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**MASTER'S THESIS**

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**Comparison of Narrative Voices: Antoinette Cosway from *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Susan Barton from *Foe***

**Usporedba narativnih glasova: Antoinette Cosway iz romana *Wide Sargasso Sea* i Susan Barton iz romana *Foe***

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this thesis is to analyze and compare the postcolonial novels *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *Foe* by J. M. Coetzee in terms of their narrative voices and cryptic endings. The analysis is based on already existing literature that is relevant for this topic, and it is done by looking at the different narrative layers and themes of the two novels. As it is necessary for readers to understand the context and the background of these works, this thesis also explores the definitions of colonial and postcolonial studies and some of their basic ideas and concepts. Since the author of this thesis is a student of the teacher education program, the second part of this paper is dedicated to forming a connection between literature studies and teacher education by researching how postcolonial literature can be included in English language teaching in high schools and how it is received by students. The research consists of a class held for a group of high school students, focusing on the novels *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*, and a questionnaire that was given to the students after the class. The results show that the students greatly enjoyed discussing the two novels and that incorporating postcolonial literature in high school English classes can be of great benefit.

Key words: postcolonial studies, narrative voices, narrative layers, cryptic endings

## Apstrakt

Cilj ovog rada jeste analizirati i uporediti postkolonijalne romane *Wide Sargasso Sea* autorice Jean Rhys i *Foe* autora J. M. Coetzeea u pogledu njihovih narativnih glasova i tajnovitih završetaka. Analiza se temelji na već postojećoj literaturi koja je relevantna za ovu temu, a provodi se proučavanjem različitih narativnih slojeva i tema ovih dvaju romana. Kako je za čitatelje neophodno razumjeti kontekst i pozadinu ovih djela, ovaj rad također istražuje definicije kolonijalnih i postkolonijalnih studija i neke od njihovih osnovnih ideja i koncepata. Budući da je autorica ove teze studentica nastavnčkog smjera, drugi dio ovog rada je posvećen stvaranju veze između studija književnosti i nastave, istražujući kako postkolonijalna književnost može biti uključena u nastavu engleskog jezika u srednjim školama i kakva je reakcija studenata na nju. Istraživanje se sastoji od časa engleskog jezika održanog jednom odjeljenju srednjoškolaca, fokusirajući se na romane *Wide Sargasso Sea* i *Foe*, i upitnika koji su studenti dobili nakon časa. Rezultati pokazuju da su učenici uistinu uživali u raspravi o ova dva romana i da uključivanje postkolonijalne literature u srednjoškolske časove engleskog jezika može biti od velike koristi.

Ključne riječi: postkolonijalne studije, narativni glasovi, narativni slojevi, tajnoviti završeci

## Introduction

The period of colonization was long and arduous, harming many nations under the guise of help and civilization. Today, we are fortunately able to recognize the negative effects that this process had and the ways in which it affected various people and their cultures. A big reason for this is postcolonialism. While the term itself tends to reject any precise definitions or limitations, there are some general concepts and ideas which we can agree are the product of this era. Some of the more well-known postcolonial authors, such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, have provided us with great and valuable insight into the minds of the colonized people. Through their theories and discussions, we are able to identify and criticize aspects of colonization that have, by force, caused many to disown their standard ways of life and their beliefs, in order to adapt to the Western ideals. While these theoretical works are the basis of postcolonialism, its true spirit lives in the fictional stories that are reflections of real-world situations and scenarios.

The novel genre was especially popular for postcolonial authors, allowing them to present the readers in their respective countries of origin, but also the general public across the world with something more easily digestible and understandable. These stories have, over time, gained a worldwide readership and have caught the attention of many different people from diverse backgrounds. This interest seems to be a clear indication that people are able and willing to sympathize with the colonized nations and their struggles, by learning more about their experiences. Postcolonial authors have given a voice to the silenced people; they have written stories that try to accurately depict the horrors of imperialism and colonization, and, most would agree, succeeded in doing so. To better understand this period in general it is important to take a closer look at its definitions, certain basic concepts (the Subaltern, the Other), its usage of the novel genre and language, as well as the presentation of women and the female voice in postcolonial literature. The first few sections of this Final Diploma Paper will be dedicated to precisely these topics.

For its main part, this paper will focus on two postcolonial novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, and *Foe* by J. M. Coetzee. Both of these writers, despite their origin as descendants of white European settlers in former British colonies, have some sort of a “personal” experience with colonization, as Rhys was born and grew up in the Caribbean island of Dominica, and Coetzee was born in South Africa – countries which have both been colonies at some point. The authors’ brilliance has been rightfully recognized by the many



awards they have received throughout their lives, for their work and contribution. Some of the more notable ones are the Order of the British Empire awarded to Rhys for her writing in 1978, and the Nobel Prize in Literature won by Coetzee in 2003.

Both of the novels have riveting stories and deal with very important themes which are relevant even today. The narration found in these two works is some of the most talked and written about from the postcolonial period, showing the impact that these novels have had. Thus, this paper will attempt to shed light on the narrative voices of Antoinette Cosway, *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s protagonist, and Susan Barton, the protagonist of *Foe*, while also comparing the two. Along with this, special attention will be given to the endings of the novels, which are full of mystery and intrigue. The discussion and analysis will be guided by referring to primary texts and secondary critical sources relevant to this topic. Lastly, this paper will also have a research-based section dedicated to bridging the gap between postcolonial literature and teacher education, or, more specifically, seeing how postcolonial literature can be used in teaching English as a foreign language in high schools.

## I PART ONE

### 1. Theoretical Framework

The basis of this thesis will consist of the background knowledge and theory found in various books and articles pertaining to the topics of literary theory, colonialism and postcolonialism, postcolonial history, analyses of the two novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*, and any other source that may be relevant to the topic. Within this wide array of sources, there are five main ones that this thesis will focus on.

The work titled *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* by Firdous Azim serves as one of the two main sources of general colonial, postcolonial, and anti-imperial theory. In this work, Azim provides a connection between feminism and anti-imperialism, focusing on the silencing and exclusion of women and people of color through the novel genre.<sup>1</sup> As the protagonists of both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* are female, it is important to explore this connection and see how it potentially affects the narrative style and voice chosen for these novels.

The second source of similar nature is *Textual Politics from Slavery to Postcolonialism* by Carl Plasa. Here we find another approach to the history of postcolonialism, as Plasa covers six different works (including *Wide Sargasso Sea*) by analyzing them through the lens of postcolonial topics, such as slavery, mimicry, colonialism, intertextuality, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the specific attention given to WSS, which will be of great use for this thesis, the entire book itself provides us with necessary postcolonial context which allows us to better understand the era itself and certain terminology related to it.

For our discussion and analysis of *Foe*, this thesis will reference the article titled “Deconstructing Defoe: the Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*” by Chongyi Liang, as well as the article “Father to my story”: Writing *Foe*, De-Authorizing (De)Foe” by Manuel Almagro Jiménez. Liang’s article gives us insight into the specifics of *Foe*’s narrative structure through a detailed discussion of the three narrative layers it consists of, and ultimately questioning the credibility of its narration.<sup>3</sup> Adding onto this, Jiménez mentions the interrelation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Firdous Azim, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, Routledge, London, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Plasa, *Textual Politics from Slavery to Postcolonialism*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, p. 1.

political, literary, and theoretical values of *Foe*, with a focus on various issues which can affect the mechanics of text construction, such as: “the proper way a story should be written, the relationship between representation and its referent in the real, the problem of realism, or the question of authorship.”<sup>4</sup> Together, these two texts will be used as a point of reference for this thesis and the concrete analysis of the narrative voice in *Foe*.

Lastly, the article titled ““Like in a Looking-Glass”: History and Narrative in Wide Sargasso Sea” by Lee Erwin will be this thesis’ starting point for its analysis of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In his paper, Erwin talks about various aspects of WSS which contribute to its complex narrative and history, claiming that there are “two major narratives [which are] mutually implicated.”<sup>5</sup> Just like the two texts mentioned above, concerning *Foe*, this text will help us delve deeper into the narrative structure of WSS and its proper analysis.

### **1.1. Colonial and Postcolonial Studies**

Looking at the world’s history from today’s perspective, it is easy to identify and categorize certain events as either “positive” or “negative”. War, pestilence, famine – it does not take a lot of thought to realize that these things should be avoided at all cost. Nowadays, we can add colonization to this list as well. However, some years ago, it was simply a part of life. Colonizers saw themselves as “saviors”; all they were doing is helping “uncivilized savages” become “normal” and domesticated. Unfortunately, “civilized”, back in the day, actually just meant “Western European”. Diverse cultures, languages, beliefs, traditions, and religions were being destroyed and torn apart because they did not align with European values. This led to the disappearance of many indigenous nations and the silencing of minorities.

During the era of decolonization and, afterward, postcolonialism, European, colonization was put under a microscope and carefully analyzed and dissected. In this process, some of the truth quickly became obvious – these cultures were not wild and untamed, they were simply different. Many of the authors of this period heavily criticized European colonization, as it was glaringly obvious that that was not something we, as humans, can gloss over and move on from easily. Some of the most well-known authors from

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<sup>4</sup> Manuel A. Jiménez, “‘Father to my story’: writing *Foe*, de-authorizing (De)Foe”, *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingles*, No. 18, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Lee Erwin, ““Like in a Looking-Glass’: History and Narrative in Wide Sargasso Sea”, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1989, p. 156.

this time are Edward Said and his work titled *Orientalism*, which presents the West's inaccurate depiction and portrayal of "The East" (the Orient); Homi K. Bhabha and his concepts of hybridity and mimicry; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with her work *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, and many others.

It is undeniable that there is an immense interest in postcolonial studies, particularly in this re-evaluation of colonial history. While the ultimate goal is to expand this interest and our collective knowledge about the topic, simply taking a look at the current state of people's attitudes towards colonialism and postcolonialism shows us that the change of people's beliefs about colonialism has been quite significant. In the words of Leela Gandhi:

"[P]ostcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past. The process of returning to the colonial scene discloses a relationship of reciprocal antagonism and desire between coloniser and colonized."<sup>6</sup>

The terms "revisiting, remembering, interrogating" are perhaps the best at summarizing the idea of postcolonialism – through it we look back at the history, teach future generations about it so that it may never be forgotten, and, most importantly, we take it apart and analyze it so that we can avoid repeating the same mistakes. This notion is exactly why postcolonial studies are so important and necessary in today's world. The colonial aftermath requires therapeutic theory which helps with remembering and recalling the colonial past.<sup>7</sup> This act of remembering, while painful and maybe even jarring to some, is ultimately necessary in order to achieve progress. Homi K. Bhabha touches upon this concept of memory, by saying:

"Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, as a way of arriving at some sort of closure of one's trauma, one must put together the pieces of their past, like a puzzle; assembling them into something that they can make sense of. A lot of us do this in our daily lives, perhaps without realizing it, or through therapy or other means of facing our "demons". This is precisely what lies at the core of

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<sup>6</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Edinburgh University Press, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 63.

postcolonialism – challenging the beliefs and the status quo of the past so that we may create a better future.

It is important to also take a moment during this discussion to reflect on the term itself – “postcolonialism”. The prefix *post-* implies that this is a period following the end of colonization/colonialism, a period during which the world is completely free of colonists and their grasp, but the reality is that this is far from the truth. As Ania Loomba puts it:

“[T]he prefix ‘post’ complicates matters because it implies an ‘aftermath’ in two senses—temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting. It is the second implication which critics of the term have found contestable: if the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased, it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism. A country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and/or culturally dependent) at the same time.”<sup>9</sup>

Colonialism has left a huge impact on the colonized nations and even though formal decolonization has happened, the colonized countries and people have been left scarred. How fair is it to talk about a period of postcolonization while, as seen mentioned in the quote above, certain countries are still dependent on others in various ways? Furthermore, the very time span of postcolonialism is brought into question. As formal decolonization spans about three centuries, depending on what region of the world one is looking at, how do we define the exact moments it began and ended? Colonized nations challenged their colonizers in different ways and through different means, as not all of them were oppressed in the same respect. Loomba continues to question this narrative by stating that the politics of decolonization in parts of Latin America or Australia or South Africa where white settlers formed their independent nations is different from the dynamics of those societies where indigenous populations overthrew their European masters.<sup>10</sup> Through all of this, it is quite clear that the term “postcolonialism” is relatively imprecise and inadequate in describing the period of history following colonialism.

Within the context of academic studies, professor Paul Brians explains postcolonialism as the following:

“Taken literally, the term “postcolonial literature” would seem to label literature written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. This is undoubtedly what the term originally meant, but there are many problems with this

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<sup>9</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Routledge, London, 2015, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

definition. First, literal colonization is not the exclusive object of postcolonial study. Lenin's classic analysis of imperialism led to Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" which distinguishes between literal political dominance and dominance through ideas and culture (what many critics of American influence call the "Coca-Colanization" of the world)."<sup>11</sup>

Brians goes on to mention another example of non-literal colonization, such as neo-imperialism used to label relationships like that between the U.S. and many Latin American countries, and the term "banana republic", which was originally a sarcastic label for such subjugated countries. He also brings up the fact that works such as Claude McKay's *Banjo* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, although considered postcolonial literature, were in fact written while the nations in question (Jamaica and Nigeria) were still colonies.<sup>12</sup> These notions and examples give evidence which further supports the idea that 'postcolonialism' is not a well-defined term and that it needs to be understood with all these different contexts and explanations in mind.

## 1.2. Concepts of the Other and the Subaltern

During the analysis of the works *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* in this thesis, multiple references will be made to certain postcolonial terms, which help us better understand the position of the narrators in these novels. Thus, it is necessary to first go over these terms and define them.

Edward Said, in his famous work titled *Orientalism*, discusses how the West (Europe, at the time) perceived the East (the Orient). This presentation was a very negative one, which portrayed the colonized nations as uncivilized, barbaric, and in need of help and education, which the West was readily available to offer. This relationship, however, served mainly the West, as it presented them in a "positive" light, as the superiors. The East, in this context, has been labeled as "the Other", with the West being the "center"; the point of reference – "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."<sup>13</sup> Following this work, "the Other" has been used to describe those who were oppressed, exploited, and dominated through colonization. The ways in which colonized

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Brians, "'Postcolonial Literature': Problems with the Term", *Postcolonialism*, 1998, World Literature Index, Retrieved May 27, 2021 from: [brians.wsu.edu/2016/10/19/postcolonial-literature-problems-with-the-term/](http://brians.wsu.edu/2016/10/19/postcolonial-literature-problems-with-the-term/).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978, pp. 1-2.

nations were described were, of course, rarely ever true and accurate. As Said states in his book: “Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment.”<sup>14</sup> “Material investment” here refers to academic scholarship, art, literature, political writing, common sense, and so on. “The Othering”, as it has become known, serves to create stereotypes, prejudices, biases, and discrimination based on various factors (race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age...). It is the ‘us versus them’ mentality, which puts one person’s group at the center, in a seemingly favorable position, and everyone else on the perimeter labeled as “worse than us”.

Similarly to Said, another classic postcolonial author wrote about the experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups – Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her work titled *Can the Subaltern Speak?* The term “Subaltern”, which was originally coined by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher, was researched and discussed in great detail by Spivak. According to her, the individuals that are colonized become vividly subjugated, and within these groups, there is a further separation into even lower levels of society – the homeless, the unemployed, the subsistence farmers, and the day laborers. She also placed a significantly larger amount of focus on social class and women’s position in the colonized nations, as opposed to Said and Bhabha.<sup>15</sup>

What is especially relevant for this thesis, within Spivak’s work, is “the female subaltern”. Spivak claims that this group is doubly marginalized: “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.”<sup>16</sup> Her concern with the position of colonized women, as those who are unheard and misrepresented, is exactly what labels Spivak as the first postcolonial theorist with a fully feminist agenda. This does not mean that she ever tried to or wanted to speak *for* these women, but rather that she was attempting to save the female subaltern from misrepresentation. Spivak concludes that neither party allowed women to speak – the British texts constructed a position for the woman in which she is made to represent Western individualism and a superior Western civilization that emphasizes modern freedom, while the

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<sup>14</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p. 170.

<sup>16</sup> G. C. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988, p. 37.

Indian ones present her as choosing duty and tradition.<sup>17</sup> Although the female subaltern is able to speak, she is not able to be heard.

## 2. Novel Genre in Postcolonial Literature

Firstly, one must consider what exactly is meant by “postcolonial literature”. As discussed earlier in this thesis, the very term “postcolonialism” (and its derivatives) is difficult to define and succinctly explain. This can create some troubles when it comes to labeling certain literature as “postcolonial”. However, broadly speaking, if “postcolonial” refers to all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day, then we can list the literature of the following countries and regions as postcolonial literature: African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka.<sup>18</sup> While this list encompasses quite a wide array of countries, which, on the surface, might not seem like they have much in common, the proverbial Venn diagram intersection for them is the fact that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, as well as emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial center.<sup>19</sup> In their book, *The Empire Writes Back*, authors Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin mention two stages of text production in postcolonial literature: the first texts, which had been produced in the colonies in the new language (English) were frequently written by ‘representatives’ of the imperial power, and in the second stage, the literature was produced ‘under imperial license’ by ‘natives’ or ‘outcasts’.<sup>20</sup>

As one can conclude, the era of postcolonialism has produced various kinds of literature, ranging from literary theory to poetry to prose. The last type is of particular interest, led by the novel genre, in which realism and fiction are blended together. The dictionary definition of the term ‘novel’ is as follows: “an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals especially with human experience through a usually connected sequence of events.”<sup>21</sup> Within the context of postcolonial literature, the notion of

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<sup>17</sup> Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, Routledge, New York, 2007, p. 187.

<sup>18</sup> B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Novel”, In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*, Retrieved May 28, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/novel>.



“human experience” seems to be of the utmost importance, as the novel genre served to portray an “as accurate as possible” account of the events, feelings, emotions, relationships, and general life of the colonized people. As James Murphy explains:

“The representational power of the novel and its ability to give voice to a people in the assertion of their identity and their history is of primary importance to postcolonial writers and scholars. Poetry, of course, can also serve this purpose, but it is often perceived as culturally and locally specific, whereas the novel is typically understood as more accessible, communal, and public. The genre of the novel creates a world which inevitably represents and reflects the world out of which it comes.”<sup>22</sup>

These worlds created within novels, although typically fictional to some extent, take different aspects and ideas from the real world – whether it is locations, historical events, politics, or something entirely different. Through this medium, authors tackle different issues, depending on what goal they are trying to achieve. Those who have lived through the period of colonization might use the novel genre as a means of coping with and processing their emotions and memories from that time. Others find the novel to be an excellent vessel for criticism, in which they can, through metaphors and allegories, provide a social commentary on different topics. Whatever its use may be, the significance of the novel genre, especially during postcolonialism, cannot be ignored.

A particularly rewarding object of study, when it comes to the novel, is its heteroglossic structure – a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe the novel’s organization of socially diverse and competing discourses.<sup>23</sup> This mode of storytelling allows for multiple competing or cooperative voices to exist simultaneously, each one telling their version of events and their thoughts and feelings. It is immediately clear how and why this is paramount in the world of postcolonialism, as it is impossible to get an accurate portrayal of history through just one viewpoint. This is also present in the novels *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*, which will be discussed later on in this thesis.

Bakhtin also refers to the novel as a chronotope, meaning: “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature... [It] is the primary means for materializing time in space... a center for

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<sup>22</sup> James Murphy, “Postcolonial Novel”, *Postcolonial Studies*, 1996, Retrieved May 28, 2021, from <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/21/postcolonial-novel/>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

concretizing representation.”<sup>24</sup> The necessity of a relationship between time and space is clear, as those two together serve as a basis for the creation of a narrative. And certainly, for the colonized nations, time and space were the building blocks for every story, whether fictional or not.

## 2.1. Language as a Medium

Perhaps one of the most obvious yet also most complex parts of a story is the language used in it. Language as a term can be used to mean many different things, such as the system of communication used in one country or community, or the style in which one speaks and writes. For the purposes of postcolonial literature, both of these aspects are to be taken into consideration.

Firstly, there is the question of which language should be used in postcolonial literature? Does one use English, or any other language of European colonizers, such as French, Dutch, Spanish or Portuguese, in order to reach a bigger audience and possibly educate a larger number of people, or should one stick to their native tongue, so as to preserve the symbolism and sentiment behind creating a piece of work that serves as a response to colonization? Fortunately, the act of translating a work is not as exhausting and time-consuming nowadays as it might have been at one point in history, which is to say that those who are interested in researching postcolonial literature can easily find translated versions of works that were written in their native languages. Of course, we also must not ignore the fact that not every version of English is the same. *The Empire Writes Back* talks about the differentiation between English (capital E) and english (lowercase e), as seen in the following quote:

“In practice the history of this distinction between English and english has been between the claims of a powerful ‘centre’ and a multitude of intersecting usages designated as ‘peripheries’. The language of these ‘peripheries’ was shaped by an oppressive discourse of power. Yet they have been the site of some of the most exciting and innovative literatures of the modern period and this has, at least in part,

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<sup>24</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, in: Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, Trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1981, p. 84.

been the result of the energies uncovered by the political tension between the idea of a normative code and a variety of regional usages.”<sup>25</sup>

The conclusion one can draw from this is that English serves a purpose in certain contexts, but it is important to not forget its origin and influence. Additionally, if we want to expand our knowledge and awareness, we must find a way to get closer to other cultures and nations, which in some situations might mean having to read and analyze translated texts. Ideally, digging deeper to try and discover the meaning and the background of certain words and terminology of another language, while reading its translated version, can only further help us understand it better and perhaps even relate to it.

Ludwig Wittgenstein uses the term ‘language games’ to describe how meaning is co-constructed, resulting in a process characterized as inter-subjective, unfinished, unresolved, dialogical, multiple, spontaneously emergent, situational and contextual.<sup>26</sup> All of the utterances of any language gain their meaning from those who have created them. However, these persons do not hold ultimate control or power over those utterances, as language is constantly evolving and changing, and words possess the full ability to develop a different meaning over time or even fall out of use entirely.

The second question one can pose is which style of language should be used in postcolonial literature? Or, more aptly, what meaning do the different styles of writing convey in these stories? According to the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, language is the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and through which the concepts of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established.<sup>27</sup> Language can be extremely powerful if used correctly and by the right (or wrong, depending on the context) people. This is why, even nowadays, certain words hold immense amounts of power, and why certain communities and groups of people stay away from such words or try to reclaim them (e.g. ni\*\*er, also known as the n-word).

On the other hand, Karen Barad argues that language has been granted too much power, referring to this obsession with language as representationalism where the focus is on correspondence between descriptions and reality<sup>28</sup> and which, according to Barad,

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<sup>25</sup> B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983.

<sup>27</sup> B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham/London, 2007, p. 135.

characterizes both social constructivist and traditional realist approaches. Authors Boje, Jørgensen, and Strand further elaborate on this idea:

“Instead of liberation of a plurality of voices, a tyranny of monologic narrative rationality has emerged as dominant groups have colonized how we should speak, how events should be interpreted, what is appropriate and in-appropriate language etc., no matter how matter is composed.

In other words, representationalism is a discursive construction that has gradually been removed from the realm of everyday speech as an effect of the apparatus of modernity of separating things into entities and of constructing dualities of language (actors, meaning) and materiality (structures, matter).”<sup>29</sup>

The multiple ways of interpreting, handling, and approaching language and its (lack of) power are evident. What seems to be the case with postcolonial literature is that the language used in it has been utilized in such a way to accurately show both the loss and the recovery of power by those who have been subjugated. Although, it is necessary to mention the downsides of the language used in these works. Loomba believes that some of the significant writings in the area of postcolonialism are very complex and difficult to understand and that the language and expression used in the postcolonial texts have to be easier to understand so that the intellectuals who are interested in postcolonialism may come to terms with the recent developments taking place in the area.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2. The Postcolonial Female Voice

One of the limitations of historical documentation is the exclusion and marginalization of women and their contributions, which has created the challenge of ascertaining what the thoughts of women actually were over the centuries.<sup>31</sup> Certain postcolonial authors have addressed this issue, attempting to create works that could be classified as feminist literature, or which at least have feminist markings. One of the perhaps most popular fictional works of this nature is Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, which has been celebrated as a text where the female author, the female protagonist, and the female reader

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<sup>29</sup> D. M. Boje, K. M. Jørgensen and A. M. Camille Strand, “Towards a Postcolonial Storytelling Theory of Management and Organization”, *Journal of Management Philosophy*, 2011, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, Routledge, London, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> A. D. Effiong and S. Inyang, “Chapter Two: A Brief History and Classification of Feminism”, in D. Oluwagbemi-Jacob, M. Egbai and A. Effiong, eds., *A General Introduction to Feminism and Feminist Philosophy*, CreateSpace, 2018, p. 8.

are joined together in sisterly harmony and recognition.<sup>32</sup> The two works which this thesis deals with, J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* are also often mentioned within the context of this topic. On the level of postcolonial literary theory, it is impossible to talk about feminism without mentioning an author that has already been referenced in this paper, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. When asked to define the word 'woman', she has stated the following: "My own definition of woman is very simple. It rests on the word 'man'."<sup>33</sup> It is difficult to interpret this quote as anything else but signaling the oppression women face from the very beginning of their lives. They are defined by the men around them, stemming from the very word that is used to label their sex.

The position of women in society has certainly improved over the years, but unfortunately, they are still not entirely equal to men. The wage gap, misogyny, sexual assault cases, and portrayal of women in media as weak and emotional, all play a role in the oppression of women. The crown atop all of these issues is the current societal system: patriarchy. Chris Weedon's definition of patriarchy tells us the following:

"The term 'patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organization of procreation to the internalized norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference."

In the same way that postcolonialism deals with the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, postcolonial feminism addresses a similar relationship but on a smaller scale – between men and women. These two relationships are comparable, with men being the metaphorical "colonizers" and women being the ones who are subjugated and controlled. In *Foe*, we see this primarily in the relationship between Susan Barton and Mr. Foe. Susan, the female protagonist, is desperately trying to get her story out there, to be listened to and heard by others. However, while it is Susan's story, Mr. Foe is the one who has all of the control over it. Without his help, she is unable to do much with the events she has experienced and gone through. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the female oppression is even more obvious, as Antoinette Cosway is subjected to the whims and wishes of her husband, who cares little about what she truly wants and needs.

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<sup>32</sup> Firdous Azim, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 172.

<sup>33</sup> G. C. Spivak, "Feminism and Critical Theory", in: David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, Pearson Education Inc., New York, 2000, p. 477.

Going back to *Jane Eyre*, Azim gives us the following summary of the novel:

“As autobiography and *Bildungsroman*, *Jane Eyre* traces the development of the central narrator from childhood to young womanhood. The main theme is thus the development of a central narrative voice, as the character, Jane Eyre, ‘learns’ a use of language, while spinning the tale of her life and locating her identity and subjectivity within that narrative. The central identity is posited in the text, most crucially, in conjunction with an Otherfigure, that of Bertha Mason.”<sup>34</sup>

Azim goes on to analyze the relationship between the characters of Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason (Antoinette in *WSS*), showing them as different manifestations of the same subject, whose relationship is always mediated by the white, English male – Rochester.<sup>35</sup> Although on the surface, Jane might seem like a true representation of a feminist, being that she is presented as having courage, sharp wit, and determination, by analyzing the novel in more detail, we can see that she is also an unfortunate victim of the patriarchy, and even more so, the expectations and rules of the Victorian era, which tended to be especially harsh towards women. Still, Jane Eyre’s attitude and approach to life inspire many because she dares to stand up to the oppressors, as seen in the following excerpt:

“Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.”<sup>36</sup>

### 3. Theoretical Background of *Wide Sargasso Sea*

The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a postcolonial work of fiction, which took inspiration from real-life settings and events that happened during the period of colonization, and as such, it is an indispensable source of material when discussing postcolonial literature. Initially, it went through a few different name ideas, such as *La Revenant* and *The First Mrs. Rochester*, before its author, Jean Rhys, settled on the name which we currently know it by.

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<sup>34</sup> Firdous Azim, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 174.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>36</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Smith, Elder & Co, London, 1847, Planet eBook, <https://www.planetebook.com/jane-eyre/>, p. 167.

Beyond being labeled as a postcolonial work, it is also a feminist prequel to the previously mentioned novel by Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*. It was published in 1966, but it is set in the period of decolonization of the Caribbean, specifically immediately after the Emancipation Act in 1833.

The Caribbean was a British colony during the 1830s and it is one of the countries which were severely affected by the colonization process during the Victorian Age. The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 brought new hope and opportunities for black people in this region, as they could finally be formally free men and women. From 1834 to 1838, a system was put in place, called “Apprenticeship”, which was intended to help both the former slaves and the planters who relied on their labor to transition more smoothly. Unfortunately, this did not fully ensure that suffering has ended, especially if someone was already considered more vulnerable and weak, such as being a female or being a Creole. It is particularly these two labels of one’s identity that Rhys chose to focus on in her novel, and the combination of them has led to the concept known as ‘double-colonization’, which is a term coined by Peterson & Rutherford,<sup>37</sup> and describes the oppression on two fronts that Creole women face.

In this novel, Rhys took an already existing character, that of Bertha Mason (“the madwoman in the attic”<sup>38</sup>) from *Jane Eyre*, and decided to give her a proper background and story. In *WSS*, Bertha becomes Antoinette Cosway, a Creole heiress, as the novel describes her childhood and later on her marriage to Mr. Rochester. Antoinette becomes trapped in a patriarchal society, in-between two worlds, belonging to neither black nor white communities. This story explores a plethora of important themes, which can be listed as follows: racism, racial and cultural identity, cultural assimilation, sense of displacement, oppression, feminism, relationships between men and women, emotional fragility, and madness. The fact that Jean Rhys is a Dominican woman herself adds additional credibility and authenticity to this work, as her personal life greatly affected her literary work and it has certainly helped her shape Antoinette’s character, with Rhys once stating: “I have only ever written about myself.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Azmat, “Double Colonization in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*: A Postcolonial Feminist Critique”, *European Academic Research*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2018, p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press, London, 1979.

<sup>39</sup> Shima Peimanfard, “Antoinette the Outsider: The Representation of Hybridity and Mimicry in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 2016, p. 15.

### 3.1. Creolization and Hybridity

As previously mentioned, the Slavery Abolition Act, although good in theory, proved to be quite dangerous for some, in practice. Such was the case with Creole people – a person of European descent born especially in the West Indies or Spanish America.<sup>40</sup> This process of creolization is described by Cristina-Georgiana Voicu:

“Creolization means more than just mixture; it involves the creation of new cultures. However, the cultural processes of creolization are not simply a matter of constant pressure from the center toward the periphery, but a much more creative interplay of creole elements.”<sup>41</sup>

In the period of decolonization, Creoles held a very difficult position in society, as they often felt a lack of belonging to either of the two ethnic groups. This was further enforced by the prejudices, stereotypes, and hatred for Creole people which existed among both white and black communities. Examples of this can be found throughout Rhys’ novel, which begins with the sentence: “They say when the trouble comes close ranks and so the white people did.”<sup>42</sup> Later on in the novel, we see how Antoinette is treated by someone who is supposed to be her friend – a black girl named Tia. Among other things, Tia throws a rock at Antoinette, which injures her, as the Creole girl and her family were escaping a house fire. This violent act confirms that she is not wanted by the black population and that she must remain separate and isolated from them.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Antoinette frequently gets called a “white cockroach”<sup>44</sup> by black people, and a “white ni\*\*er”<sup>45</sup> by white people. The distrust that existed between white and black people, and both of these groups and Creoles, is almost palpable in every sense. The loss of identity which Creole women experienced is described by Evelyn O’Callaghan:

“With neither blackness, nor Englishness, nor economic independence to sustain her, [the white Creole woman] is excluded from all groups that matter to her and subjected to cruel paradoxes: having privilege without power; sharing oppression with the

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<sup>40</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Creole”, In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*, Retrieved May 30, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/creole>.

<sup>41</sup> Cristina-Georgiana Voicu, “Caribbean Cultural Creolization”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 149, 2014, p. 999.

<sup>42</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Muhammad Azmat, “Double Colonization in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*: A Postcolonial Feminist Critique”, *European Academic Research*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2018, p. 93.

<sup>44</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.



solidarity and support of fellow victims... the product of two cultures, she is denied and despised by both.”<sup>46</sup>

Closely related to the notion of creolization is the term hybridity. The author Homi K. Bhabha was the one who further developed this term within the context of identity and literature. In his work *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha expresses his belief that the roots of hybridity are found within culture, and that this cultural hybridity “entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy”.<sup>47</sup> He also goes on to call hybridity “the Third space”, where a dialogue between cultures is established and the historical identity of a culture is viewed as a homogenizing, unifying force.<sup>48</sup> However, Peimanfard and Hanif argue that, in *WSS*, hybridity is presented as something negative, and “hybrids” (Creoles) are regarded as outsiders.<sup>49</sup> Looking back at the examples given earlier in this section, we can probably agree with their statement, seeing as how Antoinette was most certainly not praised nor celebrated among her community.

Nevertheless, Bhabha’s discussions of the notion of hybridity are one of the key elements of any discussion about postcolonialism. In the following excerpt, he summarizes his views on it:

“Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal... Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects.”<sup>50</sup>

So, according to Bhabha, hybridity is not created purely by the hybrid themselves, but by the colonial power and its forces. This notion cannot even exist without a shared history between the colonizer and the colonized, which results in the ambiguous position of a hybrid. Without having a home to call their own, they are the primary targets of alienation and displacement, which is exactly the firsthand experience that Antoinette Cosway has.

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<sup>46</sup> Evelyn O’Callaghan, *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*, Macmillan Education, London, 1993, pp. 33-34.

<sup>47</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>49</sup> Shima Peimanfard and Mohsen Hanif, “Antoinette the Outsider: The Representation of Hybridity and Mimicry in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 2016, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Homi K. Bhabha., *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 112.

### 3.2. Summary

*Wide Sargasso Sea* starts with the story of Antoinette's childhood, told from her perspective. In this first part, we see Antoinette growing up in Jamaica, surrounded by racial tensions and prejudice. Following her father's death, she is left with her mother, Annette Cosway, who eventually goes mad after the death of her son, Antoinette's younger brother, Pierre, in a house fire. Seemingly the only person who truly cares for Antoinette is one of the house servants, Christophine. In the second part, we see Antoinette's marriage to Mr. Rochester and its downfall. Antoinette tries desperately to salvage their marriage and reignite the flame, but ultimately she, like her mother, loses her sanity and is taken by Mr. Rochester to England, without her consent. The final part of the novel shows us Antoinette confined in the attic of Thornfield Hall, dreaming, quite literally, of escaping the estate and setting fire to it. The very last scene of the novel depicts Antoinette (who, at this point, can be seen as the final form of this character – Bertha Mason) taking a candle from a table and exiting the attic.

### 4. Analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*

The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a complex piece of postcolonial literature, which gives way to many different analyses and approaches. It is multilayered, and to truly understand it, we must explore all of these individual layers and reach the core of it.

The story is divided into three parts, as explained in the introduction to the novel, written by Francis Wyndham:

“The first [part] is told in the heroine's own words. In the second the young Mr. Rochester describes his arrival in the West Indies, his marriage and its disastrous sequel. The last part is once more narrated by his wife: but the scene is now England, and she writes from the attic room in Thornfield Hall...”<sup>51</sup>

As we can see, the whole story is not told by Antoinette herself, but rather the middle portion of it is narrated by her husband, Mr. Rochester. As such, it will be necessary to also take a closer look at that part of the novel, as well as the meaning behind Rhys choosing to write the story this way. Throughout this analysis, it will also be important to focus on

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<sup>51</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, pp. 11-12.

Antoinette through the lens of feminism, and the feminist aspects of the novel, as that is one of the most powerful themes in it.

Antoinette starts by saying:

“They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, ‘because she pretty like pretty self’ Christophine said.”<sup>52</sup>

In this short introductory paragraph, we are immediately introduced to the context of the novel, as well as almost all of its important characters – Antoinette, her mother, and Christophine. This opening sentence is one that cannot be forgotten easily, as it immediately places white people on the opposing side, presenting them as an enemy. The very next sentence does the same with black people – Antoinette states that the Jamaican ladies did not like her mother because of her looks, and one can assume this refers also to her outsider status, as her family had been slave owners before the Slavery Abolition Act. With this, Rhys has given us a clear description of Antoinette and her family’s situation. From the very beginning, Antoinette is shown to be a unique character, and more specifically, a unique child who is being raised in a questionable setting.

#### **4.1. Mother-Daughter Relationship**

One of the first issues we come across is the apparent lack of care or interest Annette, the mother, has about her daughter.

“A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep – it might have been cut with a knife. I hated this frown and once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her... ‘Oh, let me alone,’ she would say, ‘let me alone,’ and after I knew that she talked aloud to herself I was a little afraid of her.”<sup>53</sup>

Annette pushing her daughter away “calmly, coldly, without a word” results in Antoinette concluding that she is completely useless to her mother. In most of the scenes between the two characters, all we see is Annette wishing for her daughter to leave her alone

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<sup>52</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

and let her be. The last sentence of this excerpt solidifies the notion that their relationship is quite unhealthy, for Antoinette especially; as she directly says that she is “a little afraid” of her own mother. Yet another example of Annette’s annoyance with Antoinette’s presence can be seen in the following excerpt:

“I could see the beads of perspiration on her upper lip and the dark circles under her eyes. I started to fan her, but she turned her head away. She might rest if I left her alone, she said.”<sup>54</sup>

Annette seems not only to be disinterested in her daughter, but as if she is actively bothered by her existence and presence. Antoinette never plainly states that she is upset by this, but we can see by her reactions and attempts at interacting with her mother that she desperately wants to have some sort of a relationship with her. However, this issue only intensifies once it becomes obvious that Annette actually does care about her child, but it just so happens to be her other, male child, Pierre:

“I did not see my mother move she was so quick. She opened the door of my room and then again I did not see her, nothing but smoke. [...] I thought Pierre is dead. He looked dead. [...] My stepfather said ‘Annette, you are hurt – your hands...’ But she did not even look at him. ‘His crib was on fire,’ she said to Aunt Cora. ‘The little room is on fire and Myra was not there. She was gone. [...] She left him, she ran away and left him alone to die...’<sup>55</sup>

This display of panic and the sense of urgency, as well as the anger Annette shows over her son not being properly taken care of, makes one wonder if she would have reacted the same way had it been Antoinette instead of Pierre, in the same or similar situation. Later on, we see a much more direct expression of Annette’s preference when it comes to her children, in the scene where Antoinette goes to visit her after the house fire:

“I put my arms round her and kissed her. She held me so tightly that I couldn’t breathe [...] I could not say, ‘He is dead,’ so I shook my head. ‘But I am here, I am here,’ I said, and she said, ‘No,’ quietly. Then ‘No nono’ very loudly and flung me from her. I fell against the partition and hurt myself.”<sup>56</sup>

Here the dislike towards her child has shifted from being only verbal to becoming physical, as Antoinette gets pushed away by her mother and gets injured – a very clear

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<sup>54</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

message that Annette is sending. This tumultuous relationship between a mother and her daughter is most likely one of the contributing factors to Antoinette's ultimate decay of sanity, and there are no doubts as to why Rhys chose to include this story in her narrative.

## 4.2. Racism and a Lack of Belonging

The next most prominent narrative layer in *WSS* is undoubtedly the issue of racism. Referring back to the section in this paper about creolization and hybridity, in the following excerpts we can see some specific examples of how Antoinette understands her own identity:

"I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches. Let sleeping dogs lie."<sup>57</sup>

"It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white ni\*\*ers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all."<sup>58</sup>

The last sentence of the second excerpt is bound to cause sympathy for this character, who so plainly states the confusion and sense of displacement that she feels, caused by her ethnicity and status in society. Antoinette does not shy away from talking about her race and how it is perceived by others, along with how she feels about it. Lee Erwin poses the idea that Antoinette's understanding of racial issues is much different from her husband's understanding of it, as seen later on in the novel:

"If we lay out the racial issues the novel addresses as they are manifested in its two major narratives, Antoinette's and Rochester's, settler woman and metropolitan man, it begins to appear that whereas Antoinette sees her own displaced, deracinated condition in terms of historically specific shifts in class and economic power, the Rochester figure refuses these categories and instead interprets racial difference in moral and sexual terms, specifically in terms of miscegenation and "contamination."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>59</sup> Lee Erwin, "'Like in a Looking-Glass': History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1989, p. 144.

The dichotomy of “settler woman” and “metropolitan man” is intertwined throughout Antoinette’s and Rochester’s marriage, which also plays into feminist issues and double-colonization, which this paper will discuss more later on.

Going back to the notion of racism, Erwin argues that the play between racial terms in Antoinette’s narrative has implications for the novel’s temporal structure, stating that any memory of Antoinette’s father and of slavery is excised from her narrative, only existing in parentheses.<sup>60</sup> This is further encouraged by her mother, who, upon Antoinette’s questioning about the past, answers with: “Why do you pester and bother me about all these things that happened long ago?”<sup>61</sup> At this moment we see Antoinette’s curiosity and possible wish to learn about history be denied, as her mother tries to forget all about it. Perhaps because of her husband’s death, or because she is aware that the “way things were” was not ideal, not for everyone, and her own family had contributed to that. Either way, Antoinette seems to be trying to “fix time”, as Erwin explains:

“Antoinette's embroidering the year of her time in the convent thus suggests an attempt to fix time, a time which, since the arrival of the "new Luttrells," has been set in motion again. [...] The new people's laughter at Antoinette wearing Tia's dress and the subsequent frenzy of activity that it sets in motion in her mother, culminating in the remarriage, suggest that, as in Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), racial differentiation is the motor of time. Antoinette's entry into time will be marked out by her being made, like her nearly eponymous predecessor Anna, "not like a ni\*\*er.”<sup>62</sup>

#### **4.3. Marriage to Mr. Rochester and Loss of (Narrative) Voice**

In the previous two sections of this analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we have identified and established two important themes, or rather, layers of Antoinette’s narrative and identity. This section will deal with the third, and perhaps most relevant one, that which relates to Antoinette’s marriage to Rochester and the switch that happens in the narration of the novel, resulting in a metaphorical loss of voice for Antoinette.

As mentioned earlier, the second part of the novel is narrated primarily by Antoinette’s husband, as we see their lives through his perspective. This change seems to

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<sup>60</sup> Lee Erwin, “‘Like in a Looking-Glass’: History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1989, p. 145.

<sup>61</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Lee Erwin, “‘Like in a Looking-Glass’: History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1989, p. 145.

signal quite obvious symbolism – by getting married to Rochester, Antoinette loses her ability to be heard and to express herself, and narrate her own story. As Erwin also explains:

“The shift to Rochester's voice upon their marriage suggests that Antoinette's own narrative is now ended, having reached its proper nineteenth-century conclusion ("for better or for worse"), and that his desire now drives the narrative.”<sup>63</sup>

Something important to notice here is the difference between Antoinette's and Rochester's narration in terms of credibility. Carolyn E. Williams describes this in the following excerpt:

“While Antoinette is a seemingly truthful, transparent narrator, regardless of her sanity, unlike *Jane Eyre*, Rhys portrays Rochester as an emotional, unreliable source, rewriting history to serve his purposes and assuage his own guilt, very like Brontë's character.”<sup>64</sup>

A lot of Rochester's narration can be described as melancholic, expressing self-pity and narcissism. He portrays himself to be the victim, openly lamenting his marriage to Antoinette. An example of this can be seen on one of their first nights on their honeymoon when Rochester narrates the following:

“It was very late when I poured out two glasses and told her to drink to our happiness, to our love and the day without end which would be tomorrow. I was young then. A short youth mine was.”<sup>65</sup>

Prior to his marriage to Antoinette, Rochester was a foreigner to the West Indies, without money or bright prospects for his future. In this state, he could not exercise the role of a dominant, white, British male in the Caribbean environment, as it was completely strange to him. He realizes that he needs to “fix” this, and ultimately does so, by taking Antoinette back to Britain with him, where he is able to properly show his superiority. Antoinette is stripped of her riches, her identity, and her voice, and is subjected to Rochester's will, which is exactly how it should be in his eyes. As he mentions in the excerpt above, he “was young then” – during his time in the Caribbean – and was not able to play the

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<sup>63</sup> Lee Erwin, “‘Like in a Looking-Glass’: History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1989, p. 146.

<sup>64</sup> Carolyn E. Williams, “‘She Was Not Even Normal’: Unreliable Narratives of Female Insanity in *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *Bucknell University Honors Theses*, 2014, Retrieved June 6, 2021, from [https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1262&context=honors\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1262&context=honors_theses), p. 87.

<sup>65</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 76.

role he was meant to play. Once back in Britain, he is older and “wiser” and this newfound wisdom allows him to display his authority and power.

Although Antoinette loses her narrative voice in this part of the novel, she is still able to choose when to speak and when to stay silent within the story. An example of this can be seen in the moments when she mentions her cousin Sandy – earlier on in the novel it is implied that there might have been a sexual relationship between the two, and later on, Antoinette directly addresses this, confirming that they met up often and were in love. Through this, we can see how Antoinette does have control over what she reveals, when, and to whom. This is why, when Rochester starts narrating the story, Antoinette starts to doubt her sense of individuality and existence.<sup>66</sup> This oppression she faces leads to her outburst towards the end of the novel, culminating in her inability to hold back and follow orders. Nevertheless, unlike for most people, madness for Antoinette seems to represent her getting her voice back at the end when she is finally able to put what she feels into words.<sup>67</sup>

Rochester’s desire that Erwin mentions is certainly not lacking throughout this second part of the story. For him, appearance is what matters most, as he, for the most part, ignores Antoinette’s thoughts and feelings. At the beginning of their marriage, he describes his wife as beautiful<sup>68</sup>, lady-like, soft, and subtle, but as the marriage deteriorates and Antoinette loses more and more of her sense of self and sanity, Rochester can be seen commenting how “her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen.”<sup>69</sup> This is just one of the many examples which show Rochester making negative remarks about Antoinette’s looks, proving that she becomes something close to just an object to him. She has no real existence or identity, and he makes sure to show her that as much as possible. Rochester even plainly states that he does not love her, and once again, in the following excerpt, we can see that his main objective is to engage in a sexual relationship with her, rather than a romantic one:

“I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did.

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<sup>66</sup> Nushrat Azam, “‘Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era’ A Study of the Female Voice in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, Vol. 6, Issue 7, 2017, p. 238.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>68</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 64.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.



One afternoon the sight of a dress which she'd left lying on her bedroom floor made me breathless and savage with desire."<sup>70</sup>

This sexual desire becomes even more of a focal point as the verbal communication between the two decreases. Sex and sexuality become a form of communication and bonding, with Rochester wanting to overpower Antoinette's sexuality and beauty through his assumed male dominance and oppression, but he cannot stop himself from falling for her sensuality, resulting in fear.<sup>71</sup> This connects back to the notion of voice versus silence, since in this situation Antoinette has abandoned her voice as it is no longer of use to her against her husband. Thus, Rochester is left to narrate this part of the story, essentially speaking for Antoinette. Azam refers to this as "ventriloquism":

"The job of the ventriloquist is to speak for another character. Thus, the essence of the identity of the character rests on the voice of the ventriloquist. Ventriloquism in literature happens when someone other than the character himself describes a character's life, actions and emotions. The consequence of this is the loss of identity and voice to another individual who can represent the character however he wants to the readers."<sup>72</sup>

This idea is solidified by the fact that Rochester occasionally calls Antoinette "Marionette", and, in conversation with Christophine, she points this out and notes "[t]hat word mean doll, eh?"<sup>73</sup> With this, we can say that Rochester has fully stripped Antoinette of any humanity and her original Creole identity.

Having discussed all these various layers of the narrative presented to us in *WSS*, it is interesting to note the way that Antoinette's narrative voice seems to envelop Rochester's, coming before and after it. Erwin draws an amusing conclusion based on this:

"The "two moments" of Antoinette's narrative, moreover, standing on either side of the "copula" represented by Rochester's narrative, here seem to constitute an algebra that, translated into a sentence, would read "Marriage equals madness and death."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 85.

<sup>71</sup> Nushrat Azam, "'Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era' A Study of the Female Voice in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, Vol. 6, Issue 7, 2017, p. 239.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, pp. 139-140.

<sup>74</sup> Lee Erwin, "'Like in a Looking-Glass': History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1989, p. 153.

#### 4.4. Ending

The ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been a point of interest for many lovers of postcolonial literature throughout the years. It is a purposefully vague and ambiguous ending, which allows each reader to create their interpretations of what exactly happens once Antoinette wakes up from her dream and leaves the attic room in Thornfield Hall, with a candle in hand.

First, let us take a look at the last few sentences of this novel:

“Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage.”<sup>75</sup>

One of the reasons why Rhys chose to end the novel this way is a very simple one: it allows for this story to be viewed as a genuine prequel to *Jane Eyre*. Although the timeline itself might not entirely add up between the two novels, leaving the ending open to interpretation means that the sequel into Bronte’s novel is much more believable and plausible. In *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette (Bertha) sets Thornfield Hall on fire and leaps to her death, which one can very easily imagine happening in *WSS* as well.

Alternatively, the way that the actions play out after Antoinette wakes up is identical to her actual dream, which, combined with the fragmented style of narration, makes it difficult to distinguish dream from reality. This illustrates the way Antoinette’s dreams are an outlet for her subconscious mind, as well as depicts Antoinette’s view that dreams and reality are indifferent just as how, the way she sees it, life and death are also indifferent.<sup>76</sup>

The fire also plays an important role in this ending, symbolizing Antoinette’s anger and rage, which is the result of her being trapped her whole life, both metaphorically and physically. In Azam’s words, Antoinette is finally escaping from the physical and mental torture which she has endured, even though she might lose her own life in the process, it is just another opportunity for her to free herself and her soul:<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Norton & Company, New York, 1982, p. 171.

<sup>76</sup> “Ending of Wide Sargasso Sea”, *Ballet, Books & Beyond*, 2014, Retrieved June 1, 2021, from <https://balletbabe96.wordpress.com/2014/11/29/ending-of-wide-sargasso-sea/>.

<sup>77</sup> Nushrat Azam, “‘Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era’ A Study of the Female Voice in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, Vol. 6, Issue 7, 2017, p. 241.

“Antoinette’s choice is finally that between death by fire and the non-life which is in such painful opposition with that life of freedom, pantheistic union with luxuriant, even lush, nature, a life of total participation in all the dualistic continuities of existence. Hers is no act of despair – but a final aggressive act of assertion, reaffirmation, and self-liberation.”<sup>78</sup>

## 5. Theoretical Background of *Foe*

J. M. Coetzee (full name John Maxwell Coetzee) published one of his most significant postmodernist and postcolonial works, *Foe*, in 1986. This story is woven around the existing plot of the novel *Robinson Crusoe*, written by Daniel Defoe in 1719, which is centered on the character of Susan Barton – a British woman in search of her lost daughter. Some of the original characters from *Robinson Crusoe* are also present in this novel, those of Crusoe himself (spelled Cruso in *Foe*) and Friday.

Coetzee’s novel is a frame story, consisting of multiple modes of narration: letters, diary entries, and oral narration. The text is minimalist, highly palimpsestic, confronting the past (colonization and slavery) and present of South Africa in the 1980s (the result of said colonization and slavery). At the same time, this novel parodies the 18<sup>th</sup>-century travel and adventure genre, which often included castaways, abductions, piracy, legends of cannibals, and so on.

With this novel, Coetzee addresses all of the pioneering theories of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a relatively short story, spanning less than 200 pages, exuding the spirit of deconstructionism, as the essence of postmodernism.<sup>79</sup> The author tries to provide an imaginative background for Robinson Crusoe’s original story, showing what, perhaps, led Daniel Defoe to write his novel. *Foe* gives, at least to an extent, a voice to one of the oppressed groups – women – by having a female protagonist. By writing this metafictional novel, Coetzee targets Daniel Defoe, commenting on the colonial and androcentric tendencies, along with questioning the validity of patriarchal writing and literary classics, only to ultimately cast doubt on the credibility of literary narration.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the very title of the novel was not accidental – initially, we may read it as a simple reference or a nod to

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<sup>78</sup> Paula G. Anderson, “Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*: ‘The Other Side/Both Sides Now’”, *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol., 28, No. 1-2, 1982, p. 60.

<sup>79</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

Daniel Defoe. However, the term 'foe' can carry other meanings in this case as well: 'foe' as an enemy or an opponent (perhaps what Mr. Foe is to Susan Barton), and the French adjective 'faux' as a homophone to *Foe*, meaning "false". Combining these two, one can make several interpretations: "the parody as 'false', the false truth of the original Robinson novel, the false authorship of Defoe/Foe in opposition to the 'real' authorship of Susan Barton, Coetzee's/Susan Barton's version of the story as an opponent to the original novel, the character of Foe as a literal foe to Susan's 'real' story"<sup>81</sup>, and so on.

## 5.1. Summary

*Foe* opens with Susan Barton washing up on the shore of an island, somewhere in the South Seas. She is found by Friday (Man Friday from *Robinson Crusoe*), a black man who does not, or rather, cannot speak, due to the fact that his tongue has been cut off. Friday brings Susan to Cruso (Robinson Crusoe from the 1917 novel), who is a white man, and seemingly Friday's master, as well as some sort of a "ruler" of the island. We find out that Susan has a daughter who was allegedly kidnapped by an Englishman and taken to the New World, which is what led Susan on this trip that resulted in her ending up on "Cruso's island". In the novel, Susan proceeds to detail the story of her spending a year on the island with Cruso and Friday, before ultimately being rescued by an English ship. Cruso dies on the journey back home, while Susan and Friday get safely transported to England. Once home, Susan seeks out the author, Mr. Foe, in hopes of having her story written out and published by him. The story then continues to be told through letters which Susan writes to Mr. Foe, attempting to convince him to help transform her tale into popular fiction. After Susan finally meets with Mr. Foe in person, the novel ends in a fantastical imagining of Friday finally speaking out from a shipwreck at the bottom of the ocean.

## 6. Analysis of *Foe*

Before diving into the detailed analysis, we must first consider the choice Coetzee made when he decided to spell Robinson's name as Cruso rather than Crusoe. By doing this, the Crusoe we know from Defoe's novel is effectively "killed off", and instead, a new Cruso

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<sup>81</sup> Luise A. Finke, "Daniel Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe' and J.M. Coetzee's 'Foe': Characters in Comparison", *GRIN Verlag*, Munich, 1998, p. 5.

is brought forward, with much different characteristics. Defoe's Crusoe was an active and optimistic man, portrayed as someone with a capitalist and colonialist mindset. He was a hero in his story; taking over the island and bringing prosperity to it and any of its inhabitants. This is almost the exact opposite of what Crusoe in Coetzee's novel is like. This Crusoe is silent and passive, most closely resembling a pessimistic hermit. This shift in character can be seen as an attempt to finally silence those who have been the loudest throughout history – white colonialist men. By putting the emphasis on Susan (as well as Friday), Coetzee is putting them in the position of potential storytellers, as characters who have been continuously marginalized. The 'e' at the end of Crusoe can be viewed as standing for "Eurocentrism" or "enthusiasm", both of which Coetzee's Crusoe is missing.<sup>82</sup>

Similar to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Coetzee's novel is also split up into multiple parts or sections. The first two parts are written in an epistolary style, in the form of letters written by Susan Barton and addressed to Mr. Foe. The third part is a direct account of Susan's life and her confrontation with Foe. The fourth and final part is a real narrative relay, meant to solve the mysteries surrounding Friday, but it does not actually do so.

The structure of this novel is certainly an interesting approach that the author took, as it gives way to a different perspective of a very well-known story. The first two parts seemingly allow the subaltern (women, in this case) to speak, but we quickly find out that that is not entirely true, as, without Mr. Foe, Susan's story, unfortunately, holds no merit. Furthermore, the very literal inability of Friday to speak symbolizes all of the ignored and/or silenced voices of black people throughout history. All of these facts label *Foe* as a political novel, not only because of the frame of reference which establishes its origin, but also the issues that the novel deals with – how language is used to generate a fabulation that can be offered and accepted as real, as an objective representation of an unquestionable reality.<sup>83</sup>

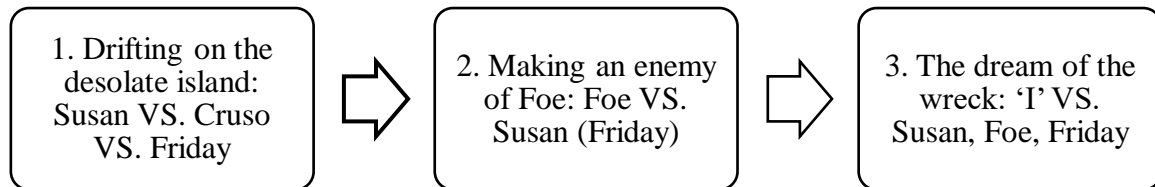
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<sup>82</sup> Flair Donglai Shi, "Post-colonialism in Post-modernism: A Comparative Characterology of J.M.Coetzee's *Foe* as an Appropriation of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*", *Subalternspeak: Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2015, p. 90.

<sup>83</sup> Manuel A. Jiménez, "'Father to my story': writing *Foe*, de-authorizing (De)Foe", *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingles*, No. 18, 2005, p. 8.

## 6.1. Narrative Layers

Chongyi Liang, in his essay about the narrative layers in *Foe*, claims that the narrative structure of the story can be laid out in the following manner:<sup>84</sup>



### 6.1.1. Colonialism and Androcentrism

The first narrative layer, Liang claims, deals with rebelling against colonialism and androcentrism (“dominated by or emphasizing masculine interests or a masculine point of view”<sup>85</sup>), through the story of Susan Barton being exiled by traitorous sailors to a desolate island, where she encounters Cruso and Friday, forming and maintaining a strange relationship with them.<sup>86</sup> The first chapter of the novel is narrated through the use of the first-person pronoun ‘I’, which shows us the exact way in which Susan perceived this “adventure” of hers. We get to see the events on the island develop through her eyes, with some personal commentary from her. This, in a sense, does indeed go against the patriarchal and androcentric views of the colonial period, where a woman’s voice was never paid much attention to nor cared for, along with her thoughts and opinions. Liang further argues that in this first narrative layer two major changes happened in *Foe* when compared to the original text of Defoe:

Change 1: increasing the presence of the white female heroine Susan Barton

Change 2: reconstructing the images of Cruso and Friday<sup>87</sup>

Truly, it is within this first narrative layer that we get to see the narrative voice of Susan Barton, a woman who, by no choice of her own, ends up spending a year with two

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<sup>84</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Androcentrism”, In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*, Retrieved June 6, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/androcentrism>.

<sup>86</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

strange men. This was, obviously, a deliberate choice made by Coetzee, who was certainly aware of the position of women in society. Be that as it may, even within this we are faced with moments where Susan is a victim of the patriarchy, such as in the scene where she allows Cruso to sleep with her, explaining it as:

“I pushed his hand away and made to rise, but he held me. No doubt I might have freed myself, for I was stronger than he. But I thought, He has not known a woman for fifteen years, why should he not have his desire? So I resisted no more but let him do as he wished.”<sup>88</sup>

The consent that she seemingly gives in this situation is quite clearly not an entirely voluntary one, as she has been taught by society that men have desires which women should fulfill. Later on in the novel, we see a similar scene play out between her and Mr. Foe, but this time, Susan is the one who takes control, as seen in the following excerpt:

“So I coaxed him till he lay beneath me. Then I drew off my shift and straddled him (which he did not seem easy with, in a woman). 'This is the manner of the Muse when she visits her poets,' I whispered, and felt some of the listlessness go out of my limbs.”<sup>89</sup>

Even Susan herself notices the uneasiness Foe felt and exhibited upon being put in a submissive position, especially by a woman. Moments like these are what add to the idea of Susan being a feminist-in-the-making, even though she is by no means a true feminist heroine. Another such moment can be seen when Susan tells Foe about herself:

“I am not a story. Mr. Foe. I may impress you as a story because I began my account of myself without preamble, slipping overboard into the water and striking out for the shore. But my life did not begin in the waves. There was a life before the water which stretched back to my desolate searchings in Brazil, thence to the years when my daughter was still with me, and so on back to the day I was born. All of which makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Cruso and Friday and what we three did there: for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> John M. Coetzee, *Foe*, Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. 30.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

This powerful paragraph serves to show the passion and determination that Susan has to have her story written and shared with the world, but precisely in the manner that she wants, and not what others, in this case Mr. Foe, want. Chongyi refers to her experience as a reflection of the status of women in the colonial society, where, due to the death of the hero (Cruso), Susan can establish her right to rebel against the androcentrism of Defoe's novel.<sup>91</sup>

When it comes to the characters of Cruso and Friday, Susan perceives them in her own way and interacts with them freely, even going so far as to question Cruso multiple times about his words and actions. She doubts Cruso's story about how Friday lost his tongue, as well as Cruso's general mental state. Regardless of this, as Chongyi points out, Cruso still has power over Susan and Friday, as well as the choice of when to speak and what to say.<sup>92</sup> These moments in the story poke through Susan's narrative voice, showing that, even though she is the one telling the story, Cruso, a male figure, does not have to abide by her rules or wishes, and instead follows his own path.

Friday, who is in an even worse position than Susan, represents a group of people who have been continuously discussed throughout history, but only relatively recently got the ability to speak for themselves. Cruso is labeled as Friday's master, which has clear connotations to the master-slave relationship of the colonial era. While in Defoe's novel this was never questioned, Coetzee's story forces the reader to consider the meaning behind Cruso's and Friday's relationship, just in the same way that the main narrative voice, that of Susan, questions it.

Chongyi summarizes this first narrative layer by saying that *Foe's* author allows Cruso to enjoy his dominant discourse power in this first chapter, keeping Friday in total silence, which reflects the true status of women and subjugated people in the colonial society.<sup>93</sup> He also adds:

“Coetzee does not turn Susan into the master of the desolate island because he is not an idealistic writer filled with rebellious emotion but just reveals the problems without the desire to find the solutions for himself.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*



### 6.1.2. Patriarchal and Classic Literature

In the second narrative layer, a narrative shift happens, in which the story gets told through a series of letters that Susan writes to Mr. Foe. Chongyi states that the relationship between Susan and Mr. Foe and the contrast between their writing form this second layer.<sup>95</sup> As previously mentioned, Susan is aware that she cannot write out and publish her story on her own, which leads her to reach out to Foe and ask for his help. It is possible to relate this both to the general difficulty new authors have when trying to publish their work, and also the additional hardships that specifically female authors face in real life. Authors Gilbert and Gubar talk about the concept of literary paternity, explaining that, in Western culture, the author of a text is “a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch”, going so far as to even compare the power of an author’s pen to the power of his (male) genitalia.<sup>96</sup> Susan is the main narrative voice in *Foe*, however, she is essentially struggling for power with Mr. Foe, who keeps offering her his opinions on how her story should be told. Perhaps one of the goals that Coetzee had in mind when writing *Foe* is exactly what the author Ian McCormick wrote in his essay on women’s writing and feminism:

“Therefore, there is still a pressing and urgent need to publish new scholarly critical work, which will help men and women to reconsider their past gender identities, and equally significant, to reconsider their futures.”<sup>97</sup>

Another portion of this narrative layer, which is equally significant, is the appearance of Susan Jr. – a mysterious girl who claims to be Susan’s long-lost daughter. We see Susan reject her countless times and insist that the girl is lying, but, ultimately, we never find out the truth about who this girl really is and could she be Susan’s daughter. Chongyi argues that Mr. Foe engineered for this girl to pretend to be Susan’s daughter, to create a more dramatic and interesting story of Susan’s life, aiming to satisfy readers’ expectations.<sup>98</sup> Knowing what we know about the character of Mr. Foe, it is certainly not impossible to believe that this is what happened. After all, he is very insistent on writing about the “bigger picture” of Susan’s life, rather than just the story of her time on the island:

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<sup>95</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press, London, 1979, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Ian McCormick, “Women’s Writing and Feminisms: an Introduction”, 2016, Retrieved June 2, 2021, from [https://www.academia.edu/22665308/Womens\\_Writing\\_and\\_Feminisms\\_an\\_Introduction](https://www.academia.edu/22665308/Womens_Writing_and_Feminisms_an_Introduction), p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, p. 7.

“We therefore have five parts in all: the loss of the daughter; the quest for the daughter in Brazil; abandonment of the quest, and the adventure of the island; assumption of the quest by the daughter; and reunion of the daughter with her mother. It is thus that we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end.’ [...] ‘The island is not a story in itself,’ said Foe gently, laying a hand on my knee. ‘We can bring it to life only by setting it within a larger story.’”<sup>99</sup>

Mr. Foe, as an author, knows what the readers want to read about and what makes a story riveting. In his eyes, the story about a missing daughter and the reunion with her mother is much more likely to sell well, rather than a “boring” story about a mostly uneventful year on an island with two other people. One cannot help but wonder if this is meant to be a commentary on Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, a novel that is filled with adventure and intrigue but ignores serious issues such as racism and slavery. By writing a novel that addresses various social issues, Coetzee has proved that literature does not need to be wondrous and fantastic (which is not to say that *Foe* is not these things) in order to achieve success and garner readers’ attention. In this novel, he attempts to address the problems of female narration by placing Susan’s writing in opposition to the writing of Defoe himself, thus deconstructing this classic writing according to the traditions of patriarchal literature.<sup>100</sup>

Going back to the commercial aspect that Mr. Foe is concerned with – it is important to consider the reasons as to why he is so interested in the story of Susan’s daughter, beyond just the fact that it will be a commercial success. Mr. Foe is prepared to manipulate the story about Susan’s daughter, if necessary, because, on the larger scale, it is a way to keep Susan, as a woman, silent. If she were to share her story with the world, her voice would become public, and she might ask for others things that were denied to her on the account of her gender. This is paralleled to Friday having no tongue and being physically unable to speak – women and colonial subjects are and should be denied their own and true voice by making them unreliable and un-sellable, thus, keeping them, both literally and figuratively, underwater. Mr. Foe, as a man, is aware of this and knows that if the oppressed groups come to the surface, the male and colonial domination will be endangered and those who were in power would lose their previous privileges. With all of this at risk, Mr. Foe, as the representative of male dominance in this novel, contrasts Susan as a narrator, making her seem unreliable and difficult to trust so that she can remain inferior and silent.

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<sup>99</sup> John M. Coetzee, *Foe*, Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. 117.

<sup>100</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, pp. 7-8.

## 6.2. Ending

The last five pages of *Foe* are quite perplexing and mysterious, leaving many confused as to what the final scenes are supposed to mean or represent. This fourth chapter, and the third narrative layer in Chongyi's analysis<sup>101</sup>, once again uses the pronoun 'I' as the narrative voice. However, from what is told, we can conclude that it is not Susan who is narrating this chapter – in fact, it is not any of the already familiar characters. This unknown 'I' encounters “a woman or a girl, her feet drawn up inside a long grey dress, her hands folded under her armpits”<sup>102</sup>, presumably Susan Jr.; “[a couple lying] side by side in bed, not touching”<sup>103</sup>, most likely to be interpreted as Susan and Mr. Foe; and “the man Friday stretched at full length on his back”.<sup>104</sup> All four of these characters are described as corpses that the narrator comes across in this strange narrative. Chongyi sees this chapter as either one of Susan's dreams or as an emergence of another first-person narrator in the fictional world of this novel.<sup>105</sup> To better understand this ambiguous chapter, we can take a look at Marco Caracciolo's summary of it:

“In the first two pages, the narrating character climbs a staircase, but because of the dark she stumbles over a dead body. She finds herself in a house, where she discovers two more corpses, lying side by side in bed, and Friday, still alive (the other characters are unnamed). The narrator leans over Friday, slowly opens his mouth and listens to “the sounds of the island” (waves, wind, and seabirds) issuing from it. After two spaced asterisks, the scene seems to start over again, except that this time the narrator, before climbing the stairs, stands outside the house, where she reads a plaque with the words “Daniel Defoe, Author.” There are only some minor changes in the scene (it is daytime, Friday has moved), and the wording is slightly different, up to the point when the narrating character— instead of opening Friday's mouth—reaches for a dispatch box, where she finds a manuscript. As soon as she reads the first words, she is transported to the middle of the sea, within sight of Crusoe's island. This transition is by no means clear, but there are no asterisks this time. Surrounded by seaweed, the narrator dives underwater and discovers the wreck of a ship. She enters, and her feet hit a strangely wrapped-up body. After mounting another staircase, she finds herself in a cabin, with the bodies of “Susan Barton and her dead captain” (they are named for

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<sup>101</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, pp. 7-8.

<sup>102</sup> John M. Coetzee, *Foe*, Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. 153.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>105</sup> Chongyi Liang, “Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*”, *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, pp. 8.

the first time here) in nightclothes. Friday lies in a corner; he opens his mouth, and emits a stream that flows in all directions, “to the end of the earth”<sup>106</sup>.<sup>107</sup>

Although the other characters are seen and described, the unknown narrator primarily focuses on Friday. In accordance with this, Friday seems to, in a certain way, interact with the narrator, implying that he is not entirely dead like the other characters in these scenes. The last time that the narrator interacts with Friday, they realize that “this is not a place of words”, but rather “a place where bodies are their own signs[. . .] it is the home of Friday.”<sup>108</sup> The ‘stream’ that Friday lets out can be interpreted in multiple ways, whether as an actual voice, like a scream or a yell, or something less easily defined. Either way, the novel ends with Friday – a character that had no way of contributing to the story up until that point beyond what Susan could say about him and his life. In the words of the author Lubomír Doležel:

“Friday is a possible author, but in an impossible world, in a world whose signs do not signify, whose stories are full of contradictions, whose authors give up authority.”<sup>109</sup>

One of Susan’s main goals was to share Friday’s story, next to her own, as she saw the importance and significance of it. Unfortunately, she realizes that the only way for Friday’s story to be genuine and proper is if he told it himself. No matter how accurate she tried to be in her retelling of it, she would always fall short of the mark. Manuel Almagro Jiménez entertains this notion further by saying:

“Friday is that hole in the narrative which cannot be represented by Foe’s or Susan’s rhetoric, even if both can take advantage of that lack of definition. Friday does not want to be trapped in somebody else’s interpretation and that is why he erases what he has drawn before Susan can see it.<sup>110</sup> The only way in which he can be father to his story is by having his body be its own sign.”<sup>111</sup>

The ending of *Foe* opens a door to many different discussions and topics, all of which are productive and necessary within the literary world. Coetzee surely had no doubts about what his intentions were when writing this novel, or how to best present them. With this last

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<sup>106</sup> John M. Coetzee, *Foe*, Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. 157.

<sup>107</sup> Marco Caracciolo, “J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* and the Embodiment of Meaning”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2012, pp. 91-92.

<sup>108</sup> John M. Coetzee, *Foe*, Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. 157.

<sup>109</sup> Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore and London, 1998, pp. 221-222.

<sup>110</sup> John M. Coetzee, *Foe*, Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. 147.

<sup>111</sup> Manuel A. Jiménez, “‘Father to my story’: writing *Foe*, de-authorizing (De)Foe”, *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingles*, No. 18, 2005, p. 20.

part of the novel covered, we can conclude that *Foe*, in a sense, gives a clue that all the literary narration has a repressive relationship with reality and, as such, it is nearly impossible to reflect reality completely and reliably.<sup>112</sup>

## 7. Comparison of Narrative Voices in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*

Having looked at both of the novels individually, it is quite easy to notice the number of similarities which they share. In this section, the focus will be put on identifying and further discussing some of these similarities, as well as any differences. Comparing the narrative voices of these novels will allow us to better understand what their authors had in mind when writing and publishing these works, and how successful they ultimately were in achieving their goals.

At a very basic level, both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* share some common topics, which are not at all unusual for most of the works from the postcolonial period. Both of these stories show and subtly comment on the issue of racism and racial relationships. Although the contexts are different, there are characters in both novels who deal with some form of oppression or judgment because of their race – Antoinette, for being a Creole, Christophine and Friday for being black. The obvious difference here is that Rhys chose to give a voice to a Creole woman, putting her at the forefront of the novel, while in Coetzee's story, the narrative voice is that of a white woman. Regardless, even in *Foe*, we see the need that Susan has to have Friday's "voice" be heard, which is Coetzee's way of acknowledging and supporting those who have been victimized because of their race. Related to this is the notion of identity, which Rhys gave significant attention to with Antoinette's character. *Foe* does not focus as much on this topic, but one could argue that this theme is woven throughout the story, perhaps avoiding explicit mentioning, but certainly not being entirely ignored either.

Feminism and patriarchy are the other two topics that both novels commentate on, in their own ways. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* there is the marriage between Antoinette and her husband, Mr. Rochester, which severely harms Antoinette and symbolizes the way in which patriarchy has harmed women all across the world, throughout history. In *Foe*, a similar thing can be seen in two relationships – one that Susan had with Cruso, where she was effectively his wife, and the other which she had with Mr. Foe. The worlds in which both of these

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<sup>112</sup> Chongyi Liang, "Deconstructing DeFoe: The Three Narrative Layers in *Foe*", *Harvard-Yenching Institute Working Paper Series*, 2010, p. 9.

women live are ruled by men, and the two protagonists are well aware of this. *Foe* does focus more on specifically the issues of the female narrative voice being heard, or even just existing in a male-dominated world, whereas *WSS*, regarding this topic, deals with a more generalized idea of feminist issues and the relationships between men and women.

The eerily similar things, one could even say identical, for the two novels are their structure and their endings. As previously discussed, both of the novels are separated into parts, with *WSS* containing three, and *Foe* four. In Rhys' novel, the narrative voice shifts between the protagonist, Antoinette, to her husband, Rochester, before returning to Antoinette. Rhys explained her choice in one of her letters, saying: "[a]nother 'I' must talk, two other perhaps. Then the Creole's 'I' will come to life."<sup>113</sup> For Antoinette's story to come through and have an impact, it had to be paralleled to, as Rhys says, "another I", who is her husband in this case. This multiperspectivity of narration allows for two (or more) stories to be heard within one piece of writing<sup>114</sup>, which is very important for all postcolonial authors. The (intentional) downside of having characters narrate their own story is the lack of legitimacy or simply lack of objectiveness. A first-time reader might initially be confused by the sudden narrator change, but that is possibly what warrants a second or even a third reading of this book, to truly grasp its meaning. Hsiao-chien Lee talks about the "double-voiced language" of *WSS*, saying:

"With Rhys's design, in the novel different voices can be heard simultaneously when the narrator is telling the story; various characters are made to tell the story respectively in separate sections. All these voices and speeches, however, resemble the diverse reflections collected in a mirror from different angles. And all these reflections focus on only one thing--to make up a complete image, in this case, an alienated woman who is imprisoned both literally and symbolically."<sup>115</sup>

The same can be said for *Foe* – while Susan is the narrator of the first three parts, the fourth and final part leaves the reader completely disorientated in terms of who is narrating and to what purpose. Thus, multiperspectivity becomes a characteristic of both of these novels, albeit to different extents. The first person 'I' changes forms in both works, which

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<sup>113</sup> Jean Rhys, *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-1966*, in: Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly, eds., *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-1966*, Penguin Books, London, 1984, p. 137.

<sup>114</sup> Christina Gieseler, "The Effects of Multiperspectival Narration on the Representation of Christophine in 'Wide Sargasso Sea'", *GRIN Verlag*, Munich, 2010.

<sup>115</sup> Hsiao-chien Lee, "'And the Woman Is a Stranger': The Double-Voiced Discourse in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*", *Eastern Illinois University Masters Theses*, 1993, Retrieved May 7, 2021, from <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2297&context=theses>, pp. 34-35.

makes them stand opposite to their originals, *Jane Eyre* and *Robinson Crusoe*, which have the main protagonist narrating the entire story.

Brontë and Defoe wanted their novels to come across as genuine and realistic, perceived by the readers as a true autobiography and a travelogue, respectively. As such, the role of their narrators (protagonists Jane Eyre and Robinson Crusoe) is to tell their own stories, which are by nature subjective and biased. These are things that add charm to the stories, in a certain way, as readers are aware that the narrators are unreliable and that the stories they are telling are most likely exaggerated or embellished in some parts. On the other hand, Rhys and Coetzee attempt to give us stories that are seemingly more objective, even though they too have unreliable narrators. As it has already been discussed, this is achieved by having multiple narrators rather than a singular one – we, as readers, are able to see different perspectives within one story, which automatically gives them more verisimilitude. The question of whether we can truly believe any of the characters, in all four of the novels, has a simple answer: no, we cannot. All of their narrators are characters within the stories, which means that they are unreliable and tells us that whatever we are reading is just a subjective telling from one person's point of view. Nevertheless, both the original novels and their alternate versions can be equally appreciated, depending on what kind of a story one is looking for.

### **7.1. Comparison of Endings**

As is the case with the other aspects of the novels, *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* share similar endings, in terms of their ambiguity and mystery. For both of the works, it is not impossible to believe that the endings are just dreams that the protagonists, Antoinette and Susan, had. Alternatively, both endings allow the reader to come up with their own conclusions and make sense of what has been given to them on their own.

In *WSS*, readers can at least be pretty sure that Antoinette is the narrative voice of the last scene of the novel, as it seems to be pretty clear that she is the 'I' in the story. *Foe*, as seen earlier, does not give us such luxury. This is one of the differences between the two novels, where we can see that Coetzee went for a more imaginative and dream-like scenario, whereas Rhys still kept the story pretty grounded, opting to simply leave it, some would say, "unfinished". There are many theories out there as to which the narrator of the final part in *Foe* is, but one author, Jamie Snead, believes it to be the remnants of Susan's character:

“Critics have speculated that Coetzee himself is the narrator of the last section. I would argue, however, that this narrator is the remnants of Susan’s character that Foe has once again consigned to the story. Therefore, the shipwreck she has often speculated about is now her home. Like Crusoe and his terraces, Susan will remain forever in the shipwreck of dead drafts, residing beside a mute Friday whom Foe has left behind in favor of a more interesting, cannibal Friday. In short, he writes aversion that might actually sell books.”<sup>116</sup>

Following the idea that Susan will, in some way, forever remain in the metaphorical shipwreck is placed in contrast with Antoinette’s (possible) ending – while she might die in the process, she is actually finally freeing herself from both her place of imprisonment and the person who had control over her (Mr. Rochester). Rhys’ choice to leave the ending open to interpretation allows the readers to have a glimmer of hope – perhaps, if we ignore the story of *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette was able to escape Thornfield Hall and lead a new, happier life somewhere else? Meanwhile, even though we do not see Susan’s death in the novel – assuming that the final part of it is a dream or dream-like experience – it is difficult to imagine her turning her life around and finding peace, especially with Mr. Foe. Friday’s fate seems to be the same, although one can at least hope that he might be able to eventually relay some information about his past and his life if he continues learning how to write with Susan’s help. In this sense, these two endings allow readers to experience almost the entire spectrum of human emotions – ranging from sadness and disappointment to hope and peace.

## 8. Conclusion

When telling a story, whether fictional or not, the author has a few options when it comes to choosing the style of narration and its point of view. This choice will guide the rest of the story, both in the process of writing it, for the author, and while reading it, for the audience. Writing in the first person, from the perspective of one, or more, of the characters in the story, is not an easy feat, especially if the goal is for the story to sound and look convincing and genuine. Add to this the wish or need to put forth some kind of message or social commentary, and the whole process increases in difficulty. Knowing all of this, we would certainly need to congratulate and thank the authors discussed in this thesis, Jean Rhys and J. M. Coetzee, for their incredible works and the passion that they so clearly show.

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<sup>116</sup> Jamie Snead, “Foe vs Foe: The Battle for Narrative Voice in Coetzee’s *Foe*”, *Rollins Undergraduate Research Journal*, Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 77, 2007, p. 7.



The goal of this thesis was to look at, analyze, and discuss the narrative voices of the novels *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*, primarily those of their protagonists; the novels' mysterious endings; and other aspects relevant to the topic. We have looked at the different narrative layers of the two novels individually, through which various topics and issues are presented, and we have also compared their similarities and differences. The endings were given special attention, as they tend to cause a lot of intrigue and discourse in the postcolonial studies and the postcolonial literary community in general.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* presents us with a more detailed version of *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha Mason, now called Antoinette Cosway. A Creole girl who struggles with her own identity and finding her place in the world, who tragically suffers the same fate as her mother, and who essentially becomes just a pawn in someone's game by being trapped in a marriage that is falling apart and ruining her. Along with the marriage comes the loss of narrative voice for Antoinette, who becomes silenced by her husband, as speaks for the both of them for a portion of the story (referred to as "ventriloquism" by Azam<sup>117</sup>). The "battle" for narrative voice in this novel represents the attempted rebellion or fight against the patriarchy on one hand, and the racist attitudes of the time on the other. Ultimately, we see Antoinette finding her own version of freedom in the destruction of her prison, and perhaps even in her demise.

*Foe* shows a similar yet different story, which reworks the original, *Robinson Crusoe*, into something potentially more realistic and tangible. The character of Susan Barton is, in a way, a prototype of a true feminist leader, as she stands up against the patriarchy in whatever limited ways she can, while simultaneously trying to fight for not only her truth but the truth of another marginalized person – Friday. This novel also deals with the issue of authorship, where we have yet another "battle" of sorts, this time between Susan and Mr. Foe, who both have their own ideas of what a narrative should look like.

Both of the novels end in, what most might consider, displeasing ways, as they do not offer any concrete resolution to the story. However, this is precisely what makes them so important in the world of postcolonial literature, as most real-life stories rarely ever have perfect endings in which everything is "how it should be" and nicely wrapped up. It would have been impossible to create idealistic stories while trying to accurately represent what the marginalized groups were going through during and after colonization. Having said all this,

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<sup>117</sup> Nushrat Azam, "'Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era' A Study of the Female Voice in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, Vol. 6, Issue 7, 2017, p. 239.

the novels' endings are also not entirely depressing, as they do offer some kind of hope if one chooses to read them that way.

Although *WSS* and *Foe* are some of the most well-known and praised novels of the postcolonial era, the authors did still receive some criticism for their works. Author Laura E. Ciolkowski stated the following about Rhys' novel:

“In spite of Rhys's celebrated promise to give Brontë's silent madwoman a chance to tell her story---Antoinette persists in replicating many of the basic elements of the English imperial narratives she scorns.”<sup>118</sup>

While one can understand where Ciolkowski is coming from, and, to some extent, even agree with her, it also seems quite unfair to label Rhys' “promise” as unfulfilled. Bertha/Antoinette has received a detailed backstory and a narrative voice of her own, which she was stripped of in Brontë's original story. For the first time, we can truly see “the madwoman in the attic” for what she is – a person who was oppressed and controlled by those with more power than her.

Similarly, Coetzee's novel was called an “achingly symbolic retelling”, and described as introducing “urgencies that are neither fresh nor illumined, only brilliantly disguised”, by a *Time Magazine* author, Stefan Kanfer.<sup>119</sup> While it is true that the topics which *Foe* presents are not new or ground-breaking, the significance of discussing them in the given context is immeasurable. The fact that this work is still sparking interest and conversation is a clear sign of how pertinent and important it truly is.

Taking into consideration everything that has been said so far about the two novels, we can conclude that the methods the authors used and the stories they chose to tell will not be forgotten any time soon. Even though both Jean Rhys and J. M. Coetzee have written plenty of other works, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* remain some of the most captivating and thought-provoking novels from the postcolonial period.

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<sup>118</sup> Laura E. Ciolkowski, ““Navigating the 'Wide Sargasso Sea': Colonial History, English Fiction, and British Empire”, *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 43, Issue 3, 1997, p. 346.

<sup>119</sup> Stefan Kanfer, “Books: Friday Night FOE”, *Time Magazine*, 1987, Retrieved June 6, 2021, from <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,963826,00.html>.

## II PART TWO

### 9. Methodological Research – Teaching English Language and Literature

While this thesis is primarily concerned with the analysis of two literary works, as a student of the teacher education program, I wanted to form a connection between the field of literature and teacher education. In consultations with my mentor, prof. Dr. Srebren Dizdar, we agreed upon the method which I would use to accomplish this goal, which will be further explained in the following section.

#### 9.1. Methodology

This research consists of two segments: an online English class that one of my colleagues and I held as a part of our pedagogical practice, and a questionnaire that was given to the students after the class.

Prior to the class, the students were sent handouts which included some basic information (title, author, year of publication, genre, themes, characters) and short summaries of the novels *Jane Eyre* and *Robinson Crusoe* as the predecessors to *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*. The students had a few days to read these handouts, and, presumably, all of them did so.

The class was held on the Zoom online teaching platform, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, 2021, and the lesson was centered on *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe*. 23 first-year students attended the class, along with their professor, Ikbala Čatić, from the Bosniak Grammar School, as well as our senior teaching assistant, Alma Žero, and two of our colleagues who were observing our class. The students' English proficiency level can be categorized as upper intermediate to advanced. The goal that my colleague and I set for the lesson was to familiarize the students with these two postcolonial novels and postcolonialism in general, and also have them engage in the analysis and discussion of their themes, while relating them to modern social issues. The class itself consisted of an introduction, two activities, and a wrap-up. In the first activity, my colleague and I presented the two novels to the students and discussed their opinions on the novels' themes and topics. The second activity had the students working in groups using the breakout rooms feature on Zoom in order to analyze excerpts from the novels and try to think of two examples found in today's society of the issue that their

respective excerpts show. After the students were done with their task, each group presented their findings and briefly discussed them with the whole class.

After the class was over, I sent a questionnaire to the students, which was made using Google Forms. This was used as a way to gauge the students' feelings and thoughts about the lesson and its topic, as well as to provide any suggestions or recommendations for possible future classes of this sort. It consisted of: three yes/no questions, one multiple-choice question, one Likert scale question, and seven questions to which the students could write out their answers. Even though 23 students attended the class, only nine responded to the questionnaire. This might be indicative of the students' interest in this topic, or lack thereof, but it is also important to keep in mind that this was, essentially, an extracurricular class for them and that they did have other responsibilities which took priority over answering the questionnaire. This could be another explanation for the relatively small number of respondents. The questionnaire is anonymous and the students were encouraged to be as honest as possible in their responses.

## 9.2. Questionnaire Analysis

*Note: The quoted responses have only been altered insofar as to edit any grammatical errors for better legibility. All of the students' responses can be found in the appendix.*

Q1: Did you like the lesson about the novels Foe and Wide Sargasso Sea?

All nine of the respondents answered 'Yes'. Although it is important to keep in mind that the students might have done so to not come across as rude, the general atmosphere of the class itself aligns with their answers. The students seemed to genuinely enjoy the class, as they actively participated in the discussions and shared their views and opinions without much hesitation. The novels, while not modern, still resonated with the students and, at the end of the class, a lot of them said that they would like to read the two books.

Q2: Would you like to have more classes in the future similar to the one we had, which cover literature from the post-colonial period? If no, please say why.

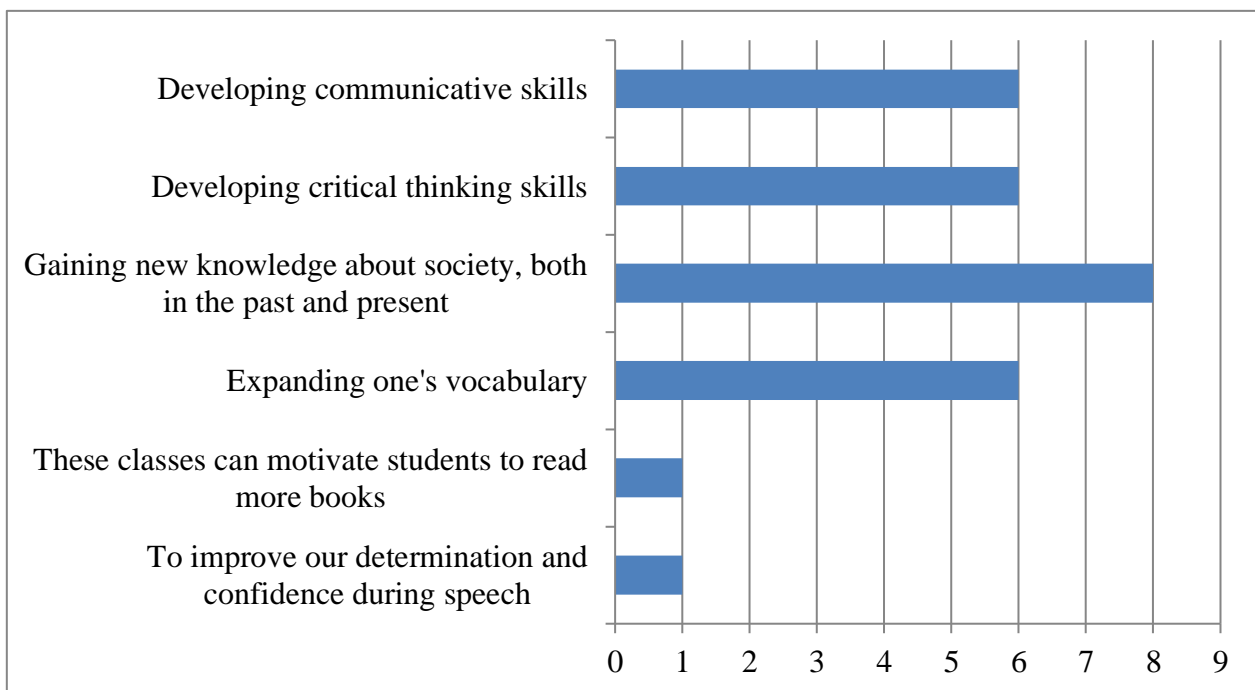
All of the students, again, responded with 'Yes'. One answer in particular specified that they found this class to be "informative and fun." Based on this, we can conclude that the

topic of postcolonialism can be interesting for younger generations if introduced correctly and in a way that they can understand.

Q3: Do you think that these types of lessons are useful for students your age?

Similar to the first question, all of the responses to this one were also ‘Yes’. It is clear that the students are able to recognize the importance of the topics covered by the lesson, and many of them verbally expressed in class that they think that these topics are still relevant and they should be taught and discussed in high schools.

Q4: If the answer to the previous question was yes, please check all the reasons why you think these types of lessons would be useful (you can also add your own):



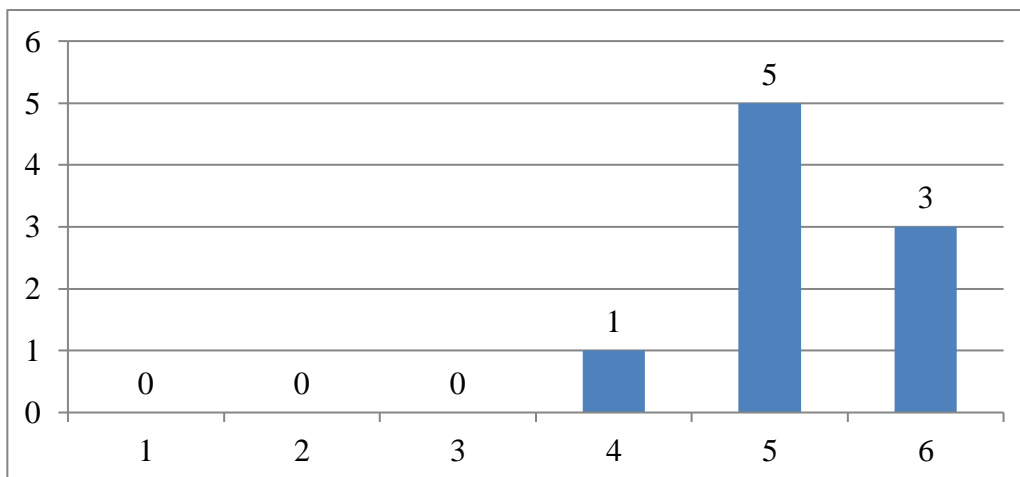
The first four options were already provided in the questionnaire, while the last two were added by two of the students. As evident, almost all of the students agree that these types of lessons can be useful for gaining new knowledge about society, both in the past and in the present. More than half of them also agree that these lessons help students develop communicative and critical thinking skills, as well as expand one’s vocabulary. The last two added responses provide an interesting insight into what students might be having issues with and what they possibly wish to improve: the motivation they have for reading books and their confidence when speaking. The fact that they believe that such classes can help them with

these issues should be a signal for the curriculum makers/teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina to try and include more lessons that deal with such literature.

Q5: Have you heard of the concept of post-colonialism prior to attending this class?

All nine of the respondents said that they have heard of postcolonialism prior to this class. This tells us that the students do get introduced to this topic – probably through history classes – and that there is a base that literature and language teachers can work off of in terms of analyzing and discussing works from this period.

Q6: To which extent do you now understand the concept of post-colonialism (postcolonial identity, issues, themes)? (1 - I don't understand it at all, 6 – I understand it perfectly)



As we can see, the majority of the students responded that they understand the concept of postcolonialism pretty well. The fact that none of the students responded with anything below a four on the Likert scale encourages the idea of including postcolonial literature in curricula even more. Although this class was a very superficial introduction to these topics, since we were limited by time, the students still seemed to grasp the idea behind postcolonialism pretty well, as can be seen in the following question. This shows that the students' interest in postcolonialism and its works is quite high, as they certainly would not be able to easily follow along if this were not true.

Q7: In your own words, how would you describe post-colonialism, based on what you have learned in this class?

Most of the students wrote something along the lines of postcolonialism being a response to colonization and decolonization, mentioning “the consequences of postcolonialism and imperialism” and “colonial[ism] literature and it[‘]s effects on society, trying to rewrite history.” Two of the responses were more detailed, stating:

“An academic study that reflects on the consequences of control caused by leading empires”

“Post-colonialism is the critical study mostly mentioned at discussions, which focuses on the events, people's behaviour and attitude during the period of colonialism and imperialism.”

These responses are a clear indication of how the students were able to understand what postcolonialism is at its very core. As I have mentioned with the previous question, the students were able to give these answers after just one 30-minute class on only two of the many postcolonial works. If they are given the chance to spend more time on these topics, the possibilities seem quite endless in regard to their knowledge and the ideas they could provide.

Q8: What do you think of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, based on what you now know about it from the class?

The responses to this question were varied, but all of them were mostly positive. One student noted that “[t]he novel is very interesting” and “[they] would like to read it in the future”, which is a sentiment that a few others shared as well, while another said that they liked “how the author gave the “crazy” character a backstory and proved that her “insanity” was completely driven by the circumstances and situations she’d been in.” One of the responses did state that they have read *Jane Eyre* and were not sure if they would like *Wide Sargasso Sea* “since the different author is writing and in her own way revealing story of a Charlotte’s Brontë’s character, that she, as an original writer left not completed purposely.” Overall, the students seemed to be absorbed in and curious about the story of *WSS*, as the topics of feminism and anti-patriarchy resonated with them quite a bit.

Q9: What do you think of the novel *Foe*, based on what you now know about it from the class?

The students generally seemed to be quite excited about this novel, stating that they “love the new portrayal of characters inspired by Robinson”, “[e]verything that bothered me in the original book was dealt with in this one”, and one student said that they are “very picky about books [they] like to read, but [they] would read this one.” Another student expressed their wish to read both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe* and compare the two novels themselves. Just like with the previous question, it is obvious that stories like *Foe* and *WSS* do not have to be something foreign or boring for younger students. The ways in which they discussed the topics in these novels, in the class, were highly eloquent and thought-provoking.

Q10: Are you able to recognize and understand the point of covering such novels and topics in class? If yes, in your own words, describe what this point is. If no, please explain why as well.

One student believes that the topics we covered are “very important not just for understanding history, but also for understanding the current situation in the society”, while another adds that “by talking about such books we gain a better understanding of the world we live in and develop critical thinking.” Most others shared similar messages and opinions, expressing the necessity of talking about more difficult topics, such as racism and oppression, in an educational environment. One of the responses mentions this specifically, by saying that these discussions “help us develop as humans and get rid of the fear of talking about taboo topics.” Once again, we can see that the students recognize the importance of classes such as this one, and they welcome these lessons with open arms.

The last two questions in this questionnaire gave the students an opportunity to provide any suggestions they might have as to how classes of this nature can be improved, as well as write down any additional comments they may have. Most of them complimented my colleague and me on our teaching abilities and on the lesson plan itself, saying that it was “educative, interactive and amazing”, “greatly designed and executed”, and that it “kept [their] attention and made [them] appreciate [the] class.” As for the suggestions, one of the students said that they would have preferred it if we did not spend a portion of the class presenting the works themselves. This can be improved by having the students be even more



involved in the class, especially since two other responses said that they would have liked it if there was more time for “teacher-student interaction” and discussion.

### 9.3. Research Conclusion

Based on the subjective experience of my colleague and me, the feedback we got from professor Čatić and our senior teaching assistant, as well as the written feedback from the students, it seems that including postcolonial literature in high school English classes would greatly benefit young people. There is plenty of interest among them in the stories presented through postcolonial works, and in postcolonial topics in general. These classes would help the students develop their intercultural competencies, empathy, and critical thinking. By reading and analyzing postcolonial works, whether in full or in excerpts, the students can better understand both the ‘colonizers’ and the ‘colonized’ concerning education, politics, geography, culture, and customs.<sup>120</sup> This is especially important for the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where tensions between people of different ethnic and national backgrounds are constantly present. As Islamović and Blažević explain:

“With regard to religious, ethnic and cultural diversity that is present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the question of establishing an intercultural, multilingual education model, which develops integration and democratic connectivity, promotes the tolerance, unity and understanding, stands the question of the survival of Bosnian society... It is essential that school systems and other institutions of education and culture, develop forms of work that will prevent exclusion, nationalism, anti-civilization and anti-democratic tendencies, and to promote democratic values, common life and cooperation.”<sup>121</sup>

Besides the cultural context, studying postcolonialism can help students with language learning itself. Reading works from this era can help them improve their vocabularies, communication, language comprehension, and reading and writing skills. If we take a look at the students’ responses (provided in the appendix of this paper), we can see that some of them have made a few mistakes in their answers. A few of those are what are known as ‘typos’, or typographical errors – unintentional mistakes one makes while typing using a keyboard (e.g. *spunds* instead of *sounds*). However, most of the other errors seem to be either

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<sup>120</sup> Simhachalam Thamarana, “Significance of Studying Postcolonial Literature and Its Relevance”, *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, 2015, p. 541.

<sup>121</sup> E. Islamović and N. Blažević, “The Prospects of Intercultural Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *Epiphany*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2014, p. 58.

grammar or spelling mistakes, such as using ‘then’ instead of ‘than’ or spelling the word ‘taboo’ as ‘tabu’. Mistakes such as these could signal a possible issue in the way students are taught in schools. If students find the content that is presented to them interesting enough, which can certainly be the case with postcolonial fiction, then they will acquire or learn a language faster as well. With this, both the socio-cultural context and language teaching are covered. The connection between these two is explained in the following excerpt:

“One of the important aspects of socio-cultural theory is the idea that learning is equally a social process as much as it is a cognitive process and the development of communication skills has been explained by socio-cultural theorists that it is a process that also has a social element attached to it. A post[-]colonial text, hence, lends excellent opportunities to English language teachers to enhance language proficiency of learners under the Communicative Language Teaching framework.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> J. Vijayakumar, and R. Shanmugam, “A Study on Using Postcolonial Texts for English Language Teaching”, *PRAYAG*, Kumaraguru College of Technology, Coimbatore, 2016, p. 2.

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## IV APPENDIX

### 11.1. Students' Questionnaire and Answers

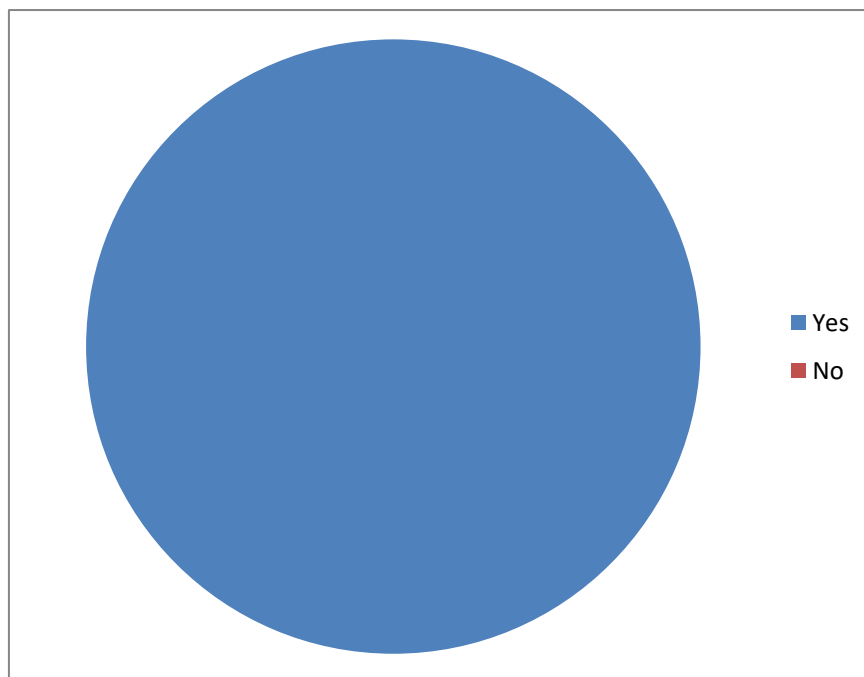
16.03.2021. English Class Feedback

This questionnaire will be used as data for an MA thesis under the title: "Comparison of Narrative Voices: Antoinette Cosway from *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Susan Barton from *Foe*". The thesis will contain the analysis of narrative voices in the two novels, as well as a section dedicated to bridging the gap between teaching and literature.

The questionnaire is anonymous, so please be as honest as possible in your answers! Thank you for your participation!

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at: [maslak.envera@gmail.com](mailto:maslak.envera@gmail.com)

#### 1. Did you like the lesson about the novels *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*?

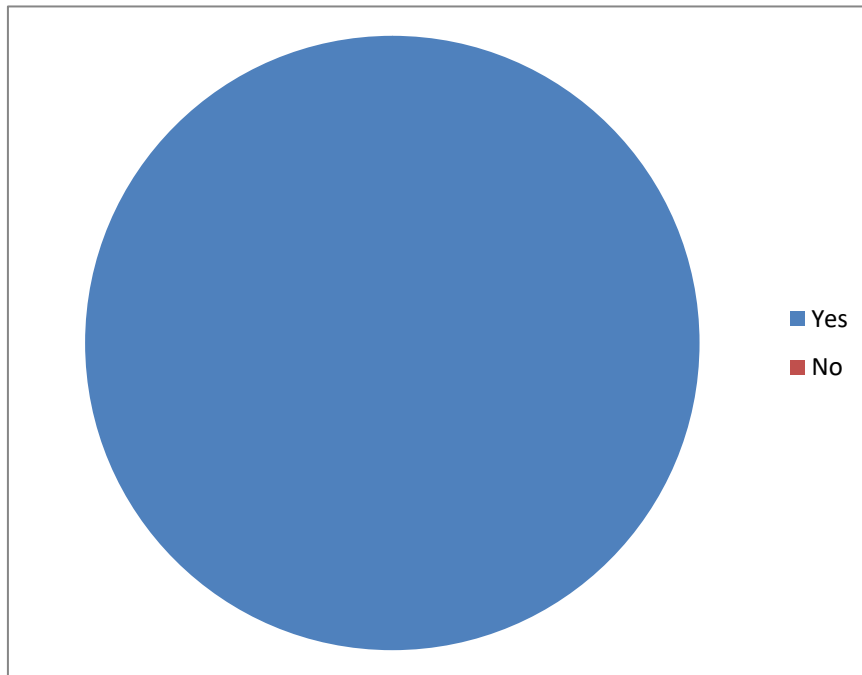


#### 2. Would you like to have more classes in the future similar to the one we had, which cover literature from the post-colonial period? If no, please say why.

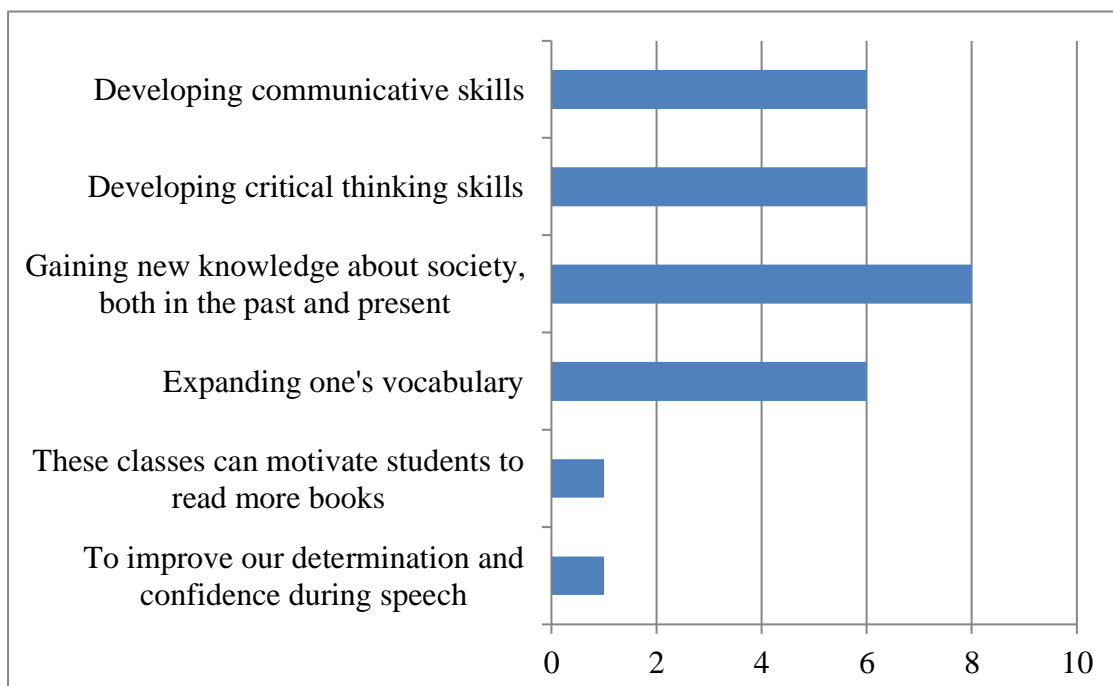
- *Yes*
- *yes!! it was informative and fun*
- *I would.*
- *Yes!*
- *It would be great to have another class.*

- *YES!*
- *Yes I would like to have more classes in the future similar to the one we had*
- *yes*

**3. Do you think that these types of lessons are useful for students your age?**

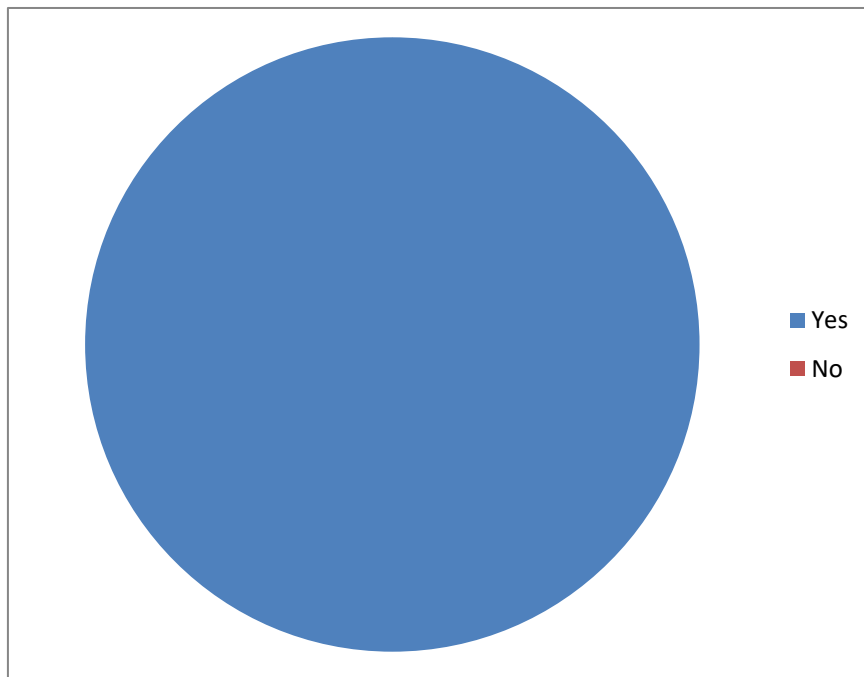


**4. If the answer to the previous question was yes, please check all the why reasons you think these types of lessons would be useful (you can also add your own):**

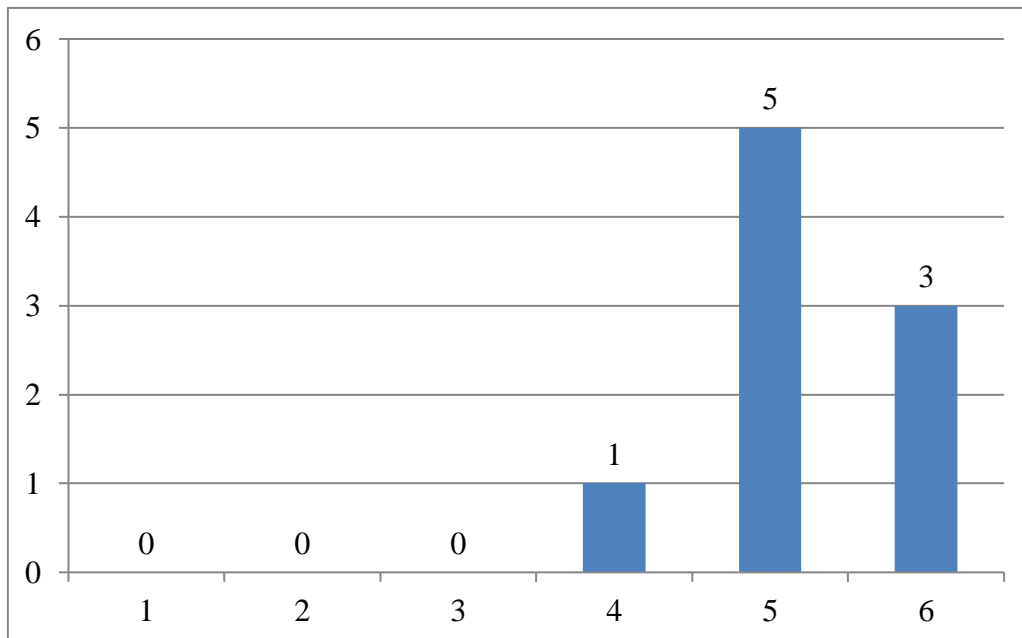




5. Have you heard of the concept of post-colonialism prior to attending this class?



6. To which extent do you now understand the concept of post-colonialism (postcolonial identity, issues, themes)? (1 - I don't understand it at all, 6 – I understand it perfectly)



7. In your own words, how would you describe post-colonialism, based on what you have learned in this class?

— *how everything changed after colonialism, from racism, hate, war etc.*

- *Period of time when people had to deal with the consequences of colonialism and imperialism.*
- *Post-colonialism*
- *It deals with colonialism literature and its effects on society, trying to rewrite history*
- *I guess I would explain it as problems and things that happened after decolonization*
- *Post-colonialism is some sort of an answer/analysis to colonialism and its contribution*
- *An academic study that reflects on the consequences of control caused by leading empires.*
- *Post-colonialism is the critical study mostly mentioned at discussions, which focuses on the events, people's behaviour and attitude during the period of colonialism and imperialism.*
- *Consequences and effects on the people and country after colonization.*

**8. What do you think of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, based on what you now know about it from the class?**

- *the novel is quite interesting*
- *Very interesting. I like how the author gave the “crazy” character a backstory and proved that her “insanity” was completely driven by the circumstances and situations she’d been in.*
- *The novel is very interesting and I would like to read it in the future.*
- *I read *Jane Eyre*, hence would read *WSS*, but not sure if I would like it, since the different author is writing and on her own way revealing story of a Charlotte's Bronte character, that she, as a original writer left not completed purposely.*
- *I think it sounds very interesting and I honestly want to read it, which for me says a lot*
- *I understood that *WSS* is an answer to *Jane Eyre*, and I would need to read the two (or just one) books in order to understand it better. I remember that you said something regarding the ending, that it isn't completed and that the reader is the one to decide what the ending really is. (she dreamed that she set the house on fire and then she woke up and took the candle)*

- *I think that it's an interesting story and the lesson definitely intrigued me to read it all*
- *The novel Wide Sargasso Sea describes the women position and slavery in 19th century, one of the most popular and important literacy about feminism and anticolonialism.*
- *It seemed interesting. I revised my knowledge on the topics it was based upon.*

**9. What do you think of the novel Foe, based on what you now know about it from the class?**

- *i am very picky about books i like to read, but i would read this one*
- *Very cool. Everything that bothered me in the original book was dealt with in this one + sprinkle on top some feminism. I like it.*
- *Foe is a bit different from original Robinson Crusoe novel, but I would also like to read it and compare these two.*
- *Since I read Robinson Crusoe very young, I do not remember much and not quite sure who we'll I understood it in the past. Today, perhaps, my perspective would be different, leading me to also read Foe. Hopefully I will.*
- *It seems like a good novel. Having not read Jane Eyre I don't have any opinions about it really, but I am excited to read them hopefully.*
- *It is some sort of a copy of the original "Robinson Crusoe", but it's told from a different point of view.*
- *I love the new portrayal of characters inspired by Robinson, but I don't think I would read the story*
- *The novel Foe describes the adventures and difficult circumstances in Susan Barton's life*
- *I liked what was presented. It made me interested into reading it fully.*

**10. Are you able to recognize and understand the point of covering such novels and topics in class? If yes, in your own words, describe what this point is. If no, please explain why as well.**

- *the teachers explained the topics well, well done :)*
- *Absolutely. By talking about such books we gain a better understanding of the world we live in and develop critical thinking.*

- *The topics we mentioned in class are very important not just for understanding history, but also for understanding the current situation in the society. Young people should learn about these and know which are bad or good so they can try to change them.*
- *Yes, the point is that students develop several skills, from critical thinking, recognising problems, connecting past ones with problems of modern world...*
- *Yes, I mean this kinds of novels, first of all are very popular. Secondly the topics they cover I believe help us develop as humans and get rid of the fear of talking about tabu topics*
- *I think that these novels are attractive to students like us, they describe the world in the past, which is very useful for us, it's important to know the history of our world (country as well).*
- *These stories gave importance to topics the original books didn't cover or mocked, so that even becomes a highlight of both stories.*
- *Yes, I am able to recognize the point of covering these novels, the themes and topics of the novels *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are very important for forming our opinions and attitudes, as well as on discussions and arguments.*
- *I think the point is raising awareness to certain topics.*

**11. Do you have any suggestions as to how classes of this nature could be made better (more interesting, relevant, interactive, productive etc.)?**

- -
- *I cannot think of anything right now.*
- *I personally think it was very interesting, but it would be better if there was more time for teacher-student interaction.*
- *Everything was really great and well put, especially the fact that you managed to finish the whole class in time limit without leaving anything unexplained, I would just like that definition of postcolonialism and its consequences were explained more, since not everyone were quite sure about its real meaning (speaking of 15 year old, we did not learn it in school, I had an idea of it, just because I have been interested in it in the past)*
- *I loved the class ,but if we were to have this type of class again I would love if we had more time to discuss things other then just working on the "tasks".*

- *I think the classes were quite fun, maybe I would add some sort of quiz*
- *Just to get rid of the presentations, they personally felt like a waste of time.*
- *Classes that were held last week were very interesting and exciting events, I would to suggest the idea of describing pictures of the topics and to express more new words.*
- *I don't have any suggestions*

**12. Is there anything else you want to add that was not covered by any of the previous questions? :)**

- -
- *you guys did great! :)*
- *You were really great, entertaining, kept our attention and made us appreciate your class(which is a whole big deal since we don't do that very often)*
- *Just that I loved the class:)*
- *No, questions covered pretty much everything that we discussed on the class. Thank you for great designed and executed classes, it was really interesting!*
- *Thank you so much for including us in this educative, interactive and amazing class, it affects positively on my mood, especially during this pandemic period.*