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Gender Stigma in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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By

Punya Prasad Upreti

University Campus

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Tribhuvan University  
Central Department of English  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Recommendation

Punya Prasad Upreti has completed his thesis entitled “Gender Stigma in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2071/02/15 to 2072/12/01 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Shankar Subedi

Supervisor

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Tribhuvan University  
 Central Department of English  
 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
 Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Approval

This dissertation entitled “Gender Stigma in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Punya Prasad Upreti has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee

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Internal Examiner

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External Examiner

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Head

Central Department of English

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Abstract

This research analyzes the issue of stigma in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette goes mad due to ill treatment into the hands of patriarchal society. She suffers from discrimination and exploitation by her husband and her condition further deteriorates. She is stigmatized as a mentally derailed woman. This stigmatization shows the plight and suffering of high class Victorian wives and mother, the limited social space and negligence of the male towards her makes her feel imprisoned.

Antoinette's heart and spirit is broken and she shows signs of an emotionally weak, confused and unbalanced woman. Rochester is cruel and call her Bertha, her mad mother's name. In England she is physically and mentally imprisoned and when the torture crosses normal limits she sets fire on the house and kills herself. Her death is a result of stigmatization because of which she had to suffer a lot.

## Contents

Letter of Approval

Acknowledgements

Abstract

I. Jean Rhys and Issues of Gender and Stigma 7

II. Mad Woman as the Revolutionary Figure in *Wide Sargasso Sea* 24

III. Gender Stigma as the Poetic Space of Woman Writer 53

Works Cited

## **I. Jean Rhys and Issues of Gender and Stigma**

This research aims to trace the madness of female character as a cause of gender discrimination in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Its structural modality shows the protagonist Antoinette as a stigmatized character who due to the gender discrimination and exploitation by her husband. The gender torture turns to be a split and mad character. The opening of the novel is set a short while after the 1834 emancipation of the slaves in British owned Jamaica. The protagonist Antoinette conveys the story of her life from childhood to her arranged marriage to an unnamed Englishman. As the novel and their relationship progress, Antoinette, whom her husband renames Bertha, descends into madness. In other words, it is the story of Antoinette Cosway, a white girl who grows up in the Caribbean, has a disastrous arranged marriage and goes mad and later imprisoned in an English country house. The consciousness of female madness as the trope to resist against patriarchal ideology and a means of female mode of writing on the Antoinette is reflected while at the end she aims to write her own story and narrates herself.

The stigma of Antoinette itself reflects the plight and suffering of high class Victorian wives and mother, the limited social space and the negligence of the male towards female make them obliged to live the lives of imprisonment in their own territory. In this sense, the madness, hysteria, schizophrenia of female is the result of gender discrimination in Victorian society. Antoinette is one of such characters who live the representative life of split personality in Victorian society.

Representation of gender stigma and schizophrenia in literature is the common feature of female writers of Victorian period. As their autonomous mode of writing trend, the woman writers like Bronte sisters used such female figures to represent the gender inequality and exploitation in different manners. From this point

the madness of woman is not limited within a form of fictional writings but also it has got space in theoretical framework while the critic deals with the madness as a revolt against male dominated writing tradition. In this sense, to give the emphasis on her stigma as a consciousness of narrow space of female in male dominated society, this research work will take the references from poetic space of woman and their anxiety according to Emily Dickenson, Jane Austin, Gilbert and Gubar as well as Elaine Showalter.

Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* affords an entirely different narration when she tells the story of Bertha, whose real name is Antoinette. She is presented as a Creole girl who is part of the elite of Martinique; a woman of the tropics who loves colors and nature. Added to the reality of the colonies is the fact that she is a woman in a patriarchal, male dominated society. Rochester proposes to Antoinette because he is penniless and he automatically obtains possession of her fortune when they marry. This young Creole woman is trapped between two worlds, constantly at the mercy of the men around her. She is the traditional silenced daughter and wife; a hybrid, unwanted by the British and rejected by her own people.

There are various reasons behind her madness, Mr. Rochester had married her due to her property, he even cheats her by sleeping with her own servant, even her jealous half caste brother Daniel writes a slanderous letter about her to her husband, everyone betrays her. English law too gives hire ship of property to the husband and society there is the role of husband. Thus, there is no place and role of Antoinette (parody figure of Berta) in male dominated society. This makes her isolated and mad like a mad woman in the attic.

With her heart and spirit broken, she begins to exhibit signs of an emotionally weak, confused and unbalanced woman. Instead of being a loving husband, Rochester

is cruel and even challenges her identify by calling her Bertha, her mad mother's name. Her husband uproots her along with her fortune to England where he keeps her hidden in the attic until finally, she sets the house on fire and jumps from the rooftop, therefore liberating herself. In this regard, Bertha's madness could not be the result of the discriminative nature of patriarchal norms and values?

By portraying the protagonist Bertha from good family background, by marrying her with gender biased husband and making her imprisoned inside her own house in the accuse of mad woman by husband; Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* depicts Bertha's madness as the result of gender discrimination as well as her consciousness of confined space of women in Victorian society.

The primary objective of this research is to bring out the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* into the dimension of its study. In particular, it aims to denote the stigma of its female protagonist Bertha in the text as the result of her consciousness of confined space of female in male dominated society as well as the exploitive nature of patriarchal norms and values. For this purpose, this study aims to observe and analyze the text with theories related to the poetic space of emerging female writer as well as their split personalities. It focuses on the personality of the protagonist Bertha. It highlights the condition of women from hypocritical Victorian society.

The research is based on text itself. The main aim of this research is to find out the relativity between the madness of protagonist Bertha with the confined space of women in Victorian society. The protagonist Bertha is very much similar with the ideal split personality from "Mad Women in the Attic." so the research might include the references from feminist theories related with split personality and madness of women from Victorian society.

The text deals with the issue that how the woman who are consciousness of their confined space are obliged to be imprisoned inside their own house in accuse of madness by their husband. In this regard, the major concern of this research paper is to focus on the stigma of protagonist Bertha to denote it as the result of her consciousness of confined space in male dominated society as well as exploitation of patriarchal norms and values. The notion of Madwoman is one of the most powerful medium of female writers as the revolt against the male centric writing and society

### **Historical Significance of the Text**

The research has a significant contribution mainly in four areas of its concern. First, the research will bring the text *Wide Sargasso Sea* into the dimension of its study. Second, it will deal with personality of Bertha as well as her co-relation with writer's personality. Then third, this study aims to observe and analyze the text with theories related with poetic space of female as well as their anxiety, split personality and madness. It focuses on the stigma as the result of gender discrimination in male dominated society. Fourth, the research will be significant for its concern with the aim of this project, to find out the conclusion that Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* depicts the stigma as the result of gender exploitation and its consciousness.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is generally recognized as being a re-writing of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). As a white Creole from Dominica in the West Indies, Rhys declared that she was "vexed at her [Bronte's] portrait of the 'tiger paper' lunatic, the all wrong Creole scenes" [...] (*Letters* 262) and that Bronte was only presenting "one side — the English side" (*Letters* 297). She clearly states her intention of reversing Bronte's text to tell the story from the mad wife's point of view:

The Creole in Charlotte Bronte's novel is a lay figure — repulsive, which does not matter, and not once alive, which does. She's necessary to the plot, but always she shrieks, she howls and laughs horribly, attacks all and sundry — off stage. For me [...] she must be right on stage. Jane Eyre, although without Jane — the central consciousness — is clearly signalled as being the hypotext for *Wide Sargasso Sea* by a number of intertextual references. Rhys's protagonists are carbon copies of an earlier cast: Antoinette Cosway Mason is Bertha Mason, Bronte's madwoman in the attic; her unnamed husband is Mr. Rochester. (*Letters* 297)

Mr. Mason, the Englishman who marries Antoinette's mother, is named after Bertha's brother; in both texts, the woman who is paid to look after the mad Bertha is named Grace Poole. The narrative events are similar. For example, the materialistic motives for the arranged marriages are identical — both Rochesters, whose elder brothers inherited the family estate, are thrust into an alien culture for financial reasons and both brides are married to an Englishman to restore the family to the identity and stability of the dominant social order. Both Antoinette and Bertha have a mother who goes mad and an idiot brother; the facts of the husbands' lives after their marriages are identical. In both novels the marriages are set in Spanish Town, Jamaica and Part III of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set in *Jane Eyre*'s Thornfield Hall. Rhys even takes up Bronte's imagery of fire and ice (or heat and cold) as well as her use of colour symbolism.

Different critics have viewed the novel with different perspectives. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Jean Rhys has not only answered and exposed the complexities of this new, strange Creole identity, but in the process has challenged the Empire and

uncovered the difficult plight of women, specifically this new hybrid woman who is neither clearly British nor a native to the islands. This novel exemplifies the issues of women in the colonial/post-colonial society that includes issues of identify, lack of independence in a male dominated society, and the formation of the hybrid or new identity. Shalini Puri comments on the concept of hybridity as follows:

These questions about identity all turn to the rhetoric of hybridity to provide affirmative answers and link the diverse elements of the Caribbean....Discourses of hybridity in the Caribbean perform several functions. They elaborate a syncretic New World identity, distinct from that of its “Mother Cultures”; in doing so, they provide a basis for national and regional legitimacy. (45)

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is a kind of prequel to *Jane Eyre*, because it describes the childhood of Bertha Mason and the early days of her marriage, which are not described in Charlotte Brontë’s novel. But it also does more than this. As Alexis Lykiard says in his memoir of Jean Rhys, her “original achievement in *Wide Sargasso Sea* was to extend, explore and modernize, while also rendering timeless, that cry, that yearning, and all those other vital elements she rediscovered in Brontë’s novel” (88).

But although it takes *Jane Eyre* as its inspiration, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set in time before that novel. Charlotte Brontë tells us that Bertha Mason is older than *Jane Eyre*, and five years older even than Mr. Rochester. In fact Jean Rhys altered the possible dates of the narrative in *Jane Eyre* (where the action covers the 1820s and 30s) to suit her own story. She starts the action of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is soon after 1833, an important date for the colonies because that was when the Emancipation Act banning slavery was passed. Jean Rhys said in a letter that when she read about Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* she thought, “that’s only one side – the English side”

(297). She expanded this in an interview, “The mad first wife in *Jane Eyre* has always interested me. I was convinced Charlotte Bronte must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it. Otherwise why did she take a West Indian for the horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature?” (5).

*Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys ignited a wave of responses, comments and criticism immediately after its publication in 1966. Before the publication of her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys’s fiction was considered limited by the fact that she was a woman and seemed to write only about her own life. However, her first critic, Ford Madox Ford, who did so much to encourage her at the beginning of her career, clearly thought of her as modernist. For example, in his introduction to her first volume of stories in 1927, he particularly praised her ‘singular instinct for form’, which he pointed out was ‘rare writers in English and rarer still for English women writers’ (Jean Rhys, *The left Bank and Other Stories*, introduced by Ford Madox Ford).

Reviewing the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the Indian fiction writer V. S. Naipaul in his one book comments on its nightmare quality and says:

An order has collapsed and some people are ‘marooned’ ... a world that appeared simple is now, seen to be diseased, and no longer habitable. Across the sea there is England, no longer home: an attic, imprisonment, flames. *Wide Sargasso Sea* remains in the mind as a brilliant idea; and it completes Jean Rhys’s world. It falls in the West Indian scene and makes more explicit the background to that journey, which turns out not to have been from innocence to darkness, but from one void to another. There is no innocence in Jean Rhys’s world; there has always been loss. (29)

Naipaul found the sense of disorder and said that an order has collapsed and Antoinette's imprisonment by her husband diseased her life. The novel's setting reminds the previous setting of *Jane Eyre* where Bertha Mason had set fire in the house of England's Thornfield Hall. And according to Naipaul, the world of *Wide Sargasso Sea* completes the world of Jean Rhys's world.

Even after the publication of her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, when critics began to treat her novels more seriously, she was angered by their tendency to treat her not as a writer but as a woman writer, and one who wrote only about passive female victims. As Helen Carr puts it, the 'anger against injustice and hypocrisy behind Rhys's "terrific – almost lurid! – passion for starting the case of the underdog" disappeared from view" (7).

Rhys's novels typically described the struggles of young women trying to find themselves and to find the means of supporting themselves. Instead of providing a fashionably happy ending, she described the difficulties they faced as, by society's standards, they all failed. Judith Kegan Gardiner has pointed out that:

When a writer like Joyce or Eliot writes about an alienated man estranged from himself, [such a figure] is read as a portrait of the diminished possibilities of human existence in modern society. When Rhys writes about an alienated woman estranged from herself, critics applaud her perceptive but narrow depiction of female experience and tend to narrow her vision even further by labeling it both pathological and autobiographical. (242)

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is a perfect example of inter-textuality and is also often cited as an example of a postcolonial novel. The novel is presented as a postcolonial counter discourse to the earlier novel *Jane Eyre*'s colonial discourse. Some critics have

described *Wide Sargasso sea* is more than a feminist novel as Judie Newman pointed out in 1995. According to Newman, Charlotte Bronte made Bertha and Jane opposites in a kind of war of the women, Rhys reverse these tactics. She gives Antoinette a similar childhood to Jane's. The only real difference is their position; one on the edge of the empire, the other is at the centre. Antoinette's personal history is firmly politicized. She is the daughter of the former slave-owners in post-Emancipation Jamaica, and so is automatically hated by both the black and the mixed-race populations, as well as by the wealthier whites.

Antoinette is also rejected by her mother, leading to lack of self-confidence, while the mother-child bond reflects the relationship of mother country-child colony. In a sense she is trying her best to threaten the male-dominated society by unveiling and mirroring the reality that how the female who have the consciousness of gender discrimination are obliged to place inside a confined space being accused themselves as mad personality. Thus this work of dissertation tries to observe the text as an anxiety of space being a female.

The main purpose of this research is to trace out the protagonist Antoinette's personality into the dimension of its study. Her subordinate position as a female and her negligence from her husband all reflect the gender biasness of patriarchal society. The imprison of Bertha by her husband accusing her as the mad woman not only presents the exploitation of female in patriarchal society but also pictures the vast gap between the male and female in society. It makes Bertha much stigmatized.

Stigma of Antoinette itself is the result of her consciousness of confined space of female in male dominated society. In this sense, to show Bertha's stigma caused by anxiety of the confined space of female. Thus, Bertha predicament is similar with the image from the "Mad Women in the Attic." In this regard this research aims to

analyze the text through the feminist theories which deals with female's stigma, madness and their confined space. Thus, the female theorists and writers such as Emily Dickenson, Jane Austin, Gilbert and Gubar as well as Elaine Showalter will be included to complete this research.

### **Notion of Madwoman in the *Wide Sargasso Sea***

In nineteenth century female have always been intrigued by mental illness; they come from a lineage of madwomen and suffer from both anxiety and depression. As a result, different feminist theories about woman's stigma always been drawn to literature that features women with similar issues. Upon reading *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is relevant came to see a completely different treatment of madness; rather than using something else to cope with her madness, Antoinette uses her madness to cope with her untenable life circumstances. The plight and suffering of Antoinette refers that her madness is the result of a complex set of circumstances that place them in positions of oppression, by the vestiges of colonialism, cultures that are patriarchal, and removal from their natural, native environment. In light of these man women's respective situations, I must then consider how their stories fit into larger feminist literary theory. Does their madness hinder their triumph over the oppressive nature of male-dominated culture, or does it cause them to succumb to it? And, in succumbing it, are they successful in inspiring rebellion by other women against their subordinate position in their own society?

What is a "Madwoman?" In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar examine her origin in the female writer's struggle for a place within the literary canon, for the right to write about her own gender. Their first question, "is the pen a metaphorical penis?" is the essential issue around which their examination is based. They focus on white, British women authors in nineteenth-century England,

examining their characters and stories and how these reflect their conflicts as female authors in a patriarchal society which seeks to keep them in their proper role as uneducated subordinates.

They describe the very act of writing as “isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture” (51). To wield the pen (the penis) was to attempt to take on a male role for which they were neither equipped nor capable. The woman writer was in an especially unfortunate position; she was dismissed entirely or her femininity called into question. Her writing was criticized, as she lacked “the pen/penis which would enable [her] . . . to refute one fiction by another” (12), to tell her own story rather than to be reduced to “a creation ‘penned’ by man” (13). Were she able to break into the male dominated field of literature, she would have to be prepared to endure ridicule and questions about her femininity.

According to Gilbert and Gubar, the Madwoman is not just a part of female authors; she is a part of all women. But what, exactly, is a Madwoman? The online *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “madwoman” as “a woman who is insane. More generally (also hyperbolically): a woman who behaves like a lunatic, a wildly foolish woman.” Gilbert and Gubar discuss the concept of the madwoman in viewing woman’s experience in a patriarchal society, in women authors’ experience of isolation and ridicule at attempting to break into a male-dominated profession, and in the characters’ experience in these women’s writings. They present nineteenth-century Anglo women as being born into an environment that can easily sow the seeds of madness. Of her upbringing, they say that “any young girl, but especially a lively or imaginative one, is likely to experience her education in docility, submissiveness,

selflessness as in some sense sickening. To be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained to ill health, since the human animal's first and strongest urge is to his/her own survival, please, assertion" (54).

In a male-dominated environment in which women are trained from childhood to consider themselves as inferior, less intelligent, and less important, madness would seem to be a common response. They also note that "hysteria did occur mainly among women in turn-of-the century Vienna, and because throughout the nineteenth century this mental illness, like many other nervous disorders, was thought to be caused by the female reproductive system, as if to elaborate upon Aristotle's notion that femaleness was in and of itself a deformity" (53).

Women were damned by their own bodies; their (understandable) reaction to being ignored and oppressed because of their gender was, in turn, blamed on their own reproductive systems and furthered the view of women as unstable, dangerous, and inherently of less worth. Gilbert and Gubar present a picture of the inhospitable environment that confronted female authors and their female characters in nineteenth-century England. While Gilbert and Gubar were writing about white women authors, through their selection of *Jane Eyre's* Creole Madwoman, Bertha Mason, as the figure upon which they name their work and subsequent chapter discussing her in detail, the reach of their theory extends beyond England's borders and into the islands of the Caribbean itself. In terms of domination and oppression, the Caribbean is figured as the female to Europe's conquering male. Patricia Mohammed describes the region as "virgin territory to be used, developed, exploited and governed by the trespassers" (7).

Mohammed presents us with the idea of a childlike, innocent, feminine landscape raped by strangers (colonialist powers). The words she chooses for the actions of the "trespassers," "used, developed, exploited, and governed," are

commonly associated both with colonialism and patriarchy. Elsewhere, she describes the Caribbean as “not just one lost child, but the children of many parents” (11). She offers us a picture of a region that is both childlike and feminine, but also “lost” or without a clear sense of identity.

Gilbert and Gubar’s *Madwoman* can also be brought to the Caribbean because she suffers at the hand of those same forces that turned eighteenth and nineteenth century women into madwomen in Europe. Colonizers from England, France, and Spain converged on the Caribbean islands, occupying them, enslaving their indigenous people, “importing” slaves from Africa, India, and Asia and using them to develop and exploit the land, as Mohammed points out.

The Caribbean Madwoman finds herself in an even worse position than her British counterpart: she is doubly oppressed, first, by the Western colonizing forces that put her in a place of subjugation as she is not a part of them and second, by her position as a woman in a male-dominated society. Some feminist literary critics see the madwoman as a figure of rebellion against a patriarchal system of oppression.

According to Elizabeth J. Donaldson, “the figure of the madwoman as feminist rebel has had a sustained cultural currency” (99). The madwoman, then, becomes the paragon of oppressed women across the world; her descent into madness serves primarily to send a message to male-dominated societies that she will not be “tamed” and will not live under the weight of its suffocative force. “Madness-as-protest” as a theory can be seen as limiting madness by making it appear spiteful and ineffective, though; to achieve her end result and to make her message known, the madwoman must destroy herself, which benefits neither her nor the female collective. Along those lines, Donaldson also notes that “this metaphor indirectly diminishes the lived experience of many people disabled by mental illness” (102).

Interpreting madness as a form of rebellion seems to imply that madness is a choice, which can trivialize the experience of those who genuinely suffer from mental and emotional illnesses. However, to interpret madness as an innate quality of women is no better than the nineteenth century male outlook that madness stems from the female reproductive system and that the woman cannot help but “go mad.” Literary madwomen such as Antoinette Mason, Mercedes Santinio, and Celia and Felicia Del Pino struggle with a myriad of forces, both internal and external, that result in an ultimate need to escape their circumstances, and madness becomes that primary method of escape.

Madness-as-protest and madness-as-escape actually look quite similar. Each type of madness, according to Shoshana Felman, is “a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration” (2). Madness (not mental illness) is a phenomenon suffered by those who are voiceless in society, both culturally and politically, by those who are the “Other” or who have been made into the “Other.” Her description of madness as “a manifestation” of negative circumstances demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship; I am “mad” because I am “oppressed,” which may sound like madness is a form of rebellion, but to call it such would suggest that “becoming mad” is a strategy to somehow combat one’s situation. Donaldson notes that “madness itself offers women little possibility for true resistance or productive rebellion” (101). Her idea makes sense; how would one be able to bring about a true rebellion if she were considered to be insane? To “become mad” is to isolate oneself, to draw into oneself and thereby to render oneself ineffective at influencing people or changing society.

How would a madwoman maintain enough credibility to start a movement to overthrow patriarchal oppression? Rather, her madness would have to inspire a spirit

of rebellion in the reader so that, through her madness, she serves as inspiration for real-life action. I view this kind of madness instead as a coping mechanism, as a way for the madwoman to distance herself mentally from her powerlessness in the face of patriarchal systems. Donaldson says, “in the face of such repression, ‘going mad’ might be considered the only sane response to an insane world” (100).

In essence, she is saying that for the madwoman, insanity is the only sane way to cope with her position in her world. The madwoman understands her position as powerless against male domination, and rather than attempt to rebel (madness-as-protest), simply seeks to survive and cope the best way she can: to dissociate from reality (madness-as-escape). For the Caribbean woman character, however, patriarchal oppression becomes complicated by another issue: if she is not part of the colonizing group, then she suffers from an additional level of subordination, and that can vary depending on her particular ethnic background. While it would seem that whiteness would allow a woman a certain level of safety or privilege, for Creole women, for example, their “customs and habits were viewed as departures from a norm established by the European colonizer and perceived as deficient in both form and content” (Mohammed 19). Clearly, skin color is not the deciding force regarding privilege in these particular colonized cultures; there are too many additional variables at play that both isolates the Caribbean woman and causes an identity crisis for her. It is in the intersections of both a cultural identity crisis and an oppressive male relationship that we find the women I address in this study.

Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* features the madwomen. Rhys’s Antoinette Mason, goes through periods of “madness” that are brought about directly at the hands of the men in their lives. However, the author demonstrates that “madness” is not as simple as it seems; even the quintessential “madwoman,” Antoinette, did not

begin her life that way. These authors present the concept of madness as a complex phenomena, the product of isolation created by an abusive patriarchal culture, colonialism, immigration, and abandonment. Through their journeys into and through madness, the authors examine the circumstances that put women in a place of conflict (isolation, lack of education, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse); this study will seek to examine the situations encountered by the “madwomen” and determine how they set the stage for each character’s mental breakdown.

Rhys uses powerful color and nature imagery in her works which connects the women both with their environment and with their own madness. Such imagery hearkens to ecofeminist theory and back to Mohammed’s earlier description of the Caribbean in female terms and the colonizers as “trespassers.” As Ben Heller further puts it in his article:

Landscape, Femininity, and Caribbean Discourse,” “a signal characteristic of Caribbean discourse has been the tendency to figure the shaping environment as female, or with qualities such as fluidity and relationality that have been associated with women, femininity, and the female body in both patriarchal and feminist discourses—and both positive and negative effects have been ascribed to this feminized landscape. (392)

The Caribbean land/seascape has been described in feminine terms, and Caribbean women are often associated with the natural environment. These authors specifically make a connection between the homeland and life and between isolation/removal from the land and death. For these women, to be isolated and extracted from their family and their home is to perish. This study will treat the nature imagery in all three works and how each character develops a sense of identity through her natural

connection to her homeland. Finally, the authors demonstrate the actions of these women from within their mental illness and how their actions bring about resolution and peace or ultimate destruction.

This research work includes the general introduction of the text, female stigma and woman's position in gender biased society in the first chapter based on the Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It further includes the parallel rewriting of *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason/Antoinette Cosway's history leading up to her madness and death in *Eyre*'s Thornfield home to give the significance of mad woman as the female mode of writing as the revolt against male centric writing tradition. The second chapter will include the theoretical connection of mad woman in woman's writings tradition as the autonomous mode of writings in connection with the textual analysis of the text. The last chapter will conclude that how the gender stigma has become woman's mode of writing as the resist against male centric writing tradition and society.

## **II. Mad Woman as the Revolutionary Figure in *Wide Sargasso Sea***

In Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette Cosway Mason Rochester embodies madness and all the tropes associated with madness. Misconceptions and ignorance lead her suitor and husband, and natives of Coulibri and Massacre to label Antoinette as a mad woman. The perception of mad woman further leads the central character Antoinette to live stigmatized life. In this sense, the entire novel goes through the madness of its protagonist that reveals the gender exploitation, stereotypical patriarchal ideology as the major cause behind her madness.

Madness has been in the debate in literary throughout the history. Authors of historical and psychological texts on madness agree that there is no singular meaning or definition for madness. Historically, for Augustans, the mad were men, and the most common depiction of madness as Showalter mentions, "Caus Gabriel Ciber's statues of 'Melancholy Madness' and 'Raving Madness,' which were eventually hidden from public view except by special request" (10). In this sense, the discussion of 'madness' is not a new in literary circle. The 'madness' of woman has left the significant mark even in the feminist criticism since it is linked with unequal gender roles and suppression of female by patriarchal gender roles.

The connection between women and madness, as explored by Dinah Manisty and others as Tyson writes, "Stems from the definition of hysteria which derives from the Greek word for womb [...] and refers to psychological disorders deemed peculiar to women" (84). Lois Tyson states, "Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (83), which explains the shift from mad men to mad women. Later the figure of 'mad women' became the troops or space for feminist writing in fiction and criticism.

The protagonist Antoinette of *Wide Sargasso Sea* goes through the rumors of her madness while she opposes to marry with an Englishman. She undermines the belief that a man will always save the day. Due to the failure marriage of her mother she and the fear that patriarchal construction of marriage could ruin her, she hesitates for marriage. Tyson notes how feminist scholars "criticize the patriarchal construction of marriage" (87). Antoinette chooses to get used to a lonely life unlike her mother who as Rhys writes, "Still planned and hoped" (18), for another husband as a means of acceptance. When a suitor presents himself, Antoinette protests marriage to a stranger, even if the marriage will quiet rumors about her madness.

Her husband's wooing comes in the form of a deal as he says, "I'll trust you if you'll trust me. Is that a bargain?" (79). He demeans Antoinette by believing she will fall for a stereotypical truce. In addition, he hinges a ceremony of love on a superficial pact. When Antoinette says, "I do not wish to marry you" (91), she makes it clear she does not desire the restrictions that come with matrimony. More specifically, Antoinette does not want him. Antoinette's madness allows her to discard the submissive role of being wife because the patriarchy has reserved the submissive role for her.

If her husband cannot promise peace and happiness, then Antoinette wants nothing to do with him. Antoinette speaks her mind and rejects coyness for blunt truth. Antoinette's decision not to marry Rochester is her choice. Antoinette's choice to be different gives her power. Her madness symbolizes either the acting out of the devalued female roles or the total or partial rejection of one's sex-role stereotype. The devaluation of women is rooted in her family because her mother too has the similar experience. Since Antoinette sees her mother as devalued, she chooses not to follow the same path. Antoinette lets her husband know she will not blindly choose marriage

because it is offered to her. In this sense, behind her madness there is the connection of traditional gender construction and submissive roles of female.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, in this sense a complete text to deal with mad women and their trend of expression in female writing. So, the text should be studied under the comparison of madwomen's history in female writing tradition. As this research aims to depict the historical significance of mad woman in women's writing tradition, it is relevant to deal the madness of Antoinette Rochester with regard to other historical figure of mad women. The representation of mad woman in literature is rooted during the period of Charlotte Bronte. Her novel *Jane Eyre* marks the historical significance for its representation of madness of female figure.

Since the *Wide Sargasso Sea* presents the parallel story of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* with regard to the name and madness of the protagonist though the setting is different it is relevant to talk madness of Antoinette in comparison to Bertha. Furthermore, Antoinette's husband himself calls her Bertha regarding she is mad as Bertha from *Jane Eyre*. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is generally recognized as being a re-writing of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. As a white Creole from Dominica in the West Indies, Rhys herself declares that she was "vexed at her [Bronte's] portrait of the 'tiger paper' lunatic, the all wrong Creole scenes" (262) as mentioned in *Letters* and that Bronte was only presenting "one side — the English side" (297). She clearly states her intention of reversing Bronte's text to tell the story from the mad wife's point of view which clearly presupposes that the protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea* like Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* is mad. Unlike in *Jane Eyre*, the protagonist herself tells her story since she is intended to write her story of madness herself as Rhys provides much authentic voice of mad woman from her own perspective.

Rhys's protagonists are carbon copies of an earlier casts such as Antoinette Cosway. Mason is Bertha Mason, Brontë's madwoman in the attic; her unnamed husband is Mr. Rochester. Mr. Mason, the Englishman who marries Antoinette's mother, is named after Bertha's brother; in both texts, the woman who is paid to look after the mad Bertha is named Grace Poole. The narrative events are similar. For example, the materialistic motives for the arranged marriages are identical as both Rochesters, whose elder brothers inherited the family estate, are thrust into an alien culture for financial reasons and both brides are married to an Englishman to restore the family to the identity and stability of the dominant social order. Both Antoinette and Bertha have a mother who goes mad and an idiot brother; the facts of the husbands' lives after their marriages are identical as both of them are regarded as a mad woman. Thus, in every angle *Wide Sargasso Sea* seems a narration of female madness which has historical relevance with *Jane Eyre* as well as female mode of writing tradition.

Thus, the madness of Antoinette Cosway could be observed as the historical madness of woman which is brought by gender discrimination and for female writer such image of mad women always tries to set their own way of female writing style. From the generation of Brontë sisters to now the mad women has become the symbol of female mode of writing as the medium to resist in male dominated writing tradition.

Through the rewriting of the Brontë text in post-colonial setting, Jean Rhys tries to depict the extended repetition with a critical distance and it is the differences that are significant. This re-vision is the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering the text from a new critical direction. Rhys's revision of Brontë's novel aims at giving a voice to the silenced other whose discrepant narrative has been

excluded, bracketed by the dominant patriarchal and imperialistic discourse. Keeping the fact into the consideration, it could be claimed that Rhys makes Antoinette see herself as her Other, Bronte's Bertha. Through the narration of the mad woman, Rhys tries to clarify the notion of mad woman through the perspective of mad woman herself.

Rhys sets her novel in Caribbean Islands. She promotes the raving monster who shrieks, grovels and laughs horribly to the status of an articulate speaks from the other side of the colonial divide. It may be more precise to say that she is not writing the other story, but writing the other into the similar story that captures the historical significance of the notion of 'mad woman' in women's writing and raises the voice against patriarchal domination.

Jane's authoritative voice is not only replaced by that of Antoinette but by a mosaic of narratives constructed in *The Wide Sargasso Sea* since the narrative captures the multiple voices both from protagonist and antagonist. Rochester also is given a voice which is excluded by Bronte. Not content with shifting the perspective radically by giving a voice and a point of view to other side, Rhys also de-contextualizes Bronte's story and re-contextualizes it both spatially and temporally.

In this connection Butler says, "Restaging and re-signifying of the offensive [text] is a kind of counter-speech, a kind of talking back" (14- 15). Keeping the notions into the consideration Rhys' effort to rewrite Bertha's story is an effort to give the stress to the voice of 'mad women,' who have been used in female writing since the female writing tradition.

*Wide Sargasso Sea*, as a re-writing of *Jane Eyre* from the other side, is doubly rooted, both in a previous text and in historical reality to make a subversive comment on imperialist mentality, inseparable from patriarchy a division into two sexes which

culturally privileges the masculine. This research purports to show how *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as the story of Bertha's past, illustrates how the characters are trapped by discourse or by a previous text and more generally by its underlying ideology but is also an attempt to break free from the straitjacket of a patriarchal narrative.

After showing how Rhy's novel, as a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, is a tragic tale of predestination moving towards a pre-written ending, then how her characters are also the powerless victims of a patriarchal colonial mentality upheld by the social system. Rhys attempts to break free by subversively suggesting a different mode of being.

The characters, events, setting and symbolism is accompanied by a certain number of verbal echoes in novel, mainly concerning the description of Antoinette's transformation into Bronte's Bertha Mason presupposes her madness. The unnamed husband engenders the mad woman in the attic when he begins calling his wife "Bertha" (70). As Bertha was also Antoinette's mother's name, she doubly inherits madness. When he calls her Bertha, she is drunk and laughing, and his remark, "Don't laugh like that, Bertha." (86), refers to Bertha Mason's mad laugh.

As Antoinette goes mad, she is described in terms, "her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen (94). The reference clarifies that Antoinette lives life like mad and behind her madness there is the role of her husband as she narrates telling her husband as that man, "I took the red dress down and put it against myself. 'Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?' I said. 'That man told me so. . . 'Infamous daughter of an infamous mother,' he said to me" (120).

The circumstance faced by Antoinette is similar with her mother. Her destiny repeats that of her mother. In addition to their striking physical resemblance, both marry an Englishman, both marriages fail partly because of cultural incompatibilities,

both become alcoholic and both go mad. The same words are repeated to describe them. For example, Antoinette says of her mother, “A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep — it might have been cut with a knife” (5) and her husband later describes her in the same terms, “the frown between her thick eyebrows, deep as if it had been cut with a knife” (88). A same event is repeated several times by different narrators, giving different versions.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* captures multiple narrations. Part One, which is told by Antoinette, tells the story of her childhood and adolescence. Part Two is narrated by the husband, but contains embedded narratives as well as Daniel’s letter is partly a doubling of Antoinette’s account of her childhood and when Antoinette tries to justify herself to her husband in a long dialogue, there is the eco of Part One. The text is full of repeating prolepses, anticipations referring in advance to an event that will be told in full in its place.

An example the passage preceding the adulterous scene with Amelie clarifies it, "I sat on the bed waiting, for I knew that Amelie would come and I knew what she would say, ‘I am sorry for you’. She came soundlessly on bare feet. [. . .] Then she said, ‘I am sorry for you" (89).

The fact that anticipatory hints are immediately followed by resolution that helps to establish the narrative as a prophetic one. As *Wide Sargasso Sea* usurps precedence, the whole text becomes prophetic. There is the plot of predestination to show how the whole of the plot seems to be proceeding from pre-existing discourse. For example, when the unnamed husband announces, “I played the part I was expected to play” (44), he is not only referring to his father’s plans, but also to his previous persona. He later sketches a blueprint for the cell in which he will

incarcerate his wife, "I drew a house surrounded by trees. I divided the third floor into rooms and in one room I drew a standing woman . . . it was an English house" (106).

Antoinette also has a sense of tragic fate from where she cannot come out, as she narrates, "I must know more than I know already. For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago" (69). Moreover, the text is shot through with the characters' sense of obligation, as though they were mere puppets of a tragic fate, with no control over their lives. For example, when Rochester receives the defamatory letter from Daniel, Antoinette's half-brother that is to trigger off the final decline of their marriage, he reflects, "I felt no surprise. It was as if I'd expected it, been waiting for it" (60).

In this sense, the *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a completely based on mad woman as the female mode of writing in male writing tradition, creating their own mode of writing trend from the history of women writers. Because of being the rewriting of *Jane Eyre* the central character lives like Bertha with the possibility of the interpretation of novel through mad woman perspective.

Bertha from *Jane Eyre* is one of the prominent female figures who is not only mad but also the role model for later developed feminist theorist who deal with mad woman and women's distinct writing tradition. The mad woman is the space for woman writers as their own subject matter of writing. Fictional representations of madness have a way of influencing clinical discourses of mental illness and vice versa.

As Showalter has demonstrated, the figure of Bertha Mason circulated in precisely this way during Bronte's time; "Bertha's violence, dangerousness and rage, her regression to an inhuman condition and her sequestration became such a powerful

model for Victorian readers, including psychiatrists, that it influenced even medical accounts of female insanity” (68). Why is the association between women's rebellion/madness and mental illness undesirable? In some ways it is not. Beginning in part with this insight, feminist critiques of psychiatry and psychology have provided us with necessary and important analyses of the gendered politics of psychiatric diagnoses: it is certainly true that women have been disproportionately and in some cases even falsely diagnosed as mentally ill.

Similarly there are a lot of symbols that represents the theme of pain, suffering and madness. It is certainly true that psychiatry and psychiatric hospitals are in dire need of outside critics. However, at this particular historical moment, one in which disability studies and feminist disability studies are coming of age, it is believed that the madness/rebellion configuration subtly reinforces what has become an almost monolithic way of reading mental illness within feminist literary criticism and perhaps in the larger culture of women's studies scholarship. This is undesirable, it is argued, because this configuration of madness, if it remains widely accepted and uncontested, may limit our inquiry into madness or mental illness.

When Antoinette is locked up in Thornfield Hall and Grace Poole lights a fire, she wonders, “What is it that I must do?” (115). At the end of the novel, after dreaming that she sets fire to Thornfield and jumps off the roof, she walks along the corridor holding her candle and remarks to herself, “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I must do” (123). Furthermore, the text is full of forebodings and premonitions, as though the characters have a vague knowledge of what awaits them. Right from the start, the husband is plagued by misgivings and a vague sense of uneasiness, which is obviously due to more than the presence of the ex-slaves at

Granbois and the unfamiliar landscape, “I woke next morning in the green-yellow light, feeling uneasy as though someone were watching me” (49).

Colour symbolism reinforces the feeling of malaise, as the colour yellow crops up in moments of impending danger — for example, Daniel’s skin is yellow (79), Antoinette’s shawl is yellow the night she gives her husband the obeah love potion which misfires (82), the blanket onto which he vomits it up is yellow (88). Antoinette explains to her husband why she doesn’t wish to marry him, “I’m afraid of what might happen” (45).

Imagery is also used to prefigure the future, as the husband crushes underfoot the wreaths of frangipani — fragile flowers, representing Antoinette herself — that had been put on their bed (42) and as a large moth blunders into a candle (47) attracted, like Antoinette, to deadly heat and love. Antoinette’s dream, which occurs three times, is premonitory, prefiguring her wedding to which she is led like a lamb to slaughter. The first dream occurs just after English strangers have arrived at Coulibri, “Antoinette dreams she is walking in the forest” (10) and is followed by an unidentified stranger who hates her; however hard she tries, she can do nothing.

The second dream occurs when she is about to leave the security of the convent to be married. This time she is following a man full of hatred “towards the forest” (34) then into an “enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall” (34) and up stone steps, obviously, the third floor of Thornfield Hall. She is wearing a beautiful white dress, feels “sick with fear” and does not try to save herself, as she knows “this must happen” (34). Her dress, which hinders her movements, indeed does get dirtied, prefiguring the tragic marriage that finally deprives her of her identity. Many traditional Gothic trappings are present, here used, as in the nineteenth-century Gothic, to vehicle anxiety and dramatize the subjective inner anguish of the

characters, the menacing forest and tall dark trees, the endangered innocent victim, the gloomy stone building with dark steps, the persecuted maiden in flight, etc provides the gothic sceneries to represents the 'madness' through symbols.

The third time Antoinette dreams, she has been transformed into Bertha and is now inside Bronte's novel as the dream enacts the final inexorable convergence with *Jane Eyre*. As she becomes Bertha, prowling along the corridors of Thornfield Hall at night and laughing, she actually comes face to face with herself, with "that ghost of a woman whom they say haunts this place" (121), which is her own image in the mirror and it is as if she is original Bertha as mentioned in *Jane Eyre*, "It was then that I saw her — the ghost. The woman with streaming hair" (484) and in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, "She was surrounded with a gilt frame but I knew her" (122) clearly pictures the mad woman.

As Rhys puts Bertha back on stage by filling in her past until the inevitable pre-written end, she aims to explain the why and wherefore of Antoinette's madness. But Rhys says she also wanted to explain Rochester's cruelty towards Bertha to justify him at all and to explain him a bit. Rhys's characters are doubly trapped as Woolf quoted in Carr:

Their emancipation from *Jane Eyre*'s mid-nineteenth-century point of view into a vantage point situated at the ends of the 1960s, reveals how shackled they are by the historical, social and cultural forces which fashioned them, to what extent their individual psychic history is bound up with historical and political forces, how far "the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected. (52)

A *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a novel less of character than of destiny. Indeed, Antoinette is in control neither of her dreamlike narrative nor of her life, but neither is her husband

free to act as he wishes. Both are trapped by historical circumstances, both are the victims of family, society, culture and more generally of ideologically saturated discourse which drive them inexorably to their tragic fates and make the novel a complete study of tragic incompatibilities.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is the story of a mad woman named Antoinette who is called Bertha by her husband regarding she is mad like Bertha from *Jane Eyre*. From the beginning of her life she has some sort of dissatisfaction which helps to develop her split personality throughout her life. There are various reasons behind her split personality. As the novel begins, Annette and Antoinette are excluded from the White British Jamaican community because they are poor, which explains why the ex-slaves jeer at them as “white niggers” (8). “Mr. Mason Annette’s new husband, who also has properties in Antigua and Trinidad represents a new breed of English merchants and imperialists who still seek to dominate the life of the colonies, as does Rochester comments, “New ones worse than old ones — more cunning that’s all” (10).

The characters represent social and racial categories, which are a legacy of the colonial system and which condition their vision and determine their relations. Just as the Sargasso Sea stands between Europe and the West Indies, the characters stand for opposed categories such as English and French, Whites and Blacks, English people from England and Creoles (white people born in the West Indies), rich and poor, colonizers and colonized, the half-castes being rejected by all the others. The hostility towards Annette is partly explained by the fact that she is from the French West-Indian island of Martinique and as Daniel writes to Antoinette's husband, “French and English like cat and dog in these islands since long time ago” (58).

In such social and cultural scenario, the psychological development of Antoinette is different. Antoinette and the black girl, Tia, could have been friends,

indeed should have been as they get on particularly well as individuals, but they are not free of social prejudice formed in the past which keeps coming between them. For example, when Tia cheats her friend out of a few pennies, the stereotype of the Negro unconsciously dictates Antoinette's insult as she calls Tia a "cheating nigger" to which Tia echoes, "white nigger" (7), as their possible friendship is undercut by the breakdown of the relationship between blacks and whites that has its roots in slavery. The social reality of the island makes Antoinette alienated from the friends and society from her childhood.

Similarly, her mother Annette's marriage to Mr. Mason is doomed to failure. As a Creole she has an inside knowledge of things and feels the lurking danger from the rebel ex-slaves, whereas he is the product of an ideology of colonial cultural superiority and thinks he knows "better and his lack of judgment culminates in the burning of Coulibri" (14-15). Like her mother's marriage, the marriage of Antoinette and her husband is set in this post-colonial background and all these dichotomies symbolize the mutually destructive differences between them.

To explain Antoinette's madness and show how she is driven mad, Rhys reverses the identity-building process. Antoinette cannot acquire an individual identity. She moves from the tentative identity as Rhys writes, "She embroiders in a medley of colours in the convent school (29) to the final loss of identity, to become "only a ghost" (111), a voiceless "doll" or "marionette" (112, 100), a zombie or dehumanized ghost, a "lunatic" (107), who has been deprived of liberty and autonomy, whose spirit has been broken and stolen by patriarchal domination.

Antoinette's madness is set in a context of the betrayal of history. The levels of betrayal range from the cultural and historical implicit in the relationships between blacks and whites to the familial and filial levels. Antoinette goes mad because she is

betrayed by everyone, by her mother who rejects her; by her black friend Tia who throws a stone at her when the ex-slaves attack Coulibri; by the family servant Amelie who "sleeps with her husband" (61); by her jealous half-caste brother Daniel who "writes a slanderous letter to her husband" (60); by Richard, Mr. Mason's son, "who marries her off for money" (68), thereby handing over all she possesses to her husband according to the English law as Rhys writes, "That is English law" (68). Antoinette explains to Christophine; by her aunt Cora who "turn[s] her face to the wall" (71); even by Christophine, who hates her husband and influences her against him.

Despite this, there are many moments when the reader has the impression that things could have worked out between Antoinette and her husband, but other characters keep interfering in their marriage and the whole society conspires to separate them. For example, even after Daniel's libelous letter, her husband is ready to love Antoinette, "I longed to bury my face in her hair as I used to do. I said, 'we are letting ghosts trouble us. Why shouldn't we be happy?'" (87). But she makes him drink Christophine's obeah love potion, which misfires and leads to his betraying her with Amelie. Even at the very end, as he takes her away, he is well disposed towards her, "She lifted her eyes. Blank lovely eyes . . . I don't know what I would have said or done. In the balance — everything" (111). But, once more, the alien background he cannot cope with intervenes in the form of what he takes to be a "half-savage boy" (112) and the moment is lost, "But at this moment the nameless boy leaned his head against the clove tree and sobbed" (111).

Moreover, madness is literally written into her, as language, in a Foucauldian concept of power, is used as an instrument by the strong against the weak, reinforcing the heredity which binds her, as all the characters keep repeating to Rochester that she

is “going the same way as her mother” ( 12, 26, 60, 79), until he also begins to see her as mad and to call her mad, finally engendering the mad woman in the attic as he renames her "Bertha" (70, 86, 87, 95) after her mother, leading Christophine to comment, “It is in your mind to pretend she is mad” (104).

Of course, the main agent in Antoinette’s descent into madness is her husband. He is not only influenced by the prejudices of post-colonial West-Indian society, which is itself the product of an imperialist ideology. In addition, he was engendered by a previous novel, which is also the product of the same Empire-founding ideology. Antoinette's husband is thus a pure product of an imperialist discursive formation, which relies “upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed upon codes of understanding” (108) as mentioned by Maurel as reference of Said.

As such, he is as much of a puppet as is his wife. The dominant power is reinforced by the use of language, by the “Letter of the Law” upheld by social structures, as Christophine explains, “They got magistrates. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash people’s feet” (10). Both Antoinette (Bertha) and her husband are caught up in the patriarchal ideology, which Rhys makes visible or detoxifies or reveals that it is an ideological construct and not a natural state of affairs. The characters are trapped in patriarchal social structures of which destroy both Antoinette and her husband.

Thus, it is the patriarchal ideology inherent within the entire social structure behind the madness of the protagonist. In suggesting, Carr mentions, “the common workings of fascism, racism and bourgeois patriarchy, the persecutory power of the modern religion of intolerance” (62) drives females to the exploitation. Rhys echoes Virginia Woolf, who argued in *Three Guineas* that, “patriarchy, racism, pomposity, militarism, economic exploitation, autocracy and fascism are all part of the same

process” (51) as mentioned Carr. Sexual politics are imbricate in this wider system of power relationships within the discourse of gender what turns Antoinette to be a split personality or a mad woman.

Antoinette as the mad woman or the parody of Bertha, it is relevant to compare her with Bertha from *Jane Eyre*. *Jane Eyre* is revealed as being itself the product of unquestioned imperialist ideology, as one of the classic texts of nineteenth-century British imperialism, both fashioned by and upholding the dominant system. Bronte’s novel reinforces dichotomies that are the tools of power like self and other, Europe and colonies, civilization and savagery, God and Devil, reason and passion, man and woman, sane and mad, sex and domination and love and reciprocity, etc.

Bertha Mason, the mad Creole woman from the colonies, represents the inhuman inarticulate other ruled by monstrous passion, excess of which has driven her mad. She is repeatedly described in animal terms like dog, tigress, bird of prey, wild beast. She is told to live in a den and grovels on all fours. She is denied a voice. She only laughs, bellows, yells, snarls, gurgles and moans. She is regarded unintelligence, a presence on the narrative stage. She is repeatedly referred to as “it” or “the thing” (347). She is compared to the devil; she represents evil linked to passionate excess being defined by adjectives such as "malignant," "gross," "impure," "vicious," "cruel," "deprived," "intemperate," "unchaste" etc. (347-59). Her horrifying physical aspect is qualified as savage and wild.

Jane, who represents the “healthy heart of England” (408), is “the antipodes of the Creole” (354), a pure intelligent self-controlled English girl of moral integrity. Rochester is the long-suffering victim manacled to a mad and monstrous wife. He is convinced that he is performing his duty, his social mission, by taking his mad wife

back to England. In the name of social order Bertha has to be killed off and excessive passion controlled.

Gilbert and Gubar examine the notion that women writers of the nineteenth Century were confined in their writing to make their female characters either embody the "angel" or the "monster." This struggle stemmed from male writers' tendencies to categorize female characters as either pure, angelic women, or rebellious, unkempt madwomen. In their argument, Gilbert and Gubar point to Virginia Woolf who says women writers must "kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been 'killed' into art". While it may be easy to construe that feminist writers embody the "madwoman" or "monster," Gilbert and Gubar stressed the importance of killing off both figures because neither the angel nor the monster are accurate representations of women or women writers.

Gilbert and Gubar claimed that female writers should strive for definition beyond this dichotomy, whose options are limited by a patriarchal point of view. *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) is a massive book on historical study of feminism which stresses especially the psychodynamics of women writers in the nineteenth century. It explores the pressure of psycho as an "anxiety of authorship" when they talk about when they talk about the feminist poetics. Gilbert and Gubar in this book writes:

The anxiety of authorship that resulted from the stereotype that illiteracy creativity is an exclusively male prerogative affected in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected a monstrous counter figure to the heroine [. . .]; such a figure is usually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. (236)

Gilbert and Gubar's main argument is that the artistic creativity of the nineteenth century tradition which is perceived basically as a male quality is in fact patriarchal superimposition upon the women writers who are imprisoned within it. In the image of "Divine Creature" the male author fathers his text. But taking the same masculine cosmic author as their model women came up copying or identifying with the dominant literary images of femininity which comes out of the phallogentric myth of creativity.

The female writers like Bronte and Rhys want to overcome this circumstance of female writer by creating their own way of writing style through the story of woman's madness. To blur the male made perception about female she herself tries to break the male made of subjectivity of female through the depiction of madness.

As Rhys fills in Bertha's absent past, she reveals another side or the other point of view that is absent from *Jane Eyre*. She not only reverses the picture by showing how it is Antoinette that is trapped like her island, she is 'colonized,' her independence and autonomy subsumed to British culture and to British law. Even though, they were forced into marriage by their families for reasons of finance and of social status, "I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks" (39).

It is made clear that they could have loved one another. But the depiction of their physical passion and of Antoinette's dawning happiness at Granbois is tainted from the start, as it contains the germs of the destructive ideology that contains them, as is signaled by ominous signs such as "the moth blundering into the candle" (47), "the crushed flowers" (42), "the rats staring at them from the window sill" (48) or "the snakes and monster crabs lurking in the forest" (52).

Rochester embodies the character of the colonizer, presenting many of the "imperializing desires deeply embedded in the education of privileged Englishmen;

the narcissism, the will to domination, and the inevitable tragedy that it breeds” (106) as mentioned by and cited by Gregg. His characteristic is described as Right from the start he feels insecure, uneasy and unhappy in the island, which is too different and against which he is prejudiced by his upbringing, “Not only wild but menacing” (39) in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Antoinette is assimilated to her island, “not English or European either . . . a stranger” (37, 39). He feels that, “Everything is too much. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green” (39) and Rhys mentions further, “the medley of bright colours in nature being the same as the ones in which Antoinette writes her name” (29). A victim of the superiority of his sex and birth, he mistrusts everyone. He feels superior to his wife and treats her as an object, referring to her as, “this Creole girl” (45), “My wife” (36) or “the woman” (39).

He is repeatedly shown as being hostile and unfeeling toward her. Christophine tells Antoinette that he is “hard as a board” (71). He replaces love and reciprocity by sex and domination, “I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love . . . she was a stranger to me” (56), then is too proud to admit that he loves her, “Don’t you love me at all?” “No, I do not” (95) even though deep down he knows he did, but repressed his feelings, “Love her as I did — oh yes I did” (102).

He is an aggressive warrior, who wants to break Antoinette up as Christophine keeps repeating to him, “All you want is to break her up” (99) and who captures wealth, property and people. He wants to possess his wife, even when she has become mad, “She’s mad but mine, mine” (108). He is engendered by the imperial tradition and his very identity is constituted by that history.

To survive, Rochester has to assert his ego and assure his dominance as he plans her transfer to England, “His decision to act is written as an act that privileges

his ego” (106) as his interior monologue is punctuated by the word “I”, which appears fifteen times. Thus Antoinette is broken up and driven mad by an encompassing ideological system through the agency of Rochester, who is guilty mainly because he conforms to the ideology that fashioned him.

Similarly, passion and madness are frequently mentioned in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Rochester notes, “everything is too much” (39) for him Antoinette’s eyes are “too large” (37), sexual passion is excessive ( 55), the noise made by crickets and frogs is “deafening” (47), the stars are “blazing” (53), the scent of the flowers is “overpoweringly strong” (49), etc. Rhys

Thus the dense tropical forest conveys the English husband’s sense of impending danger and the moon, linked to Antoinette, expresses her deteriorated mental state, “her blank hating moonstruck face” (108), and his sense of her alienation, “Not night or darkness as I knew it but night with . . . an alien moon” (53). Other typically Gothic features include the presence of the ruins in the forest (64). All these gothic features are presented to signify the unhealthy state of mind of the protagonist. In other word even in the symbolic level the novel captures the madness inherent within its female character.

However it is romanticized, madness itself offers women little possibility of resistance or productive rebellion. As Marta Caminero Santangelo argues in her aptly titled, *The Madwoman Can't Speak: Or, Why Insanity Is Not Subversive*, Bertha Mason' madness only “offers the illusion of power” (3). Protagonist’s illness becomes more severe. She seems to become delusional, instantly hating her doctor and crying about the stranger in the park. Using both fictional madwomen and women's biographical accounts of asylum experiences, Caminero Santangelo reveals the limited political efficacy of the mad subject. Similarly, Shoshana Felman writes:

Depressed and terrified women are not about to seize the means of production and reproduction quite the opposite of rebellion, madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self affirmation. Far from being a form of contestation, "mental illness" is a request for help, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration. (1997, 8)

Furthermore, and this is a crucial point for my argument here, using madness to represent women's rebellion has undesirable effects due primarily to the inevitable, as the previous quotation illustrates, slippage between "madness" and "mental illness." While Gilbert and Gubar make it clear that their discussion concerns madness as a metaphor, not mental illness in the clinical sense, this distinction proves impossible to maintain.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault argues that reason is based on the exclusion of the mentally ill, who are placed in institutions where society attempts to forget them: "It taught, then, how the soul of desiring man had become a prisoner of the beast; these grotesque faces set in the bellies of monsters belonged to the world of the great platonic metaphor and denounced the spirit's corruption in the folly of sin"(17). This came as a result of the classical age and the Cartesian concept of cogito, where sane people were supposed to be able to exercise madness from correct thinking, and mad people were those who gave primacy to their hallucinations. They were once romanticized in art, like in the proverbial ship of fools, but now they are bound to reason. Roland Barthes, in his *The Pleasure of the text* begins with these words:

Imagine someone. . . who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of

that old specter: logical contradiction; who mixes every languages, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity; who remains passive in the face of Socratic irony (leading the interlocuter to the supreme disgrace: self- contradiction) and legalterrorism (how much penal evidence is based on a psychology of consistency!). Such a man would be the mockery of our society: court, school, asylum, polite conversation would cast him out :who endures contradiction without shame? now this antihero exists:he is the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure. (1)

With, but a few minor revision and reservation ,this excerpt could be used to describe Michel Foucault's concept of madness.Barthes, of course, was not explicitly writing of Foucault, but I find it hard to fathom that he could not have made the connection, at least fleetingly, as he was composing a passage. Or, more dramatically, perhaps Barthes had just been reading Foucault, talking his pleasure, when he had the thought of an anti-hero reading the anti-hero.

From this point it is revealed that she lacks the supportive role of the mother. That is why she wishes that her mother would have like Jay Cee. The lack of motherhood here could be taken as the lack of mother figure in the women writing tradition as mentioned by Annie Gottlieb:

When I began to enjoy my powers as a writer, I dreamt that my mother had me sterilized! (Even in my dreams we still blame our mothers for the punitive choices our culture forces on us.) I went after the mother figure in my dream, brandishing a large knife; on its blade was writing. I cried, 'Do you know what you are doing? You are destroying my

femaleness, my female power, which is important to me because of you!’ (53).

Women writers have faced different problems during the course of writing. The limited space and experiences do not let them compete with male writers.

Furthermore female writers lack the authorship because to take guideline they do not get their precursors in poetic tradition. So, they have the problem of socialized anxieties, a variety of physical and mental illness, including anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia.

Antoinette and Annette, her mother, are reversible, one being also the other. The title is once more significant, as the characters are caught between two realities in a no man’s land situated between the old and the new worlds, in a sea full of asexual ungraspable slippery eels. Even geographical boundaries disappear, as Antoinette says, “They tell me I’m in England, but I don’t believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don’t remember but we lost it” (117).

Madness is thus linked both to excessive passion and to loss of identity. O’Connor, like Carole Angier, notes “a dichotomy between sex and love” (89) in the novel, as Antoinette’s husband turns love into sex, then tries to destroy and possess that which he cannot understand or control. The love/sex opposition to that between a feminine “interior” world of peace and a dangerous masculine “outside” (183-86) world as mentioned by O’Connor, is expressed in Antoinette’s dreams.

Carole Angier also points out the opposition between Antoinette’s interior world and the dominant patriarchal society, “[I]ike all Jean’s heroines, Antoinette lives almost entirely in feeling, and relies on her feelings to get at the truth . . . Inside her heroine all that matters is love, but outside her, in her lover, all that matters is

money” (557). The mad but lucid Antoinette indeed reflects, “Gold is the idol they worship” (122).

Thus in the dominant patriarchal order, the expression of passion as love leads to loss of identity, because this is a world that secretly represses feeling, engendering madness as death of the soul or self. Thus Antoinette, deprived of her husband’s love, becomes a “zombie” (27) or “soucriant” (73). The “secret” that eludes Rochester is linked to Antoinette, to the island of Granbois, to magic and dream. The “secret” is love as reciprocal sharing. The secret is the “truth.” But in the dominant patriarchal order, which is upheld by the power of the word, of the letter, of the law and which is represented by the husband, love is hidden, silenced, reduced to “lies,” becoming “nothing.” As her husband:

So I shall never understand why, suddenly, bewilderingly, I was certain that all I had imagined to be truth was false. False. Only the magic and the dream are true — all the rest’s a lie. Let it go. Here is the secret. Here. (*But it is lost, that secret, and those who know it cannot tell it.*) Not lost. I had found it in a hidden place and I’d keep it, hold it fast. As I’d hold her. (109)

But he chooses the reason of the dominant order, “All the mad conflicting emotions had left me wearied and empty. Sane” (112). And Antoinette is “only a memory to be avoided, locked away, and like all memories a legend. Or a lie” (113).

Part Second of the novel, which marks the disappearance of the husband from the narrative scene, ends with the words, “Who would have thought that any boy would cry like that. For nothing. Nothing . . .” (113), “nothing” being Rhys’ final name for love. Thus the genesis and nature of madness is unmasked as repression of all that is ‘other.’ But Rhys is not content with making visible the secret lies of

patriarchy. The unnamed husband is himself reduced to nothingness and Antoinette is given the last word, her voice taking over the final section of the novel.

Moreover, in the Part Three, the feminine subtext symbolically explodes to the surface in a blaze that destroys this dominant discourse. Red metaphorically signifies reprehensible passion, with Antoinette and with her red-soiled island throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As such, it is repeatedly repressed by her husband, as he symbolically blows out "the candles at Granbois" (93), prefers her white (for innocence) dress (80) and rejects the flame-red dress she identifies herself with as "intemperate and unchaste" (120).

This tendency to suppress the colour red is reversed in the third part of the novel. As Antoinette takes her red dress "that has a meaning" (119) from the cupboard in the red-curtained room in which she has asked Grace Poole to light a fire and is reminded of the "colour of fire and sunset" and of "flamboyant flowers" (119). The colour red literally suffuses the text, as everything associated with red is repeated again and again, echoing through the pages. The red of flames invades the final pages as Antoinette dreams she sets fire to "their world . . . made of cardboard" (116), thus symbolically destroying the dominant patriarchal order that is upheld by discourse and opening the way to a different vision of reality. Instead of really setting fire to Thornfield as Bertha does, Antoinette metaphorically sets fire to the discourse which perpetuates the repressive patriarchal order and to the book which engendered her.

Antoinette does not actually die or set fire to Thornfield at the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She only dreams her act of revenge and her death. But the dream ending is different. In her dream Antoinette does not die like Bertha, smashed up on the pavement of Thornfield. She does not fall onto the "hard stones" (123) of her

stone-walled prison (34), where the man who is cold and dead like a “stone” (95) has imprisoned her.

Instead, she jumps to freedom as her “hair streams out like wings” (123) and she hears Coco, the parrot, which in obeah is associated with the soul, and sees the flame tree, “which lifts up the buried soul when it flowers” (123). She does not jump to her future in a past text. Instead, she lands in the past with Tia in the pool at Coulibri as Eurocentricism is reversed, the past cancels out the present and dream triumphs over reality, “Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it” (123).

Only then does she walk along the passage with her candle to accomplish the ending in another book, transferring the revenge to another text, “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do” (123). She does not cross the gap from dream to reality in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. One of the most prominent part of the novel as writing women madness is that the protagonist who is regarded as mad woman herself insists to write her story. As Helene Cixous writes, in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, “Writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement, of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (quoted in Carr 81).

Madness now becomes a power as Marta Caminero-Santiago suggests that madness gives the “illusion of power” (125) since it reveals the female's anger in writing. She further mentions that scholars like Elaine Showalter and Bertha-critics, “Those for whom she symbolizes sexual desire and those for whom she symbolizes female anger” (286), dismiss how women use their madness to their advantage. This research, keeping these aspects of women madness into the consideration, argues that Antoinette uses her madness to gain agency as a means to subvert patriarchal

hegemony. Antoinette strategically incorporates the historic manifestations of madness to access power typically reserved for men.

Central character Antoinette gains power by writing her own story. Tyson discusses how the mother-daughter connection leads to Helene Cixous' idea of "mad woman" (92). Rhy's Antoinette utilizes her madness to unfold a story born from a distant mother-daughter relationship. Placing a madwoman in a central narrating role, Rhys shows the madwoman is not marginalized but a part of society which since the history of Bertha's generation has become the symbol of revolt against male dominated society and writing tradition.

As mentioned by Gunner, Helene Cixous argues that by females "writing themselves into history, [they] have often produced startling and dissonant accounts of themselves" (136). The version of womanhood women provide debases stereotypical beliefs. The mad woman subject matter is the form or own tradition of female writings. Gilbert and Gubar deal with the lack of writings from the viewpoint of the other as they mentions, "how difficult it is for women even to attempt the pen" (609).

The determination of Antoinette to write the fiction with the account of the story of her own madness which is expressed at the end of the novel captures that madness for women is their writing trend and through it they could wrestle against patriarchy as well as against the male dominated writing tradition. Antoinette not only uses the pen but also masters the pen. As quoted by Toril Moi states, "The monster woman is the woman who has a story to tell" (153).

Antoinette in this sense has the power of monster woman to wrestle against patriarchal domination because she has the subject matter to write. She dictates her story from beginning to end. Therefore she is free to show her version of femaleness

since Manisty mentions, "The monster woman is free to show her version of femaleness" (153). Rochester's narrative is subject to Antoinette's writings because throughout part two of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's dialogue enhances Rochester's narrative as the revolt against the patriarchal perspectives.

Antoinette's writing voice subverts the belief that women are dependent on men. She dismantles the structure of writing tradition as stated by Helene Cixous, "madness works to dismantle structures" (125). Antoinette does not need a man to tell her story despite the fact as mentioned by Hirsch, "female experience is shaped by male expectations and structures and virtually unrecorded by women themselves" (201). Even though Antoinette dies, she does not become the victim of her story being told by the other living in particular by the males.

Rochester has the middle, not necessarily a central, narrative because he lacks knowledge and language to explain what happens to Antoinette. Antoinette's voice provides the scaffolding for Rochester's depiction of events. The placement of Rochester's encounter is an as Abel says, "attempt [to maintain] a rigid order" (173) over everything. Rochester's failure to maintain order is evident in his backwards trajectory of his narrative. When Rochester writes, he cannot finish what he begins, and the narration must be written when the event happens.

For example, after having sex with Antoinette, Rochester does not "remember that day clearly" (139). He can only write parts of what he intends to and what he begins to write is out of order. However, Antoinette can write a linear narrative even in her state of madness. Antoinette's narrative needs Rochester's narrative in order to be realized, but Rochester's narrative is an unrealized dream because only the female madness could maintain their actual reality. Without Antoinette, the story cannot exist. Antoinette's story and death show how her dream of autonomy comes to

fruition because she dares to be mad enough to make it come true. In this sense, the madness for female author is the medium to wrestle against the male centric writing tradition or narration. The reality only could be revealed through mad woman's narration.

In Judith Butler's words, "if the subject who speaks is also constituted by the language that she or he speaks, then language is the condition of possibility for the speaking subject, and not merely its instrument of expression" (28), repetition with a difference can break free from the binary structures of established power and suggest the possibility of reconfiguration and re-signification. *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be read as a 'post-feminist' work, as part of what Drucilla Cornell, in *Beyond Accommodation*, names 'ethical feminism.' This is different from a feminism that acts on the real world in the aim of achieving equality by either reversing the hierarchy between men and women or by entering male spheres of power. She explains that such a "politics of revenge" would "only reverse the gender hierarchy, not displace it. Such a reversal would not be liberation, but only perpetuation, even if women were to finally be on top" (11). Keeping these criticisms and the subject matter of the novel into the consideration, it could be claimed that Jean Rhys by rewriting the Bertha's madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* revives the poetic space of female with own subject matter when the mad woman stands as the revolt against patriarchal domination both in society and writing tradition and her protagonist herself writes her story of madness.

### III. Gender Stigma as the Poetic Space of Woman Writer

Representation of mad woman in women's literature is the common feature of female writers of Victorian period as their own poetic space of writing. It is used as their autonomous mode of writing trend. The woman writers like Bronte sisters used such female figures to represent the gender inequality and exploitation in different manners as the revolt against the gender inequalities. From this point the madness of woman is not limited within a form of fictional writings but also it has got space in theoretical framework while the critic deals with the madness as a revolt against male dominated writing tradition. Keeping this theoretical concept into the consideration, this research has traced the stigma of female character as a cause of gender discrimination in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette is a stigmatized character who due to the gender discrimination and exploitation by her husband.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette conveys the story of her life from childhood to her arranged marriage to an unnamed Englishman with the accounts of her madness. Antoinette, whom her husband renames Bertha, descends into madness which makes her obliged to live the imprisoned life within the country house of London while she determines to write her own story of madness which is one of the factor of the text that claims the madness for female author is the poetic persona, a space of writing as well as a medium to resist the patriarchal ideology.

The madness of Antoinette itself reflects the plight and suffering of high class Victorian wives and mother, the limited social space and the negligence of the male towards her make them obliged to live the lives of imprisonment in their own territory. In this sense, the madness, hysteria, schizophrenia etc. are the results of gender discrimination in Victorian society. Antoinette is one of such characters who live the representative life of gender discrimination and stigmatized figure.

To give the emphasis on Antoinette's madness and her consciousness to reveal her story through writing in male dominated society, this research work has taken the references from poetic space of woman and their anxiety according to Emily Dickenson, Jane Austin, Gilbert and Gubar as well as Elaine Showalter. Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* affords an entirely different narration when she tells the story of Bertha, whose real name is Antoinette. Her husband proposes to Antoinette because he is penniless and he automatically obtains possession of her fortune when they marry. This young Creole woman is trapped between two worlds, constantly at the mercy of the men around her. She is the traditional silenced daughter and wife; a hybrid, unwanted by the British and rejected by her own people which leads her to the madness.

There are various reasons behind her madness, her husband marries her due to her property, he even cheats her by sleeping with her own servant, even her jealous half caste brother Daniel writes a slanderous letter about her to her husband, everyone betrays her. English law too gives hire ship of property to the husband and society there is the role of husband. Thus, there is the patriarchal ideology which makes mad woman. She, instead of being a loving husband, her husband is cruel and even challenges her identify by calling her Bertha, her mad mother's name.

This research, by analyzing Antoinette who is from good family background but due to the nature of gender biased husband who makes her imprisoned inside her own house in the accuse of mad woman and finally determines to write her story of madness comes in conclusion is her madness is the result of patriarchal social structure and her determination of writing on her own madness as the revolt against patriarchal ideology or creating writing space for own.

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