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Antoinette's construction of the Self in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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Abstract

The present dissertation investigates the challenging concept of identity, focusing on the main character of Antoinette in the 1966 - postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Falling within the field of post - colonialism, philosophy, psychology and subaltern studies, this piece of research will propose an unusual interpretation of the process of identity construction/ deconstruction in Antoinette's character.

Instead of supporting the negative interpretations of Antoinette's appropriation of the Self, such as those offered primarily by Vazquez and Voicu, the review of the key literature aims to demonstrate Antoinette's successful identity construction of the Self through Coartney's theorisation of the looking-glass, Panizza's conciliatory reading of binary couples, Koparanoglu's interpretation of Thornfield Hall's fire as an act of identity redemption, Gangl's perception of Rochester as a victim and Maurel's triumphant reception of Antoinette as the subjective voice of narration.

This piece of research demonstrates that Rhys' attempt of 'rewriting Bertha a life'¹ is not unsuccessful in light of Sarup's and Hegel's formulations of Otherness. Bertha's character is conceived as necessary to Antoinette's redemption. Both James' philosophical approach to identity and Sarup's categorisation of public/ private identity explain how Antoinette manages to become the subjective voice of narration. In addition, the refusal of Antoinette's image in the third part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is interpreted in light of the Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic.

Furthermore, this dissertation analyses the looking- glass and the current theme of dreams and letters spread throughout the narration as literary devices used by Rhys to redeem Antoinette's identity. It also provides proof of Antoinette's appropriation of the Self through the linguistic analysis of subjectivity in letters found in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

¹ Aktari, 2010: 73.

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Introduction

In this piece of research, I would like to deal with the deep-seated binary opposition between the 'Self' and the 'Other' which, throughout the years, has been and still is the kernel of post-colonial studies. Analysing the blurred lines between the above-mentioned problematic pair, based on the Lacanian reading of the role of letters, scattered throughout the 1966 - novel 'Wide Sargasso Sea', does not only jeopardise the vision of the world as perceived by colonisers but also calls into question the truthfulness of the various narrative voices in this polyphonic novel.

The importance of this research, thus, resides in the resulting invalidation of the dichotomous and excluding vision of the world (plus/minus) in favour of the more conciliatory Hegelian synthesis in the dialectic tension of two contrasting terms (male versus female voices). My dissertation will not only contribute to legitimising the Other's voice, as Spivak did by questioning the role of the overruling Western voice in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988), but it will also explain how the oppressed can claim their own rights of subjectivity and identity.

The affirmation of the 'Other' through the Lacanian interpretation of the letters will, in fact, help me to deconstruct the binarism between male and female voices in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Moreover, the reason why I decided to adopt a deconstructive approach to unravelling such entrenched dichotomised terms lies in Loomba's definition of deconstruction:

'Deconstruction does not say there is no subject, there is no truth, there is no history. It simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed to have the truth. It is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced'.²

As a result, deconstruction, as well as post-colonialism, leads to the upheaval of the established hierarchy. Using a poststructuralist approach, I will try to turn the dominant and well-established colonising view of the world upside down in favour of an egalitarian one.

² Loomba, 1998: 7-8.

To be more precise, the first chapter will review the work of the most relevant scholars within the subject of Rhys's rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, with particular attention to the Self/ Other couplet and Antoinette's identity construction.

In the second chapter, my analysis will investigate the controversial nature of the concept of the 'Other'. By drawing on Spivak's and Lacan's theorisations of 'Othering', as well as on Stanley's conceptualisation of women as 'minus males', I will explain the origins of this well- established hierarchical binary system. I will also analyse the importance of Bertha's destruction for Antoinette's appropriation of the Self in light of the Hegelian reading of the characters.

The third chapter will aim to investigate the literary devices employed by Rhys in the construction of her heroine's identity. Furthermore, I will demonstrate Rochester's passivity and Antoinette's positive appropriation of identity.

Finally, I would like to explain the multidimensional nature of the main topic of this research project: Otherness. This concept entails both postcolonial and subaltern studies as well as intercultural and feminist studies. Thus, as it is difficult to deal with a wide range of disciplines in such a limited space, I would come to grips primarily with post- colonial and subaltern studies, while considering feminism an integral part of the former.

First Chapter:

1.1 Methodology

Before starting my dissertation, however, I would like to give readers a general idea of how I conducted the analysis of subjectivity emerging from letters in the postcolonial novel of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The device I decided to apply in investigating the construction of subjects' identities is the Conversational Discourse Analysis (CDA), which:

'seeks better understanding of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others as a step towards social emancipation.'³

I am a fervent advocate of the 'Sapir-Whorf linguistic determinism', according to which 'different cultures interpret the world in different ways, and that languages encode these differences'⁴. As a result, in an attempt to grasp the imbalance of power embodied by the main characters of the novel, Antoinette and Rochester, I considered my analysis of the language to be undeniable proof that my investigation deconstructs fixed hierarchies and claims equality as well as freedom of expression between female and male voices.

Instead of calculating the predominance of subjects mentioned in the narration as a whole, however, I decided to carry out research based merely on letters for the following reasons.

Firstly, drawing on Lacan's symbolic meaning conferred to letters, in their pure signifiers, they are considered the ultimate expression of 'Otherness' and, as a result, the devices through which the silenced are allowed to have their say.

Secondly, in line with post- colonial aims of questioning the canonical order of things, letters also call into question the role played by writing over reading in such an oral culture as the West Indies, where the story takes place.

By taking advantage of CDA and a linguistic analysis of the subjects scattered throughout the letters, I will not only question the unequal and predominant male

³ Fairclough, 2014: 46.

⁴ Singh in Blakesley, 2014: 30.

power over females within conversation, but also focus on the affirmation of the 'Self/ Other' binary through the prevalent use of the personal pronoun 'I'. Numerical data collected in the appendices will show a predominant use of 'I' and an increasingly overwhelming majority of female subjects as the novel develops.

1.2 Literature review

The issue of Antoinette's identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is the focus of my dissertation, has been discussed many times over the years. However, despite the high number of contributions, the results achieved are quite homogeneous, as most of the scholars unanimously support the destruction of the female character's identity. Although Rhys' intention of restoring Jane Eyre's Bertha in the post-colonial novel is considered unsuccessful by the majority of researchers in the field, my dissertation will endeavour to prove the opposite with the help of contributions from the few defenders of Rhys' construction of Antoinette's identity.

In order to better understand the relevance of my dissertation within such an extensively studied field, I will group and compare the work of the most relevant scholars within the subject in an attempt to explaining the relation between my findings and the previous ones.

By examining the metaphor of the recurrent theme of the mirror in *Wide Sargasso Sea* from a Lacanian point of view, Fernández Vázquez maintains in his *La construcción del sujeto en la narrativa de Jean Rhys: After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie, Voyage in the Dark y Wide Sargasso Sea* that Lacan's mirror stage is essential for the construction of the subject. The author also points out the valuable contribution of Rochester's voice in the second part of the narration as it enables the woman to be considered both subject and object of the male gaze. Vázquez's contribution to the field is meaningful as his research shows how Antoinette's endeavours to oppose a patriarchal society fail and lead to the destruction of the Self. Similarly, Antoinette's difficult quest for identity ends up with the annihilation of the Self in *Jean Rhys' Exoticism and the Colonial Imperialism* by Cristina- Georgiana Voicu. Starting from the

'external projections of Antoinette's self'⁵ in the characters of Annette and Tia, the chapter also focuses on the role of the looking-glass in the process of 'becoming' through which Antoinette's Self is turned into the Other, namely, Bertha. According to Voicu, the acceptance of her image through the mirror, which represents the patriarchal authority imposed on Antoinette, means the destruction of the Self, which is also caused by Tia's will to destroy her. Furthermore, the imposition of another name and the deprivation of her economic wealth caused by her marriage to Rochester contribute to the loss of her identity.

In addition, Pollanen also depicts an analogous picture of Antoinette, torn between the binaries of subject/ object, England/ Jamaica and past/ future. In her *Abject by Gender and Race: The loss of Antoinette's identity in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's character is analysed using Kristeva's stance on the abject/ object. According to the Bulgarian- French philosopher, in fact, 'the only quality that the abject and the object share is that of being opposed to 'I'; as the "other woman" Antoinette has always represented something in opposition to everyone around her.'⁶ By analysing the difficult relationships between Antoinette and her mother as well as that of Antoinette and Rochester, Pollanen maintains that the female character is prompted to abject her Self through the negation of her image at the mirror.

As demonstrated thus far, research on the construction of identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* has led to the unsuccessful affirmation of Antoinette's Self, further enhanced by Herischian's stance in Eyvazi's contribution entitled *Evaluation of Intertextuality and Irony in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea: a Postmodern Outlook*, where the achievement of the ideal identity by Jane Eyre in the Bildungsroman *Jane Eyre* finds its counterpart in Antoinette's failure in the anti- Bildungsroman *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Although far more research has been carried out on the destruction of Antoinette's identity than on the successful construction of her identity, it is worth delving into both interpretations in order to obtain an overall picture of the complex

⁵ Georgiana- Voicu, 2014: 55.

⁶ <http://journals.oregondigital.org/OURJ/article/view/1891/2146>.

field we are dealing with. Indeed, Le Gallez's analysis of Antoinette's role in *The Rhys Woman* helps us to clarify the extent to which the female character can be considered a 'passive victim' within the narration. Opposing previous scholars' discoveries, Le Gallez explains that Antoinette 'far from being as passive as she looks, is passive only in a culturally determined way, and that underlying this attitude is an ironic awareness that the quality is actually part of the feminine condition in the society in which she lives'.⁷ Drawing on Dworkin's theorisation of the natural passivity of women, the subject is further explored by Le Gallez with the help of a neat classification of bad and good women. The author makes clear women aim to achieve passivity in order to be considered victims and good women; therefore, her contribution to the study of identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is revelatory. In fact, she maintains that 'happiness for a woman is to be passive, victimized, destroyed or asleep. [...] It tells us that the happy ending is when we are ended, when we live without our lives or not at all.'⁸

Similarly, as James claims in *The ladies and the mummies: Jane Austen & Jean Rhys*, the label of passive victim attached to Antoinette is erased by the initiative and courage, which led her to set fire to Thornfield Hall. According to the author, refusing the constraints imposed by the patriarchal world, which is embodied by Rochester, and the destruction of Thornfield Hall result in Antoinette's appropriation of the Self since, by ceasing to be considered the object of Rochester's predominance, she becomes the subject of her own life.

Furthermore, as Fayad states in *Unquiet Ghosts: the struggle for representation in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys' choice of conferring authority to Rochester as the predominant narrative voice in the postcolonial novel resides in the fact that Antoinette is 'outside and beyond language.'⁹ Therefore, her representation is committed to the Other: that is, Rochester, who reduces Antoinette to a ghost. Like Le Gallez and James, Fayad also recognises her act of setting fire to Thornfield Hall as a way of liberating herself from the passive victim label.

⁷ Le Gallez, 1990: 4.

⁸ Ivi, 7.

⁹ Fayad, 1988: 235.

The importance of Rochester's narrative in the affirmation of Antoinette's identity is analogously legitimised by Erwin in his "*Like in a Looking- Glass*": *history and narrative in Wide Sargasso Sea*. By taking into account Spivak's stance on Rhys' decision to write *Wide Sargasso Sea* both from Antoinette's and Rochester's points of view, Erwin maintains that Antoinette's voice must be considered in view of Rochester's one as 'the impossible desire evident in Antoinette's narrative, that is, to occupy a racial position not open to her, can only realize itself in the gaze of the Other.'¹⁰

Instead of supporting the destruction of Antoinette's identity, as previously proposed by both Vázquez's and Voicu's interpretation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I would advocate Coartney's theorisation of the looking- glass in *Identity Crisis for the Creole Woman: a Search for Self in Wide Sargasso Sea*, where 'despite society's attempts to eradicate the identity of the Creole woman, Antoinette forms a secure sense of Self at the end of the novel, thus freeing her from the restrictive labels and cruel rejection she has been forced to endure.'¹¹ If the looking- glass encountered in the first part of narration reflects Gilbert and Gubar's theorisation of the mirror as the means of men's superiority over women, its role changes when, towards the end of the book, Antoinette recognises herself as a ghost in the mirror and refuses her image. The rejection of her Self, at this point, should not be interpreted as the destruction of the Self, as read by previous scholars. Rather, as Coartney claims, it should be considered the rejection of the labels given to her by the masculine society.

Furthermore, I would endorse Panizza's conciliatory interpretation of the binary couples of Europe/ Caribbean, White/ Black communities and the intermingling state of dreams and reality. They are all described as essential elements to Antoinette's affirmation of the Self in *Double Complexity in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea*, since 'what nobody in the story seems to understand is that those two polarities are necessary to each other, one keeping the other alive by its very opposition. Whiteness and blackness, dreams and realities are all sides of one composite but whole universe, so it is not necessary but even dangerous, to make a clear- cut choice between

¹⁰ Erwin, 1989: 215.

¹¹ <http://www.mckendree.edu/academics/scholars/issue10/coartney.htm>.

them.’¹² Apart from identifying the red dress and the looking-glass as means of Antoinette’s appropriation of the Self, Panizza’s contribution to the study of identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is significant as she further develops the theme of based on Spivak’s understanding of the mirror in relation to the construction of identity. According to Spivak, the mirror can be considered the means through which Antoinette can rid herself of the image conferred on her by Rochester, through the objectification of the Self. Thus, Antoinette’s identity is constructed through the mirror that, according to Spivak’s *Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*, can be analysed in light of Narcissus’ madness in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Again, since Panizza considers Thornfield Hall the symbol of the patriarchal power, the act of setting fire to the property can be read as the appropriation of the subject over her Self.

Like Panizza, Koparanoglu also identifies Thornfield Hall arson as means of Antoinette’s appropriation of the Self in his research entitled *The victim of colonization: Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea*. The author claims that the sense of strangeness and otherness is, however, perceived not just by Antoinette but also by Rochester who is displaced in a foreign country in the second part of the post-colonial novel’s narration. According to Koparanoglu, the role of Rochester’s voice is ‘a process of self-identification that enables him to maintain his superiority over the uncivilized island and over its racially different natives’¹³, especially in the second part of the narration. Despite the dominant male voice, Antoinette’s presence is persistent within the novel. Her invasion of Rochester’s narration in the second part of the book calls into doubt his status of coloniser and challenges his opinion on Christophine.

Likewise, Koparanoglu’s interpretation of Rochester as a victim away from home finds its confirmation in *Women Making Progress? A study of WSS as a response to Jane Eyre*, where, according to Gangl, ‘Rhys suggests Rochester is also a victim, a victim of the Victorian familial values.’¹⁴ Furthermore, Gangl’s relevance to the subject lies in her recognition of Antoinette’s desire for de-individualisation. Being excluded from both the White and the Black communities, Antoinette feels the need to return to a pre-oedipal stage, such as the convent, or the mother she had been

¹² Panizza, 2009: 6.

¹³ http://www.inst.at/trans/17Nr/3-3/3-3_koparanoglu17.htm.

¹⁴ Gangl, 2007: 56.

separated from when she was young: that is, a time where the Self was part of the Other and vice versa.

The appropriation of the Self and the triumph of Antoinette as a subject is, however, maintained by Maurel in *The Ironic Other* (chapter four of *Jean Rhys*). By giving an explanation of the concepts of lack and negativity attached to women in the binary and androcentric world we are living in, thanks to De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, the author gives credit to Rhys for having succeeded in conferring a positive value on the Other. In addition, Maurel maintains that the construction of Antoinette's identity is successful if we compare the dominant subjects in both novels: the dehumanised Bertha encountered in *Jane Eyre* is considered an object, as is evident from the use of the subject 'it' to refer to her, while the humanised Antoinette of *Wide Sargasso Sea* manages to redeem her identity through the use of the pronouns 'she' and 'I', as will be proven by the linguistic analysis of the postcolonial novel in the third chapter of my research.

The complexity of Antoinette's identity is, however, made it clear through the articulated analysis of *The impossibility of creating identity in Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea*¹⁵. El Ouardi manages to fulfil the arduous task of analysing Antoinette's identity by recognising two stages: identity construction and identity destruction. Despite its objective of justifying Rhys' intention of redeeming Bertha's character in the canonical novel, the essay ends up highlighting the destruction of her Self. On the one hand, Rhys manages to give Antoinette an identity; the objectified character of *Jane Eyre* is, in fact, turned into an active subject through the help of elements which improve Antoinette's self-esteem such as a nation, a home, a sense of belonging to a class, a family, friends and a marriage. On the other hand, the same elements will determine her identity destruction at a later stage. In fact, the absence of Rochester's love, the rejection of religion, deprivation of money after her marriage, the change of her name and loss of her house undermine her self-esteem and identity. El Ouardi's research on identity is particularly accurate as it tries to encompass a comprehensive vision of Antoinette's Self by taking into account both James's conceptualisation of the Self and Sarup's dual models of identity. However, it omits some vital aspects which

¹⁵ Original title: *La imposibilidad de crear una identidad en Wide Sargasso Sea de Jean Rhys*.

allow us to see the successful construction of Antoinette's identity, as I will demonstrate in the second chapter of my piece of research.

Although the majority of studies about identity on *Wide Sargasso Sea* are based on the destruction of Antoinette's identity, my research project will try to demonstrate how Antoinette strives for the affirmation of the Self. In particular, I will draw on contributions from Le Gallez, James, Fayad, Erwin, Coartney, Panizza, Koparanoglu, Maurel with particular attention given to the significant research carried out by El Ouardi with the aim of establishing the victory of the Self in the postcolonial novel.

Second Chapter: The concept of Identity between the Self and the Other

The second chapter of my research project focuses on the identity of the controversial character Antoinette in the 1966 - postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. While investigating the reasons that make Rhys' masterpiece a rewriting of the canonical novel of *Jane Eyre*, I will also examine the intertextual relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in order to explain how the Caribbean author managed to comply with her intention of restoring Antoinette's identity; in fact, 'remaining faithful to Brontë's plot line, Rhys exhibits the differences between the two sides of the Atlantic, the differences across the Sargasso Sea.'¹⁶

Furthermore, aided by Spivak's and Lacan's theorisations of the Other in relation to the Self, I will delve into the challenging task of comprehending the affirmation of an in-between identity such as that of Antoinette. This unit will, thus, lay the foundation for the analysis of subjectivity in letters which will be presented in the third chapter of this dissertation.

2.1 Wide Sargasso Sea and Rhys's rewriting back

Since Antoinette's identity forms the core of my research, I wish to begin this chapter by analysing the title of the novel which embodies the harassment of an identity trapped in the Sargasso Sea. Rhys chose the Sargasso Sea as the name for her novel not only due to its liminal location, but also for the deeper meaning of the term, which is revelatory when viewed in light of the analysis of Antoinette's identity construction. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the Sargasso Sea is:

'A region of the western Atlantic Ocean between the Azores and the Caribbean, so called because of the prevalence in it of floating sargasso seaweed. It is the breeding place of eels from the rivers of Europe and eastern North America, and is known for its usually calm conditions.'¹⁷

¹⁶<http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1283&context=honorsthesis>.

¹⁷ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Sargasso-Sea>

As the Sargasso Sea can be deemed the embodiment of Antoinette's identity crisis and her difficulties in the affirmation of the Self, torn between England and Jamaica, it also enhances the differences between the male and female world, as suggested by Winterhalter: the Sargasso Sea is 'a potential geography of sexual difference, in which the civilised world of England is symbolised as masculine and the island paradise of the Caribbean aligns as feminine'.¹⁸

In order to better understand the complexity of Antoinette's character and the difficult process she faces in constructing her own identity, which will be the focus of my piece of work, it is also necessary to clarify Rhys' intentions in re-writing *Jane Eyre*. During an interview with Vreeland, the author said:

'When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been. She seems such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life.'¹⁹

With the explicit declaration of her dissatisfaction with Bertha's character in *Jane Eyre*, it can be maintained that Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* in a bid to give Antoinette an identity. Her task, however, was very difficult to accomplish and also incurred harsh criticism from Spivak due to her decision of giving a voice to 'a white creole rather than to a former black slave such as Christophine.'²⁰ Indeed, Spivak reprimanded Rhys for having imposed 'the silence of the most oppressed people of the Caribbean- the black women and former slaves- in favour of a Creole character.'²¹ Exploring Antoinette's character is, thus, essential for understanding the author's choice of rewriting a response to *Jane Eyre* as well as for invalidating Spivak's argument.

¹⁸ Winterhalter, 1994: 219.

¹⁹ Aktari, 2010: 73.

²⁰ Edwards, 2008: 55.

²¹ Ibid.

Wide Sargasso Sea's main character is intentionally one of minor importance in *Jane Eyre*: the madwoman Bertha, who is renamed Antoinette by Rhys. Research on the dependency between the two novels has revealed several points of contact as well as some notable differences, which render such a relationship quite controversial. On the one hand, the postcolonial writer follows Brontë's chronological narration from childhood to adulthood in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. On the other, it is the accomplishment of the two heroines' identities that demonstrates a substantial difference between the two novels. This is in spite of the fact that the characters share the same unhappy childhood, both ignored by the mothers and trying to compensate with surrogate figures leading to a spiritual crisis. According to Herischian, while *Jane Eyre* can be considered a Bildungsroman, namely, 'a novel dealing with one person's formative years or spiritual education,²² since Jane manages to assert her own identity at the end of the story, the same cannot be said for *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Antoinette struggles to achieve happiness and freedom.

As a result, the question that arises is as follows: given that Antoinette's construction of identity is problematic and at some point vain, thus urging Herischian to consider *Wide Sargasso Sea* an anti-Bildungsroman, is Rhys' attempt at rewriting Bertha's life in the post-colonial novel unsuccessful? No, it is not, and this chapter will explain the reasons why, by suggesting an uncommon interpretation of Rhys' masterpiece.

2.2 Antoinette's identity in the Self/ Other couplet

Giving an insight into Derrida's deconstruction is fundamental for the long-term goal of juggling the dominant Manichean system of binarism and analysing the controversial nature of Antoinette's identity. By analysing the binary oppositions of the Saussurean structuralism through deconstruction, Derrida maintains that 'within these systems one part of that binary pair is always more important than the other, that one term is 'marked' as positive and the other as negative. Hence in the binary pair GOOD/EVIL, good is what Western philosophy values, and evil is **subordinated** to

²² <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Bildungsroman>

GOOD.’²³ Similarly, by taking into consideration the masculine/ feminine binary opposition and the much greater significance conferred on the first term than the second, it becomes clear that, as a female, Antoinette is subjected to the ideology of her time and is considered both inferior and passive. This means that Rhys’s endeavours to restore her identity encounter several hindrances, as is even more evident from Dworkin’s analysis:

‘As nonphallic beings, women are defined as submissive, passive, virtually inert. For all patriarchal history, we have been defined by law, custom, and habit as inferior because of our nonphallic bodies. Our sexual definition is one of “masochistic passivity”: “masochistic” because even men recognize their systematic sadism against us; “passivity” not because we are naturally passive, but because our chains are very heavy and as a result we cannot move.’²⁴

It follows that women are considered inferior to men and that ‘nonphallic beings’ have been allocated a negative semantic space, as Julia Stanley showed in her analysis of the man-made world we are living in today. In fact, female deficiency depends on their ‘minus maleness [...]’. This is what Stanley has referred to as negative semantic space for no matter what women do they are still branded as women and therefore cannot develop positive meanings and definitions of themselves.’²⁵ Different from the male category and alien to the positive connotation that it entails, it is no surprise that women are associated with the concept of Otherness if we apply the notion of difference, which involves female inferiority and identity deconstruction. In the postcolonial novel of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha’s character is, thus, perceived as the Lacanian Other. This concept, drawing on Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, as well as Freudian psychoanalytical studies, refers to ‘the other who resembles the self, which the child discovers when it looks in the mirror and becomes aware of itself as a separate being’.²⁶

²³ Oloruntoba, 2008: 38.

²⁴ Dworkin, 1982 : 47.

²⁵ Spender, 1998: 20.

²⁶ Ashcroft et al., 2013: 380.

Instead of supporting the longstanding exclusionary interpretation of the binary couplet of Self and Other, these terms should, conversely, be interpreted in light of Sarup's formulation according to which Otherness is perceived as 'deprivation in relation to ourselves, because we regard the other as complete unities in relation with ourselves; and this is why the other is defined as "what is not".'²⁷ El Ouardi's revolutionary contribution to the conceptualisation of the Other is also related to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Drawing on Fichte, the German philosopher was, in fact, the first to recognise the Other as playing an important role in the affirmation of the Self: 'the other, for Hegel, is indispensable for the existence of my consciousness as Self consciousness in which the Self apprehends itself'²⁸. In this respect, contrary to the dominant thought which sees the Other as the means of identity deconstruction, Otherness should be read as the means through which identity construction is implemented 'since we have to identify ourselves with the other in order to achieve our own identity'²⁹. As a result, the character of Bertha is necessary to Antoinette's redemption, as I will demonstrate in the following section.

2.3 The investigation of identity: Bertha's deconstruction

As has been shown so far, trying to support Rhys' intentions of constructing an identity for Antoinette does not mean denying that her Self is at stake in the narration of the postcolonial novel. In a state of uncertainty about her race, origins, family and the subjection to the stronger sex, Antoinette's identity is, in fact, clearly jeopardised several times by disparate factors: nostalgia for her mother country, her mother's negligence of her, the catastrophic marriage to Rochester and last but not least having her name changed by her husband. However, I am strongly convinced that Rhys managed to meet her original intentions by turning Jane Eyre's passive character of Bertha into the active Antoinette, as I will explain shortly. In addition, this section will also aim at demonstrating Antoinette's gradual redemption from object into subject. The first chapter of my dissertation has already pointed out the tendency of most of

²⁷ El Ouardi, 2012-13: 16.

²⁸ Berenson, 1982: 84.

²⁹ Ivi, p.17.

the scholars to identify Rhys's intentions of restoring Bertha's character as failing. However, James's philosophical approach to the concept of identity, Sarup's categorisation of public and private identity and the Master/Slave dialectic theorised by the above-mentioned German philosopher will all be of paramount importance in demonstrating the opposite.

According to James, the Self consists of four components: namely, the Material Self, the Social Self, the Spiritual Self and the Pure Ego. The first only involves the following elements: 'soul, body, clothes and family'³⁰. The second is considered as the 'recognition which he gets from his mates'³¹, the third as 'a man's inner or subjective being, his psychic faculties or dispositions, taken concretely'³² and the fourth as 'the "I" self' (ibid.)³³. Bearing in mind this categorisation of the Self, I would argue that the elements deemed to be responsible for Antoinette's destruction of identity only undermine the Jamesian Material Self and the Social Self while leaving the Spiritual Self and the Pure Ego undeterred.

Furthermore, I would advocate Sarup's theorisation of fragmented identity, according to which there are two identities: one "outside" (public) and the other "inside" (private). Drawing on his definition of identities, 'the outside of our identity is how others see us, and the inside part of our identity has to do with our vision of ourselves'³⁴; I would consider the public identity as the objective vision of ourselves, perceived by others, and the private one as the subjective construction of the Self. In light of Sarup's analysis and Coartney's theorisations of the changing role of the looking-glass throughout the narration, I would argue that the act of Antoinette's refusal of her own image reflected in the mirror in the third part of the novel means the destruction of what in Sarup's words is defined as the 'public identity': that is, the image imposed by the patriarchal society on Antoinette: Bertha. It can be derived that Bertha is a separate entity from Antoinette and what is taking place here is, thus, the destruction of Bertha's identity as an object in order to empower Antoinette as a subject.

³⁰James, 1890: 292.

³¹Ivi, p. 293.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Sarup, 1996: 14

Since the first studies on the subject, scholars have questioned how such a long masculine perspective, imposed by Rochester's voice at the very heart of the narration of a polyphonic novel, can convey the appropriation of Antoinette's Self. Indeed, it is through this effective literary device that Antoinette becomes 'agent and object of the same masculine gaze at once'.³⁵ The unclear difference between the object and the subject, thus, represents the leitmotif of the post-colonial novel, where Antoinette comes to be depicted as the subject and object of the narration (part II of *Wide Sargasso Sea*) and manages to become the undisputed subject of the narration (part III).

Bertha's objectification in the canonical novel of *Jane Eyre*, where she is referred to as 'it' pronoun, is replaced by the active role of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as demonstrated by Rhys' use of the pronouns 'I'/'she' in referring to the aforementioned female character. In this way, Rhys succeeds in the difficult task of turning the dehumanised Bertha into the subject of narration, by opposing Spivak's and Sarup's conceptualisations of the "Third World Woman."³⁶

The objectification of Bertha through the looking-glass in the third part of the narration is also the turning point of Antoinette's recognition of the Self as a subject. According to the Hegelian reciprocal relation of the Self and the Other, the appropriation of the Self is implemented only when 'I see the other as object, and through him I see myself as subject- a self-consciousness'³⁷. By taking into account what has been said so far with particular regard to Sarup's definition of the Other as deprivation of the Self, the refusal of Antoinette's image in the third part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be justified by Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic. The objectification of Bertha through the looking-glass as the Other means Antoinette's acknowledgement of something lacking, as stated in the following 'It is precisely because the Master sees the Slave as thing-like that knowledge of the other and therefore of the Self is

³⁵ Translation from Fernández Vázquez, - original text: 'la adopción de una perspectiva masculina hace que la mujer sea al mismo tiempo agente y objeto de la mirada creando una división en la identidad de las protagonistas', 1998: 185.

³⁶ 'The "Third World Woman" is not allowed to speak; she is caught between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, between tradition and modernisation. She is rewritten continuously as the object of patriarchy or of imperialism.' (Sarup, 1996:165).

³⁷ Berenson, 1982: 87.

lacking.³⁸ Following on from this, is understandable why the female character refuses her image at the mirror. She denies the incompleteness of the Other, embodied by the patriarchal figure of Bertha, by losing her public identity in favour of the affirmation of the subjective Self. The reflection of Bertha in the looking-glass reminds her of such a loss. From here derives the rejection.

Moreover, the twofold nature of the Hegelian Being, defined through the Aristotelian terms of 'Coming-to-Be (Construction)' and 'Ceasing-to-Be (Destruction)' can exemplify Antoinette/ Bertha's relationship since Antoinette's refusal of Bertha in the mirror, which can be compared to the 'Ceasing-to-Be' process, legitimises Antoinette's existence in the 'Coming-to-Be' one.

The second chapter of the present research has offered an unusual interpretation of the construction of Antoinette's identity in contrast to the latest critics of the impossible affirmation of the mad woman's Self over the Other. Drawing on James's and Sarup's theorisations of the identity together with the Hegelian contribution to the subject, this chapter has demonstrated how Rhys has successfully accomplished her original aim of giving a life and an identity to Antoinette through the deconstruction of the oppressed character of Jane Eyre's Bertha. The final chapter of this piece of research will attempt to prove the same through the analysis of the primary resource of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 86.

Third Chapter- Analysis of subjectivity in *Wide Sargasso Sea's* letters

If the second chapter of my piece of research tried to defend Rhys against her fierce critics who maintain that her attempt of Antoinette's identity construction in the post- colonial novel of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is unsuccessful, the third one will aim to outlining the literary devices used by the author to construct Antoinette's identity. While bearing in mind Lacan's and Hegel's approaches to the Self/ Other couplet, introduced in the previous chapter, this unit will analyse the relationship of power between Antoinette and Rochester in the heroine's appropriation of the Self and it will give proof of Antoinette's construction of subjectivity through the linguistic analysis of letters in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

3.1 Antoinette's construction of identity

Like Rhys, who experienced an identity crisis first- hand, related both to her skin colour and rejection by the West Indies and England, Antoinette similarly struggles to be accepted by her community and for this reason she can be considered the author's alter ego. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, with the intention of granting Bertha a dignified life, Rhys takes advantage of several literary devices in an attempt at providing the construction of her identity: the looking- glass, the theme of dreams and letters. This section will summarise them with particular attention to the significant role of the latter within the narration.

First of all, as has been widely discussed in the previous chapter, the **looking-glass** plays an important role in the affirmation of Antoinette's identity. Reflecting the same difficulties encountered by Rhys in the affirmation of her Self, Antoinette faces an identity crisis due to the fact that she does not fully belong to the European or the Caribbean race. In addition, the loss of her father, her uncertain surname together with her mother's second marriage and her careless attitude towards the daughter negatively affect Antoinette's self- esteem. Drawing on Burrows's analysis of the mother-daughter relationship, in fact, 'the repeated acts of rejection on the part of Annette create a trauma in her daughter, whose reaction is to develop strategies of

dissociation (hence the double identity) and withdrawal (taking refuge in a mental world to escape the evils of reality).³⁹ It is when Antoinette's lost identity is expressed, especially in the nameless and faceless Bertha of the third part of the narration of the post-colonial novel that the looking-glass seems to be the solution for the achievement of her self-awareness in order to allow the recognition of Antoinette's Self through Bertha's deconstruction.

The recognition of the Self through the Lacanian mirror-stage is, thus, a key element in the restoration of Antoinette's identity and Rochester's attempt of depriving her of the looking-glass will aim at driving her crazy, as it is easily deductible from Antoinette's words in the third part of the novel.⁴⁰

However, the absence of the mirror in the third part is counterbalanced by the recurrent device of the dream, which plays a role as significant as that of the looking-glass in the appropriation of Antoinette's identity. If Brontë both emotionally charges dreams of the unspoken and reveals the real nature of her characters to the reader, Rhys uses dreams as places where characters' 'lost identities find their way to their conscious'.⁴¹ Furthermore, if distinguishing between dream and reality is feasible in *Jane Eyre*, it is difficult to define those blurred lines in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where all the events seem to happen in a dream-like state. Although Antoinette blatantly strives for the affirmation of her identity during the whole narration, her personal growth can be deduced in the three dreams scattered throughout the narration. The first one⁴², in fact, occurred when she was only a child, mirrors her predominant fear for being chased after an unknown man in the forest. The second one⁴³, once again set in a forest, happened when she was seventeen and it shows her growing courage in following the same unknown man of the previous dream. This meaningful dream can be interpreted as a passage from her childhood to adolescence, when the fear for the

³⁹ Panizza, 2009: 7.

⁴⁰ 'There is **no looking glass here** and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. **The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself.** Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us—hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. **What am I doing in this place and who am I?'** (Rhys, 2000: 117).

⁴¹ Eyvazi, 2014: 158.

⁴² Rhys, 2000: 11.

⁴³ Ivi: 34.

Other starts to become curiosity and attraction. However, it is the last dream⁴⁴ to be essential to Antoinette's character's restoration. In fact, to be more precise, if Brontë depicts a convicted Bertha, guilty of setting fire to Thornfield Hall and fleeing from the roof, Rhys does not attribute these actions to Antoinette in reality. On the contrary, she takes advantage of the third dream to narrate the tragedy and justify Antoinette. As has been shown, thus, dream is one of the literary devices through which Rhys unfolds Antoinette's restoration: 'Antoinette thus remains innocent in Jane Rhys's novel.'⁴⁵

The analysis carried out until now has gradually shown an in- depth insight into the devices of the looking- glass and dreams in the appropriation of Antoinette's self, from her alienation in the mirror- stage to the restoration of her character, but it is also worth mentioning in this chapter the role played by **letters** in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in order to understand the Self/ Other dichotomy. There is a considerable amount of letters in the second and the third part of the narration, while they are absent in the first part, where the narration is led by the overruling voice of the first person narrator of Antoinette. The interpretation of the inner value of letters in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in light of the Lacanian reading of the Purloined Letter by Poe, reveals the connotative meaning exerted by missives: 'signifier whose signified is irrelevant; it is not subject to divisibility; it can have and lose its place only in the symbolic order: and its displacement-and-return has much in common with binary circuits.' (Muller & Richardson, 2009: 59). Furthermore, Lacan confers a symbolic meaning to letters: in a novel where it is the voice of the silenced and oppressed to be considered the overruling perspective of narration, their pure signifiers are, in fact, reckoned to be the ultimate expression of the Other, as it is evident from the following:

"There is always **the other side**, always", Antoinette says to her husband as she tries to persuade him that Daniel Cosway's assertions are slanderous. In her revision of *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys bends all her imaginative powers towards producing such revitalizing: she writes about and from '**the other side**', creating an alternative version to Rochester's account of his first marriage in *Jane Eyre*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ivi, 160.

⁴⁵ Eyvazy, 2014: 160.

⁴⁶ Rhys in Maurel, 1998: 145.

Apart from being expression of the Others, as has been already mentioned in light of the Lacanian reading dealt with in the second chapter of this piece of research, letters both satisfy Rhys's modernist need of new ways of writing about unconventional subjects, and are the devices through which the stream of consciousness of the first person narration guarantees free expression to the Jamesian Pure Ego. Even if the absence of letters in the first part of the narration of the postcolonial novel and the presence of the majority of them in the second part of the postcolonial book, mainly written by the coloniser's voice of Rochester, might be interpreted as an attempt to legitimise the male voice over Antoinette's one, I would, conversely, maintain that it is through Rochester's letters that female subjectivity gradually imposes over the male one, as I will demonstrate through the linguistic analysis of the letters.

3.2 Wide Sargasso Sea and the "wrong side"

Starting my analysis from a structural point of view, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is divided into three parts. The former is entirely narrated by Antoinette's voice, the second one, mainly told by Rochester, is at times recounted by Antoinette and it ends with the white coloniser's voice. The third one starts with Grace Poole's voice but it also ends with Antoinette's. However, the above-mentioned voices are not the only one heard in the post-colonial novel since there are many others that intervene in the narration of the story such as the implicit perspectives of Annette, Aunt Cora, Mr Mason, Christophine, Daniel Cosway and the black community, which contribution is perceivable during the unfolding of the plot. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is, thus, a polyphonic novel which raises the problematic issue of the authority and credibility of its narrative voices.

Despite the greatest number of narrators, Rhys' perspective is not ignored as can be understood in light of Bakhtin's 'double-voiced discourse', according to which 'double-voiced discourse expresses authorial intentions but in a refracted way. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author.'⁴⁷ In fact, 'as Gayatri Spivak has argued, Rhys takes the risks

⁴⁷ Bakhtin, 1981: 324.

of writing from the point of view of “the wrong side” in the novel’s colonial setting, writing not only from the point of view of Antoinette, the white slave-owner’s daughter, but from that of a white Englishman as well.’⁴⁸ Furthermore, I would also support Erwin’s statement where the relationship between Rochester and Antoinette is made clear:

‘This is not to suggest a reconciliation or synthesis of the two views; on the contrary, it is to argue that **the impossible desire evident in Antoinette’s narrative**, that is, to occupy a racial position not open to her, **can only realize itself in the gaze of the Other**, in an attempt to perform the impossible feat of seeing herself from the place from which she is seen’.⁴⁹

As a result, if the previous chapter has stressed the role of Bertha as the Otherised Antoinette’s Self, Erwin’s statement similarly highlights the importance of Rochester’s Otherisation towards the achievement of Antoinette’s identity construction.

⁴⁸ Erwin, 2015: 207.

⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 215.

3.3 A postcolonial interpretation of social powers: Rochester as a victim

Before proceeding with the linguistic analysis of letters, scattered throughout the narration of the book thanks to the help of CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis), it is useful to consider the relations of power between the two main narrative voices of *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Antoinette and Rochester. Even though it is the character of Antoinette who has aroused researchers' curiosity throughout the years for having been deemed to be oppressed and silenced, the role of the white coloniser can be considered of equivalent importance, given that the gaze through which Antoinette's Self takes shape is that of Rochester, as maintained by Erwin. The coloniser is, thus, perceived as a victim and the reference to him as the Otherised and the medium of Antoinette's appropriation can be grasped through the analysis of some excerpts of the novel.

First of all, if we take James' critic on board, Rochester's victimisation is blatantly noticeable as 'he does not love Antoinette Bertha Cosway. He has married for money, not love.'⁵⁰ He is a victim of patriarchy and as such he is oppressed by his father's expectations.

Secondly, Antoinette's displacement finds its counterpart in Rochester's one in the West Indies, which also determines a sense of alienation for Rochester in Antoinette's island, as is shown in his revelation to Antoinette: 'I feel very much a stranger here,' I said. 'I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side.'⁵¹

Thirdly, even if the central and longest chapter of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is narrated by the white coloniser's perspective, I would support Koparanoglu's stance, according to which Antoinette's voice prevails over Rochester's. If the first part of the book is told by Antoinette without any interference by other narrative voices, the second chapter is apparently dominated by Rochester's perspective but it is considerably invaded by Antoinette's voice. In fact, she both manages to put into question Britain's hegemony over the colonised West Indies and contends for the

⁵⁰ James, 1983: 65.

⁵¹ Rhys, 2000: 82.

rectification of Rochester's racist judgement of Christophine's character. The first case can be exemplified by the following excerpt:

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

'Well,' I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.'

'But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?'

'And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?' 'More easily,' she said, 'much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.'

'No, this is unreal and like a dream,' I thought.⁵²

The second case, where Antoinette's strong opposition to Rochester's biased language against Christophine is shown, can be detected from the conversation between coloniser and colonised about Antoinette's nurse in the second part of the book:

'Her coffee is delicious but her language is horrible and she might hold her dress up. It must get very dirty, yards of it trailing on the floor.'

'When they don't hold their dress up it's for respect,' said Antoinette. 'Or for feast days or going to Mass.'

'And is this feast day?'

'She wanted it to be a feast day.'

'Whatever the reason it is not a clean habit.'

'It is. **You don't understand at all.** They don't care about getting a dress dirty because it shows it isn't the only dress they have. Don't you like Christophine?'

'She is a very worthy person no doubt. I can't say I like language.'

'It doesn't mean anything,' said Antoinette.

'And she looks so lazy. She dawdles about.'

⁵² Rhys, 2000: 49 (my emphasis).

‘Again you are mistaken. She seems slow, but every move she makes is right so it’s quick in the end.’⁵³

Last but not least, although Rochester renames Antoinette into the objectified Bertha, his Otherisation finds its ultimate expression in the absence of a proper name for the whole narration. By supporting Voicu’s stance, it is clear that ‘leaving him nameless actually leaves the reader two choices as to his identity. Not having a name of his own means that his identity is shaped under the symbolic denominations such as: “Antoinette’s husband” or “the husband”, or even “Rhys’s male narrator.”’⁵⁴ It follows that Rhys manages to set Antoinette as the centre around which narration revolves, while considering Rochester as Antoinette’s Other.

From the analysis of the elements just mentioned, it can be assumed that Rochester’s status is not superior to Antoinette during the whole narration and that, representing Antoinette’s Other, like Bertha, he contributes to Antoinette’s construction of the Self.

3.4 Linguistic analysis of letters in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Thanks to the help of numerical data collected in the appendixes of the present dissertation, this section will give proof of Rochester’s Otherisation and the affirmation of female subjectivity in Rhys’ successful intentions of rewriting the canonical novel of Jane Eyre. Absent from the first part of the novel, where Antoinette is the undisputed major character of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, letters become a fundamental component within the narration only in the second and third parts of the book. By analysing both, the intention of this unit is to come to grips with the changing style of communication from letters written by male and female subjects in order to prove Rochester’s passivity, introduced in this chapter, and the resulting affirmation of female subjectivity with particular attention to Antoinette’s.

⁵³ Ivi, p. 52-53 (my emphasis).

⁵⁴ Voicu, 2014: 84.

3.5 Analysis of letters from part two of Wide Sargasso Sea: Rochester's narrative voice

The first appendix in this piece of research is a letter composed by Rochester in his mind that perhaps has never reached its destination. Here, Rochester's jumble of thoughts gives life to a balanced coexistence of several subjects: 'I', 'you' 'she' and other subjects, which can be categorised under the 'it- subject'. As it is evident from the even number of 'I' and 'it- subject', both encountered in the first letter (only three times), Rochester's subjectivity does not overcome the number of other subjects involved in the narration, which can be comprehensible in light of Spivak's interpretation of letters as cutting edges according to which 'it is the gap between knowing and being that the episode of the imaginary letter occludes.'⁵⁵ Instead, there is a considerable effort to deprive Rochester of his subjectivity through the use of the passive verb 'have been paid to me.'⁵⁶ The 'I-subjectivity', thus, in this case, plays the role of indirect object, while emphasis is stressed on what in an active sentence should have been the object: 'the thirty thousand pounds.' As the investigation of the following letters will demonstrate shortly afterwards, this can be interpreted as the first clue of passivity of Rochester's character. Moreover, the use of the impersonal structure of 'the girl **is thought to be**'⁵⁷ also contributes to hide the white coloniser's feelings behind the community's common sense. Rochester, thus, plays the role of the victim subjected to the patriarchal society that had dispatched him to the Caribbean with the mission of marrying Antoinette.

The second letter written by Rochester is also very simple in its style. It is composed by main clauses, coordinates and only one complex sentence with two subordinates, that is the following: 'His father died soon after I left for the West Indies as you probably know.'⁵⁸ The tenses of the verbs used varies from present to simple past and present perfect and the letter seems to be Rochester's quieter attempt of recounting his negotiation in order to marry Antoinette with less mournful tones than the previous one. In this letter, the first person pronoun starts to acquire more

⁵⁵ Spivak, 1987: 12.

⁵⁶ See appendix 1, line 1, p. 39.

⁵⁷ Appendix 1, line 6, p. 39.

⁵⁸ Appendix 2, line 5, p. 40.

significance in the narration, but it is still dominated by an equal presence of 'he' and 'she' pronouns and other subjects. Even in the attempt of claiming his identity through the increasing number of 'I- subject', it must be clarified that the use of the first person pronoun is used four times, three of which to express the fulfilment of Rochester's father aims, as is evident from the following sentences: 'I dealt of course with Richard Mason.' 'His father died soon after I left for the West Indies as you probably know.' and 'I will write again in a few days' time.'⁵⁹ The fourth one (**my illness** has left me **too exhausted**)⁶⁰, furthermore, identifies Rochester's disease so that it can be concluded that the white coloniser's portrait is everything but positive up to now. Once again, Rochester's passivity is proved by Rhys's wise use of subjects and verbs.

The third appendix records the increasing number of the 'I pronoun' as the most frequent one (encountered nine times). Female subjectivity is totally absent and Rochester's feelings and thoughts are at the centre of narration, as it can be detected from the following: 'I feel that', 'I felt wretched enough', 'I suppose' and 'I feel better already.'⁶¹ The letter is dominated by present tenses, used to express Rochester's feelings, and past simple, employed to describe and recount the events occurred. The 'I-subjectivity' starts to stand out but it can be maintained that the overall semantic value of the words used within the letters is negative: '**Left**', '**too long**', '**without**', '**hardly**', 'I was **down**', '**Nothing** serious', 'I felt **wretched** enough', 'it was **difficult**'.⁶² Rochester is here the predominant narrative voice but, by being messenger of such negative semantic words, he is similarly loaded with negative values: hence, he is depicted as a negative character.

The following three letters are employed to give voice to other characters of the community. The fourth and fifth letters are written by Daniel Cosway and are addressed to Rochester. Claiming to be Antoinette's 'brother by another lady'⁶³, Daniel's character persuades Rochester to believe him about her sister's madness. The overruling and compassionate use of 'I-subjectivity', detectable in the fourth appendix, gives voice to Daniel as Antoinette's doppelganger, similarly refused by his

⁵⁹ Appendix 2, lines 4-5-8 respectively, p. 40.

⁶⁰ Appendix 2, lines 7-8, p. 40.

⁶¹ Appendix 3, lines 1-3-7 respectively, p. 41.

⁶² Appendix 3, between lines 1-2-3-6, p. 41.

⁶³ Appendix 4, line 11, p. 42-43-44.

family and society. His first letter claims Antoinette's madness while his second one threatens Rochester for not having replied to the former. By taking into consideration that Cosway's letters are, however, inserted into the second part of the book narrated by Rochester, it can be argued that they are the means through which Rochester's hatred towards Antoinette emerges within the narration. The use of negative semantic words as '**wicked**', '**detestable**' and '**madness**'⁶⁴, just to mention a few, can be interpreted as Rochester judgement about Antoinette.

In addition, the sixth appendix is a letter written by the magistrate Mr Frazer to Rochester. It mirrors Christophine's judgement from a judicial perspective as well as the popular opinion about her, conveyed by Mr Frazer's wife's comments, as it is detectable from the following: 'my wife **insisted** that'.⁶⁵ I would consider this letter as an attempt to give voice to the white community as well as a failed effort to contrast Antoinette's rectification of Rochester's racist judgement of Christophine's character, previously mentioned. This letter, in fact, fails to meet its objective as the imposition of the white community's judgement over Christophine, conveyed by the 'I- subject' encountered eight times in the narration, is flanked by the almost equal use of 'she-subject', recorded nine times.

The eighth appendix is Rochester's last letter to his father. It seems to follow the second appendix's structure as it starts with a similar structure mainly dominated by simple clauses and with the same 'inclusive we', which both takes into account Rochester and Antoinette. However, the predominant 'I- subjectivity' of the third letter is replaced by an equal presence of 'you-subject' and first person pronoun, which restates the already mentioned Rochester's victimisation under the patriarchal yoke embodied by his father. The certainty acquired by Rochester, conveyed by expressions such as '**I am certain** that you', '**I am certain** you'⁶⁶ does not render Rochester strong enough to try to work out the difficulties encountered. Thus, the white coloniser is 'forced'⁶⁷ to leave Jamaica because of Cosway's revelations. Hence,

⁶⁴ Appendix 4, between lines 5-8, p. 42.

⁶⁵ Appendix 6, line 8, p. 47.

⁶⁶ Appendix 7, lines 3-4 respectively, p. 48.

⁶⁷ Appendix 7, line 3, p. 48.

Rochester is depicted as a weak character who, rather than trusting his wife, chooses to believe the stranger's voice of Daniel Cosway.

3.5 Analysis of letter from part three of *Wide Sargasso Sea*: female narrative voices

In the only letter of the third part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a new voice is imposed as the narrator: Grace Poole's. Grace is speaking to Leah, another servant and she is recounting a conversation with the housekeeper Mrs Eff, who reprimands her for gossiping. Her narration reveals the unreliable nature of all utterances, given that it is impossible to stop servants gossiping. This is also self-evident by the number of times when readers can encounter the terms 'said' (eight times) or 'told', 'gossip' and 'rumours' with the same semantic function.

The reported speech of the conversation between Grace and Mrs Eff merges with Grace's thoughts, which subverts and disorders categories of linear time and blurs the lines between subjects and objects. In fact, there is not a clear first person narration even though there is a predominance of the subject 'I' (repeated twenty-eight times within the letter) as it is used at times for Grace at times for Mrs Eff. Direct speech and Grace's thoughts are intermingled. In addition, there is a letter in the letter (highlighted in yellow), which once again emphasises the chaotic identification of the subject.

It is worth noting that the predominant use of the first person singular only embodies female characters. 'The master of the house'⁶⁸ has the opportunity to speak through a letter but he never uses the subject 'I'. This can be considered quite revelatory of the intention of Jean Rhys for the following reasons. The third part of the book '*Wide Sargasso Sea*' is the affirmation of female characters over the male ones. As a result, the overwhelming presence of the 'I' is the powerful re-appropriation of the self of women after a second part of the book, entirely narrated by Rochester. He is 'the devil', according to Grace and he is considered as such by readers, who are introduced to the third part with such a strong judgement. The "Death of the Author" introduced by Barthes in 1967, which, on the other hand, announced the birth of the

⁶⁸ See appendix 8, line 12, p. 49.

Reader, allows the latter to gain freedom in the interpretation of texts. It is clear that readers are advised to be active participants rather than passive ones but, in my opinion, this does not mean that the author disappears while leaving the burden of interpretation to readers only. As has been shown so far, the author, Jean Rhys in this case, scatters meaningful elements throughout the book that influence readers' perception of the facts narrated. If Mrs Eff provides a perspective on Rochester that has not appeared yet in the novel- tender, compassionate, generous-, Grace Poole casts doubts on the nature of her employment and the condition imposed on Antoinette through the imperialist and patriarchal structure of marriage. Despite her detestable part played in Antoinette's cruel captivity, Grace, like Antoinette in her time at the convent, is afraid of the world outside Thornfield Hall. The similarity between the characters can allow us to conclude that Grace's perception of Rochester is the same of Antoinette's and inevitably of the readers. The 'rhizomatic structure' of the novel, according to which '[...] the meaning of a text lies not in this or that interpretation but in the diagrammatic totality of its readings, in their plural systems'⁶⁹, is, thus, result of the author's intentions.

The repetition of the coordinative conjunction 'and', encountered fourteen times in the letter, outnumbers the disjunctive coordinative conjunction 'but', identified seven times. Therefore, I would interpret these numerical data as Rhys's subversion of the natural female subjugation. The predominant presence of coordination grants equal power to both women and men, by erasing the hierarchical order between the two categories.

The present chapter of this research has revealed an unusual interpretation of the construction of Antoinette's identity in contrast to the latest critics of the impossible affirmation of the mad woman's Self over the Other. Drawing on the Lacanian reading of the looking- glass in the mirror stage, the recurring theme of the dream and the Lacanian role attributed to letters, this unit has demonstrated how Rhys has successfully accomplished her original aim of giving a life and identity to the oppressed character of Bertha in her response to the romantic novel of Jane Eyre. Jean Rhys, thus, has the merit of giving a voice to the oppressed Bertha of the canonical Jane Eyre by Otherising Rochester's character and constructing a positive

⁶⁹ Barthes, 1970: 131.

image of Antoinette's Self in her post- colonial novel. Her contribution is huge since, as this chapter has demonstrated, every single narrative voice of the polyphonic novel contributes towards the positive appropriation of Antoinette's identity.

Conclusion

Dealing with the key literature within the construction of Antoinette's identity, this dissertation has led to three major findings, which will be summarised in the following.

First of all, Antoinette's refusal of her own image in the looking-glass of the third part of *Wide Sargasso Sea's* narration does not represent Antoinette's deconstruction of the Self, as proposed by the majority of scholars involved in the field. Rejecting her own image at the mirror, conversely, empowers Antoinette in the patriarchal society she lives in. What is destroyed through the help of Coartney's theorisation of the looking-glass is, thus, what in Sarup's words is described as the public identity: that is, the image of madness (Bertha) imposed by the patriarchal society.

Secondly, as hinted at in the Hegelian conciliatory interpretation of the Self/Other binaries and Panizza's theorisation of binary couples, it could be maintained that not only is Bertha's destruction of the Self necessary for the affirmation of Antoinette's identity, but it also determines the humanisation of the animalised *Jane Eyre's* protagonist into the main character of the *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Thirdly, the analysis of the Lacanian mirror-stage of the looking-glass, the recurrent theme of dreams and the Lacanian reading of letters shows how the personal growth and affirmation of Antoinette's identity is implemented throughout the narration.

Since the second chapter of my piece of research deals with Barthes' 'Death of the Author', I reckon that a clarification upon Rhys' intentions in rewriting the novel of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is needed.

As testified by The 'Death of the Author', the disappearance of the author's authoritative interpretation of the text empowers readers to decode a text in never-ending ways. The eclipse of the authorial 'I' from the narration and the coexistence of several narrators jeopardise the presence of an absolute truth.

As a result, if the defence of Rhys' intentions in rewriting *Jane Eyre* can be implemented by my personal and questionable understanding of Sarup's, James' and Hegel's reading of the post-colonial novel as a reader, I would maintain that the use

of subjectivity in letters, expertly designed by Rhys, unequivocally guides readers towards Antoinette's appropriation of the Self.

The emergence of her voice is, in fact, flanked by Rochester's declining role of authoritarian voice: according to my reading of Gangl, it can, in fact, be argued that Rochester is depicted as 'a victim of the Victorian familial values'⁷⁰. The linguistic analysis of letters, scattered throughout the post- colonial novel, is the proof of the powerful role of CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) in Antoinette's construction of identity.

⁷⁰ Gangl, 2007: 56

APPENDIX 1

Extract from Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

PART TWO

p. 42

1. Dear Father. **The thirty thousand pounds** have been paid to me without question 2. or
condition. **No provision** made for her (that must be seen to). **I** have a modest
3. competence now. **I** will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son
4. **you** love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby
5. manoeuvres of a younger son. **I** have sold my soul or **you** have sold it, and after all
6. **it** such a bad bargain? **The girl** is thought to be beautiful, **she** is beautiful. And
7. yet...

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF SUBJECTS WITHIN THE TEXT

SUBJECTS	FREQUENCY (Number)
The girl/ she	2
I	3
Other subjects (the thirty thousand pounds, no provision, it)	3
You	2

APPENDIX 2

p.46

1. Dear Father, **we** have arrived from Jamaica after an uncomfortable few days. **This**
2. **little estate** in the Windward Islands is part of the family property and **Antoinette** is
3. much attached to it. **She** wished to get here as soon as possible. **All** is well and 4. has
gone according to your plans and wishes. **I** dealt of course with Richard Mason. 5. **His**
father died soon after **I** left for the West Indies as **you** probably know. **He** is a 6. good
fellow, hospitable and friendly; **he** seemed to become attached to me and 7. trusted
me completely. **This place** is very beautiful but **my illness** has left me too 8. exhausted
to appreciate it fully. **I** will write again in a few days' time.

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF SUBJECTS WITHIN THE TEXT

SUBJECTS	FREQUENCY (Number)
We	1
Antoinette/ She	2
His father/ He	3
Other subjects (this little estate, all, this place)	3
I / my illness	4
You	1

APPENDIX 3

p. 46

1. **I feel that I have left** you **too long without** news for the bare announcement of
2. my approaching marriage was **hardly** news. **I was down** with fever for two weeks
3. after **I** got to Spanish Town. **Nothing** serious but **I felt wretched** enough. **I** stayed
4. with the Frasers, friends of the Masons. **Mr Fraser** is an Englishman, a retired
5. magistrate, and **he** insisted on telling me at length about some of his cases. **It** was
6. **difficult** to think or write coherently. In this cool and remote place **it** is called
7. Granbois (the High Woods **I** suppose) **I** feel better already and **my next letter** 8. will
be longer and more explicit.

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF SUBJECTS WITHIN THE TEXT

SUBJECTS	FREQUENCY (Number)
I / my next letter	9
Mr Fraser/ he	2
Nothing/ it	3

APPENDIX 4

p. 59

1. Dear Sir. I take up my pen after long thought and meditation but in the end the 2. truth is better than a lie. I have this to say. You have been shamefully deceived by 3. the Mason family. They tell you perhaps that your wife's name is Cosway, the 4. English gentleman Mr Mason being her stepfather only, but they don't tell you 5. what sort of people were these Cosways. Wicked and detestable slave-owners 6. since generations – yes everybody hate them in Jamaica and also in this beautiful 7. island where I hope your stay will be long and pleasant in spite of all, for some not 8. worth sorrow. Wickedness is not the worst. There is madness in that family. Old 9. Cosway die raving like his father before him.

10. You ask what proof I have and why I mix myself up in your affairs. I will 11. answer you. I am your wife's brother by another lady, half-way house as we say. 12. Her father and mine was a shameless man and of all his illegitimates I am the 13. most unfortunate and poverty stricken.

14. My mamma die when I was quite small and my godmother take care of me. 15. The old mister hand out some money for that though he don't like me. No, that 16. old devil don't like me at all, and when I grow older I see it and I think, Let him 17. wait my day will come. Ask the older people sir about his disgusting goings on, 18. some will remember.

19. When Madam his wife die the reprobate marry again quick, to a young girl 20. from Martinique- it's too much for him. Dead drunk from morning till night and he 21. die raving and cursing.

22. Then comes the glorious Emancipation Act and trouble for some of the high and 23. mighties. Nobody would work for the young woman and her two children and 24. that place Coulibri goes quickly to bush as all does out here when nobody toil 25. and labour on the land. She have no money and she have no friends, for French 26. and English like cat and dog in these islands since long time. Shoot, Kill, 27. Everything.

28. The woman called Christophine also from Martinique stay with her and an old 29. man Godfrey, too silly to know what happen. Some like that. This young Mrs 30. Cosway is worthless and spoilt, she can't lift a hand for herself and soon the 31. madness that is in her, and in all these white Creoles, come out. She shut herself

32. away, laughing and talking to nobody as many can bear witness. As for the little
33. girl, **Antoinetta**, as soon as **she** walk **she** hide herself if **she** see anybody.

34. **We** all wait to hear the woman jump over a precipice 'fini batte' e' as **we** say
35. here which mean 'finish to fight'.

36. But no. **She** marry again to the rich Englishman Mr Mason, and **there** is much
37. **I** could say about that but **you** won't believe so **I** shut my mouth. **They** say **he**
38. love her so much that if **he** have the world on a plate **he** give it to her –but no use.

39. **The madness** gets worse and **she** has to be shut away for **she** try to kill her
40. husband- madness not being all either.

41. **That sir** is your wife's mother- that was her father. **I** leave Jamaica. **I** don't
42. know what happen to the woman. **Some** say **she** is dead, **other** deny it. But **old**
43. **Mason** take a great fancy for the girls Antoinette and give her half his money
44. when **he** die.

45. As for me **I** wander high and low, not much luck but a little money put by and **I**
46. get to know of a house for sale in this island near Massacre. **It's** going very cheap
47. so **I** buy it. News travel even to this wild place and next thing **I** hear from Jamaica
48. is that **old Mason** is dead and **that family** plan to marry the girl to a young
49. Englishman who know nothing of her. Then **it** seems to me that **it** is my Christian
50. duty to warn the gentleman that **she** is no girl to marry with the bad blood **she**
51. have from both sides. But **they** are white, **I** am coloured. **They** are rich, **I** am poor.
52. As **I** think about these things **they** do it quick while **you** still weak with fever at the
53. magistrate's, before **you** can ask questions. If **this** is true or not **you** must know
54. for yourself.

55. Then **you** come to this island for your honeymoon and **it's** certain that **the**
56. **Lord** put the thing on my shoulders and that **it** is **I** must speak the truth to you.
57. Still **I** hesitate.

58. **I** hear you young and handsome with a kind word for all, black, white, also
59. coloured. But **I** hear too that **the girl** is beautiful like her mother was beautiful,
60. and **you** bewitch with her. **She** is in your blood and your bones. By night and by
61. day. But **you**, an honourable man, know well that for marriage more is needed
62. than all this. Which does not last. **Old Mason** bewitch so with her mother and
63. look what happen to him. Sir **I** pray **I** am in time to warn you what to do.

64. **Sir** ask yourself how **I** can make up this story and for what reason. When **I**
65. leave Jamaica **I** can read write and cypher a little. **The good man** in Barbados

66. teach me more, **he** give me books, **he** tell me read the Bible every day and **I** pick
67. up knowledge without effort. **He** is surprise how quick **I** am. Still **I** remain an
68. ignorant man and **I** do not make up this story. **I** cannot. **It** is true.

69. **I** sit at my window and **the words** fly past me like birds- with God's help **I**
70. catch some.

71. A week **this letter** take me. **I** cannot sleep at night thinking what to say. So
72. quickly now **I** draw to a close and cease my task.

73. Still **you** don't believe me? Then ask that devil of a man Richard Mason three
74. questions and make him answer you. Is **your wife's mother** shut away, a raging
75. lunatic and worse besides? Dead or alive **I** do not know.

76. Was **your wife's brother** an idiot from birth, though God mercifully take him
early on?

77. Is **your wife** herself going the same way as her mother and all knowing it?

78. **Richard Mason** is a sly man and **he** will tell you a lot of nancy stories, which
79. is what **he** call lies here, about what happen at Coulibri and this and that. Don't
80. listen. Make him answer- yes or no.

81. If **he** keep his mouth shut ask others for many think it shameful how that
82. family treat you and your relatives.

83. **I** beg you sir come to see me for there is more that **you** should know. But **my**
84. **hand ache, my head ache and my heart** is like a stone for the grief **I** bring you.

85. **Money** is good but no money can pay for a crazy wife in your bed. Crazy and
86. worse besides.

87. **I** lay down my pen with one last request. Come and see me quickly. Your obt
88. servant **Daniel Cosway**.

89. Ask the girl Amélie where **I** live. **She** knows, and **she** knows me. **She** belongs
90. to this island.

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF SUBJECTS WITHIN THE TEXT

SUBJECTS	FREQUENCY (Number)
I	44
She/ female	29
You	9
They	8
We	3
He	22
Other subjects (the English gentleman, everybody, wickedness, madness, the glorious Emancipation Act, trouble, nobody, that place Coulibri, there. some, other, it, this)	26

APPENDIX 5

p.75

1. Why **you** don't answer. **You** don't believe me? Then ask someone else- everybody
2. in Spanish Town know. Why **you** think they bring you to this place? **You** want me
3. to come to your house and bawl out your business before everybody? **You** come to
4. me or **I** come.

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF SUBJECTS WITHIN THE TEXT

SUBJECTS	FREQUENCY (Number)
You	5
I	1

APPENDIX 6

p.91

1. I have often thought of your wife and yourself. And was on the point of writing to
2. you. Indeed I have not forgotten the case. **The woman** in question was called
3. Josephine or Christophine Dubois, some such name and **she** had been one of the
4. Cosway servants. After **she** came out of jail **she** disappeared, but **it** was common
5. to knowledge that **old Mr Mason** befriended her. I heard that **she** owned or was
6. given a small house and a piece of land near Granbois. **She** is intelligent in her 7. way
and can express herself well, but I did not like the look of her at all, and 8. consider her
a most dangerous person. **My wife insisted that she** had gone back to 9. Martinique
her native island, and was very upset that I had mentioned the matter 10. even in such
a roundabout fashion. I happen to know now that **she** has not 11. returned to
Martinique, so I have written very discreetly to Hill, the white inspector 12. of police in
your town. If once. **He**'ll send a couple of policemen up to your place 13. and **she** won't
get off lightly this time. I'll make sure of that...

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF SUBJECTS WITHIN THE TEXT

SUBJECTS	FREQUENCY (Number)
I	8
The woman/ she	9
Old Mr Mason/ he	2
It	1

APPENDIX 7

p. 105

1. Dear Father,

2. **We** are leaving this island for Jamaica very shortly. **Unforeseen circumstances**,

3. at least unforeseen by me, have **forced** me to make this decision. **I am certain**

4. **that you** know or can guess what has happened, and **I am certain you** will believe

5. that the less you talk to anyone about my affairs, especially my marriage, the better.

6. **This** is in your interest as well as mine. **You** will hear from me again. Soon **I** hope.

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF SUBJECTS WITHIN THE TEXT

SUBJECTS	FREQUENCY (Number)
We	1
I	3
You	3
Other subjects (unforeseen circumstances, this)	2

APPENDIX 8

Extract from Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

PART THREE

1. **They** knew that **he** was in Jamaica when **his father and his brother** died,' **Grace**
2. **Poole said**. **He** inherited everything, but **he** was a wealthy man before that. **Some**
3. **people** are fortunate, **they said**, and **there were** hints about the woman **he** 4. brought
back to England with him. Next day **Mrs Eff** wanted to see me and **she** 5. complained
about **gossip**. **I** don't allow **gossip**. **I told you** that when **you** 6. came. **Servants** will talk
and **you** can't stop them, **I said**. And **I** am not certain that 7. the situation will suit me,
madam. First when **I** answered your advertisement **you** 8. **said** that the person **I** had
to look after was not a young girl. **I** asked if **she** was an 9. old woman and **you said** no.
Now that **I** see her **I don't know what to think**. **She sits** 10. **shivering and she is so thin**.
If **she** dies on my hands who will get the blame? 11. Wait, Grace, **she said**. **She was**
holding a letter. Before you decide will you listen 12. **to what the master of the house**
has to say about this matter. "If Mrs Poole is 13. **satisfactory why not give her double,**
treble the money," she read, and folded the 14. **letter away but not before I had seen**
the words on the next page, "but for God's 15. **sake let me hear no more of it." There**
was a foreign stamp on the envelope. "I 16. **don't serve the devil for no money," I said.**
She said, "If **you** imagine that when 17. **you** serve this gentleman **you** are serving the
devil **you** never made a greater 18. **mistake in your life. I** knew him as a boy. **I** knew
him as a young man. **He** was 19. **gentle, generous, brave. His stay** in the West Indies
has changed him out of all 20. **knowledge. He** has grey in his hair and misery in his
eyes. Don't ask me to pity 21. **anyone who had a hand in that. I've** said enough and
too much. **I** am not 22. **prepared to treble your money, Grace, but I** am prepared to
double it. But **there** 23. **must be no more gossip. If there is I** will dismiss you at once.
I do not think **it** will 24. **be impossible to fill your place. I'm** sure you understand." Yes,
I understand, **I** 25. **said**.

26. 'Then **all the servants** were sent away and **she** engaged a cook, one maid and
27. **you, Leah. They** were sent away but how could **she** stop them talking? 'If **you**
28. **ask me the whole county** knows. The **rumours** live heard - very far from the
29. **truth. But I** don't contradict, **I** know better than to say a word. After **all the house**

30.is big and safe, a shelter from the world outside which, say what you like, can be
 31.a black and cruel world to a woman. Maybe that's why **I** stayed on.'

32.The **thick walls**, **she** thought. Past the lodge gate **a long avenue of trees** and
 33.**inside the house the blazing fires and the crimson and white rooms**. But
 34.above all the thick walls, keeping away all the things that **you** have fought till **you**
 35.can fight no more. Yes, maybe that's why **we** all stay - **Mrs Eff and Leah and me**.
 36.**All of us** except that girl who lives in her own darkness. **I**'ll say one thing for her,
 37.**she** hasn't lost her spirit. **She**'s still fierce. **I** don't turn my back on her when **her**
 38.**eyes** have that look. **I** know it.

ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY OF SUBJECTS WITHIN THE TEXT

SUBJECTS	FREQUENCY (Number)
They	3
He	7
I	28
You	12
She/ Mrs Poole/ her eyes	16
We/ All of us	3
Other subjects (some people, servants, the master of the house, there, his stay, all the servants, the whole county, the rumours, all the house, the thick walls, a long avenue of trees)	12

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