woman, Foe has no power over the telling of her story. But it also exposes the fact that she defines her voice relative to that of a male (Foe), and the purpose of her story appears to be at least as much about the power struggle with a man for her own voice, as the narration of the story itself. Thus, Susan’s idea of the power of voice seems confusing from the start as she tried so hard to express her freedom from male domination that she ends up defining her freedom only in relation to the interactions with the opposites in her life. The desire to see herself a substantial being in the novel looks to be the root of her power struggle with Foe. She felt that as long as she had narrative freedom she was free of oppression, an individual with substance:

The nature of the conflict between Susan and Foe is not primarily ethical or political so much as it is narratological, and, by extension, ontological, in so far as the ability to narrate the world determines a character's presence as a 'substantial being...in the world.'<sup>36</sup>

This conflict of interest was further confused by Susan's inferiority complex. Even though she believed in the feminine voice and wanted to tell her story with her voice and not be influenced by anyone else's, she put her individuality at risk by reaching out to a male writer, Foe, to help her with the writing since she seemed to think of him as a superior. This action completely contradicts her speeches about individuality and the independence of feminine voice as she said:

When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso. Is that the fate of all storytellers? Yet I was much a body as Cruso. I ate and drank, I woke and slept, I longed. The island was Cruso's (yet by what right? By the law of islands? Is there such a law?) but I lived there too. I was no bird of passage, no gannet or albatross, to circle the island once and dip a wing and then fly on over the boundless ocean. Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth. To tell the truth in all its substance you must have a quiet, and a comfortable chair away from all distraction, and a window to stare through; and then the knack of seeing waves when there are fields before your eyes, and of feeling the tropic sun when it is cold; and at your fingertips the words with which to

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<sup>36</sup>MacLeod, "'Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story?' Or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence, and Discourse in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*," 5.

capture the vision before it fades. I have none of these, while you have it all. (Foe 52)

Susan bestows praise after praise on Foe and his writing prowess to convince him to write for her. Even though she initially said that she would not let her story be controlled or manipulated by anyone, especially not a man, Susan still ends up feeling like she does not have the necessary skills to capture the story in a satisfying way and decides to rely on the talents of a male writer to find her identity, her lost substance. Susan comes across as more of a victim here as the overpowering nature of Foe confused Susan's whole outlook and beliefs and she seemed to have had no other choice but to rely on Foe's words. Her experiences on the island seemed to have a negative effect because of which she believes that her substance lost and now her story will lack the truth. She realizes that she lacks a lot of qualities that are inherent in Foe and she cannot move ahead single-handedly to write her story. Susan's intentions and actions paint a confusing picture and reflect her conflicts with figuring out the definition of voice and finding her own. While it looks like she wanted to believe in the power and independence of the feminine voice, her constant reliance on the male characters in her life seem to reflect a lack of confidence in the powers of feminine expression. Even though the story was being told from the perspective of a female, she chose the skills of a male writer to capture its substance in its fullest and truest form.

Throughout the novel, Susan Barton is seen struggling to find the voice inside her that would help her story be written with the proper direction and technique. Since she struggles so much with her own voice and has little faith in her own talents, she is seen assuming roles or identities that are imposed on her by other characters. She becomes Foe's muse, Friday's translator, Crusoe's partner and all these characters are imposed on her by men and one could argue that the roles Susan played was more often than not by her own choice but rather it was imposed on her.

And these men don't seem to be too helpful when it comes to Susan finding her identity



and expressing herself with her voice. Foe attempts to dissuade Susan in her attempts to inquire about language and from understanding and experiencing freedom as Susan remarks - "There is not need for us to know what freedom means, Susan. Freedom is a word like any word. It is but the name we give to the desire you speak of, the desire to be free. What concerns us is the desire, not the name." (Foe 149)

By confusing Susan's definitions of desire with actual freedom, Foe comes across as a typically manipulative man in a male dominated society. To further confuse Susan and stop her from accomplishing her goals, Foe brings forth another obstacle that fills Susan's mind with doubts about her identity. He brings a girl named Susan Barton as the lost daughter of Susan. This event summarizes Susan's confusions with her feminine voice and identity quite well. While this ploy seems to work at first, as it seems to have a negative effect on Susan's confidence as an individual with substance, it fails to work completely as Susan rejects the dictation of her identity by a woman. Meeting a woman with the same name certainly has a lot of effect in the individuality and essence of Susan as a unique human being in society and bringing forth a person of the same name as that of Susan's was a direct attack on Susan's identity as Susan starts to question her own existence:

But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself and this girl is a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you?" (Foe 133)

Susan's sense of identity seems to be shaken by this event but it eventually fails to completely derail her as her confusing views on feminine voice take over. The fact that a girl was imposing the new identity of a mother seemed to not have nearly the effect that Friday or Foe had on her. Susan rejects this new outright calling her supposed daughter

mad - “My name is Susan Barton,’ she whispered; by which I knew I was conversing with a madwoman.” (Foe73) Susan continues the rejection of a coherent-self by claiming to Foe that the child hasn’t the same characteristics - “She is unlike me in every way.” (Foe 132)A girl dictating her identity as a person seems to have absolutely no effect on Susan whereas she adapts herself to all the men in the novel quite easily. Coetzee’s views on male hegemony are exposed here. The fact that Susan readily accepts identities whose substance and meaning depend on three men, but completely rejects just one identity that is imposed on her by a girl, reveals that she still is trapped in the thought processes of most women who were born and grew up in patriarchal societies. No matter how hard these women try to find their own voice, no matter how assertive they are about their views, deep down they are used to following a man’s leadership and accepting their views rather than that of a woman’s.

Foe’s overpowering statements confused Susan to such an extent that eventually, silence became a regular form of communication. Failing to understand Foe’s theories of speech and language, Susan thought of resorting to silence to keep her confusing emotions in check. Susan was unaware that the person she relied on to bring her lost voice back to her, to give her substance as a woman and as a human being, to tell her story, would end up being the one doing everything in his power to confuse her, to take her identity away and manipulate her into giving him power over her story. As Foe’s plans started to work and Susan became more and more confused with the whole notion of language and speech she silences herself to avoid confrontation in the fear that her story might never be told otherwise. She felt that the expression of her voice was completely dependent on Foe’s writing and silence was the best way to deal with this helpless state. This silence is not a choice as she is compromising her voice and letting Foe’s version dominate just so she can have her story told, even if it is not the version she would write herself.

However, this is a compromise that completely goes against her original intentions. Here again we see a contradiction between Susan’s intentions and her actions as she had said, “In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe.

Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story.” (Foe 141) Susan seems to truly believe that she must speak the unspoken; she must tell the untold story. Her intentions are to give voice to the feminist cause. However, she chooses to be quiet instead of telling the unspoken story. She ends up telling Crusoe’s story instead of her own. She appears to again accept compromise over conflict. She seems to again be overpowered by Foe and fails to assert her freedom when it comes to her story. Her actions again completely go against her belief that she was “a free woman” (Foe 131)

Silence was another source of frustration for Susan. Not only was Friday’s continued silence worrying her but also the way Foe could not understand silence, neither Friday’s nor Susan’s was frustrating her to no end. She tells Foe:

You err most tellingly in failing to distinguish between my silences and the silences of being such as Friday. Friday has no command of words and therefore no defense against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman. What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday. But that is not so. No matter what he is to himself (is he anything to himself? – how can he tell us?), what he is to the world is what I make of him. Therefore the silence of Friday is a helpless silence. He is the child of his silence, a child unborn; a child waiting to be born that cannot be born. Whereas the silence I kept regarding Bahia and other matters is chosen and purposeful: it is my own silence. (Foe 121)

Even though this attempt by Susan might seem to be her expressing her voice to Foe, it does seem to stem from her frustration with Foe's constant lack of concern or understanding for what was a way of life for Friday as Friday doesn't even have a name that he can say is his own and a definition of identity for Susan. It seems like she is pleading to Foe to understand the silence that they suffered from. She appeared to still be looking for his approval, or at the least, his understanding of the roots of this silence. It also reveals the fact that she thinks of silence as a form of identity as she thinks it is an unavoidably negative condition for Friday while it is a proof of feminine independence for herself. Susan and Friday both use silence but Susan's sees Friday's silence as helpless. Susan feels that Friday has no words, no way to defend himself and no choice but to be silent. She thinks that it takes away from his identity. However, she sees her own silence as purposeful. She sees her silence as a choice that represents her independence as a person to reveal what she wants to and to keep secret what she doesn't want to share.

However, eventually, the authorship of Foe became so prominent and overpowering that Susan lost her sense of speech and independence. Susan started off by wanting to tell her side of the story, the feminine side, but it became clear later that she never believed that she could be the mother of her story, as she was not born a storyteller. Thus she asked Foe to be the father to her story. Susan compares the authority of an author to that of a father, clearly accepting male hegemony, positioning herself as the victim, the "other" of the father and thus giving up authorship rights to the men.<sup>37</sup> The initial aim of wanting to express her independence through words was completely shattered when she ended up doing the contrary by becoming overpowered and trapped under Foe's intimidating

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<sup>37</sup>Jason D Price, "Coetzee's Foe: Susan Barton's (Un) Reliable Narration and Her Revelation through Misreading" (Seton Hall University, 2008), 13.

ways. She lost her voice completely to Foe's manipulation. "She wants to narrate the world and ends up as somebody else's [Foe's] character."<sup>38</sup>

Susan ends up submitting sexually to Foe as well, falling for his manipulations, and trying her best to gain his attention and acceptance. Even though she was so in need of Foe's acceptance that she could not refuse him, Susan tried to make herself believe that she still had some control. She says:

I calmed Foe. 'Permit me.' I whispered – 'there is a privilege that comes with the first night, that I claim as mine.' So I coaxed him till he lay beneath me. Then I drew off my shift and straddled him (Which he did not seem easy with, in a woman). 'This is the manner of the Muse when she visits her poets,' I whispered, and felt some of the listlessness go out of my limbs. (Foe 139)

According to Susan it seemed like she believed that there is a certain manner in which a muse should address her poet and in this instance the muse is herself and the poet is Foe. She readily accepts her role as muse and Foe's sexual advances but tries to justify the compromise by telling herself that somehow she was on top, that she too had a voice, when that clearly was not the case.

By the end of the novel, all Susan wanted was to be free. She said:

There is an urging that we feel, all of us, in our hearts, to be free, yet which of us can say what freedom truly is? When I am rid of Friday, will I then know freedom? Was Crusoe free, that was despot of an island all his own? If so, it brought no joy to him that I could discover. (Foe 149)

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<sup>38</sup>MacLeod, "'Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story?' Or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence, and Discourse in J. M. Coetzee's Foe," 5.

Not only had Susan's initial intentions changed after meeting Foe, but her ideas about being "a free woman" had also changed. Foe had such an overwhelming effect on her that she no longer believed that she was free and doubted if she ever could be. Susan's voice was no longer a worthy enough opponent for Foe.

Susan's Barton's story ends at the hands of an unknown narrator, who describes the experience of finding her dead in the ship with the narrator saying:

I enter. Though it is a bright autumn day, light does not penetrate these walls. On the landing I stumble over the body, light as straw, of a woman or a girl. The room is darker than before; but groping along the mantel, I find the stub of a candle and light it. It burns with a dull blue flame. The couple in the bed lie face to face, her head in the crook of his arm. (Foe 155)

Susan Barton and her dead captain (Cruso), fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, held out in blessing, float like stars against the low roof. I crawl beneath them. (Foe 157)

By taking away narrative power in the end, Coetzee drives home the point clearly visible from the beginning – Susan Barton never had power. She spent her life succumbing to the wishes of men, to gain acceptance, to avoid confrontation, to feel significant, and in her death she reunites with Cruso, her "king". Death did not silence Susan's voice for it had been silent from the beginning even though Susan tried constantly to tell herself that she had power.

On the surface, it may look like Coetzee wanted the readers to see Susan Barton as a strong and independent woman, who had survived the odds and was determined for her story to come in the eyes of the reader, a closer look into the storytelling reveals

that Susan's desire to be a liberated woman was not strong enough in the face of male domination. One may assume that through her constant submission to strong male Coetzee tried to portray the power of post-colonial feminism, he ended up showing a picture of a weak woman who defined her existence and individuality in relation to the men in her life. While the idea of feminism seemed attractive to Susan, her heart was still stuck in the colonial world of male domination and female subservience. While Susan does symbolize the post-colonial mentality of women to be free, her tendency to compromise and desire to please overshadow her struggle for liberation. In *Foe*, Susan's voice is not only silent in front of strong male oppression, but unfortunately, it is willingly so.

### Chapter 3:

#### Comparison of Portrayals of Feminine Voices in *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

‘Woman’ is *only* a social construct that has no basis in nature, that ‘woman,’ in other words, is a term whose definition depends upon the context in which it is being discussed and not upon some set of sexual organs or social experiences. This renders the experience women have of themselves and the meaning of their social relationships problematic.<sup>39</sup>

Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* are both post-colonial re-written texts having strong female characters as the narrators. While Rhys tried to give the silenced Bertha in *Jane Eyre* a voice of her own with Antoinette, Coetzee changed the whole notion of adventure stories by having a female adventurer, Susan Barton, narrating her experiences instead of a male character as shown in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Both of these novels attempted to give voice to women, a representation of the post-colonial times in which women were starting to find their individuality. This chapter will be an analysis of the similarities and differences, from the discussion stated in the previous chapters, in the representation of feminine voice in the two post-colonial novels.

The female characters narrated both the novels in different ways. In J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, Susan Barton believed that language played a big part in expressing oneself and without the proper use of language one can never communicate one’s true self in its fullest to the society. She constantly lamented the fact that Friday could not speak, even though he communicated with music - “There are times when I ask myself whether in his earlier life he had the slightest mastery of language, whether he knows what kind of thing language is.” (*Foe* 142) It seemed to Susan that speech was an irreplaceable form of communication to achieve the freedom of individuality as Susan states referring to

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<sup>39</sup>Mary Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 52.



Friday - "He does not know what freedom is. Freedom is a word, less than a word, a noise, one of the multitudes of noises I make when I open my mouth." (Foe 101) This implies that for Susan language is the essence of freedom and if one doesn't have the medium of speech, he or she won't be able to understand the meaning and significance of freedom as well.

However, in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the female character Antoinette never focused so much on the usage of language to express her voice as for her what mattered the most was to convey her thoughts and emotions in any accessible medium which would get her the most amount of attention. Antoinette tends to use a wide range of communication mediums and talks in metaphors, dreams, and madness. For example, while in the convent she talks about her dream and says, "I dreamed I was in Hell." This could be a metaphor for her future entrapment in a palace in England.

The use of silence is another area in which the two novels differ. In Coetzee's *Foe*, Susan Barton is seen eventually having to resort to silence to avoid conflict and confusion when Foe starts to overpower her in the third part of the novel. Foe's statements, opinions and manipulations confused Susan's own beliefs and emotions so much that she decided to become silent even though she had been the one narrating the story from the beginning. A point to be argued in this maybe that sometimes Susan Barton deliberately chose silence over speech as she didn't want the readers of *Foe* to know everything that was going on in her mind. She says to Foe while defining the difference between her and Friday's silence - "Whereas the silence I keep regarding Bahia and other matters is chosen and purposeful." (Foe 122) "Allowing individuals to make of her what they will (Chapter XXVI), she retains her sense of superiority ('I smiled at them at all'); allowing them to think little of her, she retains her privacy in a novel where there is much isolation but little of that valuable commodity."<sup>40</sup> In this

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<sup>40</sup>Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "'Faithful Narrator' or 'Partial Eulogist': First-Person Narration in Brontë's 'Villette'," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 15, no. 3 (1985): 249.

regard one may argue that, Susan expressed little about her real self and by holding her emotions she was able to keep an upper hand over others sometimes as other individuals might get confused about her real personality and opinions regarding things and it made her come out as a mysterious lady in front of others who had a secret heart and mind.

On the other hand, in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, silence was Antoinette's method to get noticed, as she was unable to affect her husband through her speech. But even though Antoinette's complete silence gave her attention it wasn't in a positive manner as, in her husband's opinion, silence was a sign of her impending insanity as Rochester stated - "She's as mad as the other, I thought, and turned to the window." (WSS 132) Antoinette's silence, even though may have been intentional, didn't get her a positive response from Rochester; instead it made her look even more insane in the eyes of Rochester as he constantly keeps referring to her as insane - "My lunatic. My mad girl." (WSS 136)

Another idea that is consistent in both the novels is that of females being given attention and importance because of their bodies and succumbing to the desires of males, "sexual appetite was considered one of the chief symptoms of moral insanity in women."<sup>41</sup> In *Foe*, the character of Susan Barton who came across as a strong-willed individual, driven towards her goal of publishing her own story is seen surrendering herself physically to both the male characters, Cruso and Foe. Foe and Cruso both see Susan as a physical object and desire her sexually while Susan seems to have an innate need to please both men, which eventually leads to giving up her body as per their wishes in order to create a place for herself in a world where men overpowered her. One can argue that, Susan's lack of resistance against the men's physical urges came from the fact that she realized and accepted the male hegemony that prevailed and thought that the physical union was a duty for her but she herself was confused about the whole notion of physical union as she stated:

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<sup>41</sup>Harold Bloom, *The Victorian Novel* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2004), 231.

Was I to regret what had passed between Cruso and me? Would it have been better had we continued to live as brother and sister, host and guest, or master and servant, or whatever it was we had been? Chance had cast me on his island, chance had thrown me in his arms. In a world of chance, is there a better and a worse? We yield to a stranger's embrace or give ourselves to the waves; for the blink of an eyelid our vigilance relaxes; we are asleep; and when we awake, we have lost the direction of our lives. (Foe 30)

On the other hand, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette used her physical attributes as a way of getting her husband's love and attention and feeling significant. Rochester was unable to resist his wife's charm and sexuality and eventually had no choice but to fulfill her desire by giving her the craved attention, even if it meant only through physical union. Antoinette's direct attitude towards sex made Rochester's fear even stronger as he didn't want to lose himself to Antoinette - "Rochester could have loved Antoinette, but he let his fear and weakness control him."<sup>42</sup>

In both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*, there is the use of the first-person narration in most parts, where the female character herself is narrating her emotions and experiences. In *Foe*, there seems to be more of a dialogue between Susan and her male counterparts, especially after her encounter with Foe. Susan is seen disagreeing and even voicing her opinions to Foe regarding language, storytelling and freedom as she states in one instance when Foe intentionally brought a girl named Susan to be the daughter of Susan Barton:

But if these women are creatures of yours, visiting me at your instruction, speaking words you have prepared for them, then who am I and who indeed are you? I presented myself to you in words I knew to be my own- I slipped overboard, I began to swim, my hair floated about me, and so

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<sup>42</sup>Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, 552.

forth, you will remember the words- and for a long time afterwards, when I was writing those letters that were never read by you, and were later not sent, and at last not even written down, I continued to trust my own authorship. (Foe 133)

In spite of her doubts and confusions, Susan somehow managed to display her sense of confidence and control in front of Foe during their dialogues.

On the other hand, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys showed little interactions between Antoinette and her husband Rochester in terms of dialogues. This may be due to the reason that, Rochester always found Antoinette to be someone who didn't fit his notion of the perfect English woman and so he found it difficult to have a proper conversation with her. A thing to be noted in this case is that both Antoinette and Rochester stuck to their own beliefs and prejudices, refusing to compromise or understand each other, which led to them never having a good conversation and it became as if the more they conversed, the more confused and annoyed they made each other - "She was undecided, uncertain about facts- any fact. When I asked her if the snakes we sometimes saw were poisonous, she said, 'Not those...'" (WSS 73) When Antoinette tries to speak her heart out and happily describes the place and surroundings that Rochester was new to, he takes it in a negative manner and gets irritated by Antoinette's way of expressing herself as he states, "Her pleading expression annoys me. I have not bought her, she has bought me." (WSS 59)

The theory of post-colonialism could be applied in context where Rochester's opinions regarding Antoinette were mainly focused on his pre-conceived notions related to her background. The fact that Antoinette comes from a less developed country than England made Rochester feel that Antoinette lacks a lot of things compared to the English women.

Both the novels focus on the search for an individual identity and end up defining the female protagonist in relation to other males' treatment of her. *Foe's* main

protagonist, Susan Barton is seen as depending on the male characters to define her identity. In the beginning of the novel, she lived with Cruso and Friday in Cruso's island, obeying Cruso's orders; she sleeps with Cruso as it makes her feel that she is more significant to Cruso. She also defines her own voice in relation to Friday by comparing his muteness to her ability to speak. Even though she works as Friday's ventriloquist, he helps her to realize the importance of speech and expressing oneself with words. Similarly, when Susan meets Foe, she starts to define herself according to his views of her and she becomes a confused individual who bends to Foe's every whim and opinion. As a matter of fact, she ends up sleeping with him to gain his acceptance and starts to define her freedom and voice in relation to how much creative freedom Foe chose to give her.

Similarly, Antoinette ends up defining her identity by relating it to her husband Rochester's treatment of her and this decides what she thinks about herself. She resorts to any means and mediums available to her such as madness, silence, sex, etc. to gain Rochester's notice. Antoinette is seen requesting Christophine, a motherly figure to her, to help Antoinette out in gaining her husband's love and affection. Eventually, Rochester's influence became so severe that Antoinette's emotions and expressions were completely defined by his behavior towards her and when his ignorance reaches extreme levels, it results in Antoinette losing her mind and going mad.

Another thing to be mentioned here is that in both the novels, the lack of freedom and voice affected the individuals so much that it became a matter of existence for both Antoinette and Susan. The insecurities, doubts and helplessness, mostly the result of their interactions with the male characters, took away their sense of identity and existence.

While Susan and Antoinette both searched for their voices throughout the novels, their journeys pass through different paths. In *Foe*, Susan Barton starts out as a strong and confident individual, believing in her individuality as a free woman and looking to share

her story with the world. However, as the story progressed, she ended up compromising on her ideals more and more and bowing down to the dominating male voices. Foe's power as a writer and his knowledge and skills of manipulation succeeded in confusing Susan about her identity, individuality and freedom. She ended up losing her essence and substance, as a woman, to Foe. While she starts out trying to help Friday find his voice, by the end of the novel, she had lost her own and ended up trying to free her own soul from the overwhelming power of Foe's voice.

On the other hand, in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette grew up as a child of silence but found her voice at the end of the novel. In her earlier life, Antoinette struggled to find her place in society as she didn't belong racially with the surrounding people and then she struggled to fit in culturally with her husband. Even after marriage, she had troubles voicing her feelings and emotions to her husband. Rochester, who played a dominant role, subdued Antoinette's voice for a long time. However, eventually, after lots of inner struggle with her voice, Antoinette found her way out of the shell she was trapped in and chose to put an end to the oppression and negligence of her husband. She resorted to madness and overpowered everyone else so much that they were bound to listen and give significance to Antoinette's presence as an individual.

As we can see from the above discussion, post-colonial novels such as *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are very similar in their intention to give women a voice. Both have female characters as protagonists and main narrators. However, the expression of that intention is quite different. While in *Foe* speech is given a lot of importance, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* other mediums of expression such as sex and madness are given equal significance. The novels are also quite different in their portrayals of female silence, which is a compromise for Susan but a way of getting attention for Antoinette. While both of these post-colonial novels try to give voices to women, both of the novels have main protagonists who end up defining their identity from the male perspective.

While in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a female writer, Jean Rhys, attempts to give another female

Creole character, Bertha, a voice of her own through Antoinette and succeeds to a certain extent of giving the readers an opportunity to hear Bertha's side of the story, she still needs a male character, Rochester, to define Antoinette in the many crucial parts of the novel. By taking Antoinette's voice away in essential parts, Jean Rhys gives rise to the question of whether she was really able to bring Bertha out of the patriarchal notions that Bronte had made her a victim of in *Jane Eyre*. On the other hand, in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Coetzee attempts to create a strong female persona, willing to tell her own story but fails to maintain the boldness and independence in the character, as Susan Barton's story ended up depending on men, both in context and writing. It can be argued that Coetzee was deliberately playing with the character of Susan by giving readers the idea in the beginning that he was creating a strong female voice, even though, in the end, he took the narrative authority away from her and proved that Susan never really had the power to tell her own story. It is a clear representation of the times when women were starting to find their feet as individuals but they had still not completely moved on from the ideas thrust into them as children of a patriarchal society.

## Conclusion

Muffled throughout their history, they have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts.<sup>43</sup>

The presence of women has affected every culture and society in human history, whether they were oppressed or liberated. Through most of history women were forced to suppress their voices and be subservient to men in every aspect of life, including the one place where true expression of oneself is of utmost importance – literature. Countless years of discrimination in literature, which was full of male writers who portrayed women as the weaker gender, who were dependent on men, hindered the women’s liberation movement even more. The fact that women could not even truly express themselves in literature resulted in them having little power over their representation for hundreds of years. As a consequence, the female voice had been lost for ages. However, the will to be independent, the desire to be seen as equals to men and countless years of determined struggle resulted in a strong feminist movement that has been responsible for the liberation of women in the post-colonial era. The feminist voice, suppressed for so many years before, also found its way to literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The post-colonial age has seen more feminine writers, stronger feminine characters and the true power of the feminine voice. Post-colonial novels like Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* are two hugely influential pieces of work that tried to capture this latest definition of what it means to be a woman in this era.

Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* are re-written texts which focused on the representations of the female voice and silence through the characters of Antoinette and Susan Barton respectively. These are novels in which the characters are shown as living in dreams, silences, conflicts and emotions, which are many times overlapped by the male voices and their perspectives. Both the authors were able to give a whole new outlook on female characters that were previously left without a voice, by

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<sup>43</sup>Kelly Oliver, *French Feminism Reader* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 268.



making the female characters the main narrators of the stories as Edward Said stated: "In reading a text, one must open it out both to what went into it and what its author excluded. Each cultural work is a vision of a moment, and we must juxtapose that vision with the various revisions it later provoked..."<sup>44</sup> These novels give us a chance to look at the same stories done before, from the previously voiceless female's perspective, in a society that views women differently and more powerfully than ever before in human history. The novels not only focus on the voices of the female characters but also their silences as it satirically portrays the silencing of women. Thus these novels are good representations of how far forward the voice of women has come in literature.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an attempt to rewrite the story of Bertha whose voice was completely overpowered by that of Bronte in *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, portrays the character of Bertha from *Jane Eyre*. As the chief narrator of the novel, Antoinette's perspective gives readers an opportunity to see Bertha's side of the story. Through Antoinette, Rhys gave Bertha a voice to express her feelings, thoughts and emotions that went unspoken in *Jane Eyre*. Thus, *Wide Sargasso Sea* provides readers with a much more feminine perspective, representative of the post-colonial times, of the story of *Jane Eyre*.

Similarly in *Foe*, Coetzee, despite being a male author, tried to give a female character a chance to tell her story in the context of the hugely popular story of Robinson Crusoe that was previously told by Daniel Defoe. While the thought of this famous adventure story, being told from a female perspective would have been impossible before, post-colonial literature is not limited by any such boundaries. Coetzee tried to use the character of Susan to represent the newly empowered feminist of the era, giving readers a close look at the struggles, conflicts, powers and freedom of a woman in post-colonial society.

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<sup>44</sup>Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 67.

Both the novels focused on the treatment of women and their struggle to find a voice. Jean Rhys and Coetzee used the characters of Antoinette and Susan in relations to other men in their lives in order to show the treatment of women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century having been treated as inferiors to men and lacking the freedom to do what they wanted to do or say.

It can be argued that in the both the cases of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*, both the writers tried to give the female characters a voice of their own through which they can express themselves. Even though, they were seen putting forward there expressions quite fearlessly sometimes, there were reflections of societies notions embodied between them; he notion that women are regarded as powerless compared to men. Both Antoinette and Susan's voice sometimes contained of what they actually felt and sometimes it embodied what they were expected to say as a woman in a society.

The struggle to find a place in this new society where women are seen as more independent and able is represented clearly in both the novels. Both Antoinette and Susan struggle to figure out their identities throughout the stories. They see themselves as liberated in some ways but dependent on men in other ways. Their chief conflict lies in trying to free themselves from the manipulation of men in their lives and trying to find a definition for their own identity and voice that is independent of men. This struggle ends in Antoinette gaining freedom and Susan losing herself to the overwhelming power of men in her life. Even though the readers got to see strong female characters going to different extreme extents and using different mediums to express themselves, Antoinette and Susan both struggle constantly to move on from notions of the patriarchal society thrust upon them since childhood. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette, despite having her own say in most parts of the novel and gaining freedom at the end, still constantly searched for attention and acceptance from her husband. Most of the times that she expressed herself, it was to somehow gain her husband's approval. Similarly, Coetzee's *Foe* sees Susan Barton aspiring to be an author and determined to publish her own tale, yet she is shown to be depending on her male

counterpart's help and his opinions on her capabilities as an author. She also accepts Crusoe as the leader of the island without resistance and caters to his every need. In every aspect of their lives, the presence and of men was not only constant but also influential in how Susan and Antoinette felt, how happy they were and how they expressed themselves. Their voices were more powerful and expressive those of women in literature previously, but they were still affected by men in a major way.

Jean Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* are reflective of the fact that, even though women were coming out strong and putting their perspectives and opinions quiet courageously forward during the post-colonial era, they still could not completely liberate themselves from the power of men that had overwhelmed them for centuries previously.

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