



## HEROINES OF THE POSTCOLONIAL ERA - COMPARISON OF PORTRAYALS OF FEMININE VOICES IN J.M. COETZEE'S *FOE* AND JEAN RHYS' *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*

**Nushrat Azam<sup>i</sup>**

Lecturer,  
Department of Language & Literature,  
Fiji National University,  
Fiji

### **Abstract:**

This research seeks to analyze and compare the mediums and effects of voice and silence in the lives of the female characters of the re-written postcolonial texts Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*. The analysis shows that Rhys and Coetzee used the names of Antoinette and Susan to show women's treatment during the 19th century. Treated as inferiors to men and lacking the freedom to do or say as they pleased, the treatment of women and their struggle to find a voice was a focus of both novels. The analysis focused on the significant incidents, character interaction, character flaws, and internal & external conflicts of the story to determine the gaps in voices and silences. The paper will also analyze the role of the protagonists', Antoinette and Susan, and their relationship with the other significant characters in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Foe* to identify how Antoinette and Susan had similar struggles and how they resorted to diverse mediums to find that "voice" and "identity." It can be thus concluded that both the postcolonial texts gave much more importance or significance in terms of voice and identity to the male characters as opposed to the female ones.

**Keywords:** creole; voice; silence; madness; identity

### **1. Introduction**

*"'Woman' is only a social construct that has no basis in nature, that 'woman,' in other words, is a term whose definition depends upon the context in which it is being discussed and not upon some set of sexual organs or social experiences. This renders the experience women have of themselves and the meaning of their social relationships problematic." (Poovey, 52)*

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* are both postcolonial re-written texts having strong female characters as the narrators. Rhys tried to give the silenced Bertha in Jane

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [nushratazam@gmail.com](mailto:nushratazam@gmail.com)

Eyre a voice of her own with Antoinette. Coetzee changed the whole notion of adventure stories by having a female adventurer, Susan Barton, narrating her experiences instead of a male character, as shown in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Both novels attempted to give voice to women, a representation of the postcolonial times in which women were starting to find their individuality. The research will analyze the similarities and differences from the discussion started in the previous chapters in the representation of the feminine voice in the two postcolonial novels.

The female characters narrated both novels in different ways. In J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Susan Barton believed that language played a big part in expressing oneself. Without proper language, one can never communicate one's true self to its fullest to society. She frequently lamented the fact that Friday could not speak, even though he communicated with music - "*There are times when I ask myself whether, in his earlier life, he had the slightest mastery of language, whether he knows what kind of thing language is.*" (Foe, 142) It seemed to Susan that speech was an irreplaceable form of communication to achieve the freedom of individuality as Susan states referring to Friday - "*He does not know what freedom is. Freedom is a word, less than a word, a noise, one of the multitudes of noises I make when I open my mouth.*" (Foe, 101). This implies that for Susan, language is the essence of freedom, and if one doesn't have the medium of speech, he or she won't be able to understand the meaning and significance of freedom as well.

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

While in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a female writer, Jean Rhys, attempts to give another female Creole character, Bertha, a voice of her own through Antoinette and succeeds to a certain extent in allowing the readers an opportunity to hear Bertha's side of the story. Even though she still needs a male character, Rochester, to define Antoinette in the many crucial parts of the novel. By taking Antoinette's voice away in essential parts, Jean Rhys raises the question of whether she could bring Bertha out of the patriarchal notions that Bronte had made her a victim of in *Jane Eyre*.

On the other hand, in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Coetzee attempts to create a strong female persona who is willing to tell her own story. The author fails to maintain the boldness and independence in the character as Susan Barton's story ended up depending on men, both in context and writing. It can be argued that Coetzee was deliberately playing with the character of Susan by giving readers the idea in the beginning that he was creating a strong female voice. Even though, in the end, he took the narrative authority away from her and proved that Susan never really had the power to tell her own story. It is a clear representation of the times when women were starting to find their feet as individuals; however, they had still not completely moved on from the ideas thrust into them as children of a patriarchal society.

## 2. Research Structure and Hypothesis

This paper will analyze the characters of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Susan in *Foe* by understanding the gaps and silences in the narration to focus on their struggles to find their authentic self. It will analyze the mediums used by the two characters and portray how they faced similar struggles in a quest for identity. Antoinette's and Susan's struggle to find their "identity" will be evaluated mostly through their use of voice and silence in critical parts of their lives.

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* are rewritten texts focusing on the representations of the female voice and silence through the characters of Antoinette and Susan Barton, respectively. In these texts, the characters are shown as living in dreams, silences, conflicts, and emotions, which are many times overlapped by the male voices and their perspectives. Both the authors were able to give a whole new outlook on female characters that were previously left without a voice by making the female characters the main narrators of the stories, as Edward Said stated;

*"In reading a text, one must open it out both to what went into it and what its author excluded. Each artistic work is a vision of a moment, and we must juxtapose that vision with the various revisions it later provoked...."* (Said, 67).

The stories allow us to look at the same stories done before, from the previously voiceless female's perspective, in a society that views women differently and more powerfully than ever before in human history. The novels focus on not only the female characters' voices but also their silences as it satirically portrays the silencing of women. Thus, these novels are good representations of how far forward the voice of women has come in literature.

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

Similarly, in *Foe*, Coetzee, despite being a male author, tried to give a female character a chance to tell her story in the context of the hugely popular tale of *Robinson Crusoe* that Daniel Defoe previously told. While the thought of this famous adventure story being told from a female perspective would have been impossible before, postcolonial literature is not limited by such boundaries (Azam, 2018). Coetzee tried to use the character of Susan to represent the newly empowered feminist of the era, allowing readers to gain an idea of an intimate picture of the obstacles, conflicts, powers, and freedom of a woman in a postcolonial society.

### 3. Methods and Methodology

This paper will use feminist theory to frame a textual analysis of Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J.M Coetzee's *Foe*. Precisely, it will evaluate the characterization of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Susan in Coetzee's *Foe* to understand the difference in the use of "voice" and "silence of the two female protagonists. The paper attempts to show the similarities between Antoinette and Susan's struggles and their fight to gain freedom throughout their journey.

The research will focus on the portrayal of the two female characters as both are portrayed differently in the two novels. It will focus on the theory of feminism –postcolonialism to claim how the feminist viewpoint of the characters depended on how they were able to cope with the dominating nature of their male counterparts as it became more prevalent during the Postcolonial era.

The purpose of choosing Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* is mainly because the two postcolonial texts give the female protagonists an entirely fresh standpoint from the original as it works as an effort to bring out the other, feminine side to the story that went unseen earlier. Both the re-written texts were written in such a manner that it recommends the likelihood of a fundamental transformation in the mindset of people during the Postcolonial era.

### 4. Analysis

#### 4.1 Comparison of "Silence"

The use of silence is another area in which the two novels differ. In Coetzee's *Foe*, Susan Barton is seen eventually having to resort to silence to avoid conflict and confusion when Foe starts to overpower her in the novel's third part. Foe's statements, opinions, and manipulations confused Susan's beliefs and emotions so much that she decided to become silent even though she had been narrating the story from the beginning.

*"Silence is generally deplored because it is taken to be a result and a symbol of passivity and powerlessness: Those who are denied speech cannot make their experience known and thus cannot influence the course of their lives or history."* (Gal, 1994: 407)

A point to be argued in this is that sometimes Susan Barton deliberately chose silence over speech as she did not want the readers of *Foe* to know everything that was going on in her mind. She says to Foe while defining the difference between her and Friday's silence – "*Whereas the silence I keep regarding Bahia and other matters is chosen and purposeful.*" (Foe, 122)

*"Allowing individuals to make of her what they will (Chapter XXVI), she retains her sense of superiority ('I smiled at them at all); allowing them to think little of her, she retains her privacy in a novel where there is much isolation but little of that valuable commodity."* (Rabinowitz, 249)

In this regard, one may argue that Susan expressed little about her authentic self. By holding her emotions, she was able to keep an upper hand over others sometimes, as other

individuals might get confused about her authentic personality and opinions regarding things, and this made her come out as a mysterious lady in front of others who had a secret heart and mind.

However, this compromise completely goes against her original intention as she feels that the expression of her voice is entirely dependent on Foe's writing and silence is the best way to deal with this helpless state. Susan's innate desire to tell her story is there; however, she is unable to put her thoughts into words without the validation of Cruso, which contributes to her silence. This silence is not a choice as she is compromising her voice and letting Foe's version dominate just so she can have her story told; even if it is not the version, she will write it herself.

On the other hand, in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the silence was Antoinette's method to get noticed, as she could not affect her husband through her speech. When Christophine tries to talk her out of her marriage, she says, "*I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him*" (Rhys, 83). She could have rebelled, but it appears as if she has internalized her silenced and submissive existence (Shuja, 2017).

But even though Antoinette's complete silence gave her attention, it was not in a positive manner as, in her husband's opinion, the silence was a sign of her impending insanity as Rochester stated - "*She's as mad as the other, I thought, and turned to the window.*" (WSS 132) *Antoinette's silence, even though may have been intentional, didn't get her a positive response from Rochester; instead, it made her look even more insane in the eyes of Rochester as he continually keeps referring to her as insane - "My lunatic. My mad girl."* (WSS, 136)

As Rochester continues to refuse to acknowledge Antoinette's voice, she decides to push herself into a world of silence. Her silence soon becomes overpowered by madness as she starts expressing her deepest thoughts and desires through her silent actions, which in Rochester's eyes is mad silence. She chooses to be seen as a madwoman in front of society as her mad silence succeeds in providing her curiosity and attention from her husband and society and, thus, the feeling of being significant (Azam, 2017).

Moreover, Rochester objectified Antoinette by referring to her as a doll numerous times in his narration, which shows that Rochester has downgraded Antoinette to a simple doll because of her mad silence. Here one can notice the indirect use of ventriloquism as in ventriloquism, one is merely a puppet in the hands of the ventriloquist, and again, For Rochester, Antoinette's eyes, voice, smile, and everything else are as unexpressive as those of a doll. He is unable to see the struggle and pain behind the doll's face (Azam, 2017). Throughout her life, no one understood her; no one heard her silent cries –

*"Antoinette is a child of silence, to whom communication, words, speech bring only unhappiness and rejection...She is silenced first by her mother, who denies her existence, and then by Rochester, who refuses to be the reader of her story."* (Mezei, 1987:195-209).

#### **4.2 Submissiveness Towards the Male Counterpart**

Another consistent idea in both the novels is that of females being given attention and importance because of their bodies and succumbing to the desires of males, "*sexual appetite was considered one of the chief symptoms of moral insanity in women*" (Bloom 231). In Foe, the character

of Susan Barton, who came across as a strong-willed individual woman, driven towards her goal of publishing her own story, is seen physically surrendering to both the male characters, Cruso and Foe.

Foe and Cruso both see Susan as a physical object and desire her sexually. At the same time, Susan seems to have an innate need to please both men, eventually giving up her body per their wishes to create a place for herself in a world where men overpowered her. Her sexuality characterizes Susan. Susan's sexuality is first displayed at the beginning of the novel. The fact that she excuses his actions of degradation to an impulse of desire solidifies her role as an accessory in the novel; she not only lets Cruso use her but excuses it as a right of his male desires (DeBuck, 2007). One can argue that Susan's lack of resistance against the men's physical urges came from the fact that she realized and accepted the male domination that prevailed and thought that the physical union was a duty. However, she was confused about the whole notion of the physical union, as she stated:

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

Susan's intuitive submission to a dominant man proves that she wants to see herself as "a free woman," but in her heart, she cannot get herself out of the tendency to bow down to a robust, masculine figure. Coetzee makes Barton the woman behind the man, defining her as a "*free and autonomous being like all human creatures that finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other*" (Dragunoiu, 15).

On the other hand, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette used her physical attributes as a way to get her husband's love and attention and feel significant. Rochester was unable to resist his wife's charm and sexuality and eventually had no choice but to fulfill her desire by giving her the craved attention, even if it meant only through physical union. Antoinette herself becomes aware of Rochester's fascination with her physicality, and for that reason, Antoinette chooses to utilize it in a manner in which she is expressing herself and reaching out to Rochester (Azam, 2017).

Antoinette's vocal approach towards sex and physical union contributed to Rochester's doubts and fears as he rarely comes across British women with such a straightforward approach towards sex. He also feared that Antoinette would take over his heart, mind, and body if he got close to her as somewhere, he felt an unexpressed attraction towards her. Antoinette's direct attitude towards sex made Rochester's fear even more potent as he didn't want to lose himself to Antoinette. - "*Rochester could have loved Antoinette, but he let his fear and weakness control him.*" (Angier, 552)

### 4.3 Use of Dialogues

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

*"But if these women are creatures of yours, visiting me at your instruction, speaking words you have prepared for them, then who am I and who indeed are you? I presented myself to you in words I knew to be my own- I slipped overboard, I began to swim, my hair floated about me, and so forth, you will remember the words- and for a long time afterwards, when I was writing those letters that were never read by you and were later not sent, and at last not even written down, I continued to trust my own authorship."* (Foe, 133)

Despite her doubts and confusion, Susan somehow managed to display her sense of confidence and control in front of Foe during their dialogues. Susan exercised her power of using language appropriately. She tried hard to put forward her thoughts and sentiments in front of Foe as much as she felt intimidated by the idea of Foe being superior in knowledge and power. She tried not to display her uncertainties and misperceptions in front of Foe and come across as an individual who is strong and confident enough to speak her mind and show her capabilities competently.

On the contrary, in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys showed few interactions between Antoinette and her husband, Rochester, in dialogues. This is because Rochester always found Antoinette to be someone who did not fit his notion of the perfect English woman, so he found it challenging to have a proper conversation with her. A thing to be noted in this case is that both Antoinette and Rochester stuck to their own beliefs and prejudices, refusing to compromise or understand each other. This lack of understanding and communication contributed to them never having a good conversation. It became as if the more they conversed, the more confused and annoyed they made each other. Their inability to understand one another for whom they were contributed majorly to Antoinette locking herself away by keeping her thoughts, desires, and dreams entirely to herself. In Rochester's eyes, she was not a balanced individual as she was not decided or sure of any fact or information - *"She was undecided, uncertain about facts- any fact. When I asked her if the snakes, we sometimes saw were poisonous, she said, 'Not those...'"* (WSS, 73)

When Antoinette tries to speak her heart out and happily describes the place and surroundings that Rochester was new to, he takes it negatively and gets irritated by Antoinette's way of expressing herself as he states, *"Her pleading expression annoys me. I have not bought her; she has bought me."* (WSS, 59) Antoinette does not act according to Rochester's idea of how a woman should be, thus, creating disharmony in the emotional conversation. Consequently, she is hated by and hates Rochester and everything he embodies.

The theory of postcolonialism could be applied in a context where Rochester's opinions regarding Antoinette were mainly focused on his preconceived notions related to her

background. The fact that Antoinette comes from a less developed country than England made Rochester feel that Antoinette lacks many things compared to the English women. Antoinette's ambiguity of skin color also contributes to her exclusion from an English identity when she reflects, "*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*" [20]. Or elsewhere, her husband recounts how he overheard one of the housemaids singing, "*The white cockroach she marry, The white cockroach she buy young man*" [20] (Peimanfard & Hanif, 2016).

#### 4.4 Quest for "Identity"

Both the novels focus on the search for individual identity and end up defining the female protagonist in relation to other males' treatment of her. *Foe's* main protagonist, Susan Barton, is seen as depending on the male characters to define her identity. At the story's start, Susan Barton lives with Cruso and Friday on Cruso's island, obeying Cruso's orders; she sleeps with Cruso as it makes her feel more significant to Cruso. She also defines her voice in relation to Friday by comparing his muteness to her speaking ability. Even though she works as Friday's ventriloquist, he helps her realize the importance of speech and expressing oneself with words. Similarly, when Susan meets Foe, she starts to define herself according to his views of her, and she becomes a confused individual who bends to Foe's every whim and opinion. She ends up sleeping with him to gain his acceptance and starts to define her freedom and voice in relation to how much creative freedom Foe chose to give her.

Similarly, Antoinette defines her identity by relating it to her husband Rochester's treatment of her, which decides what she thinks about herself. To gain Rochester's notice, she resorts to any means and mediums, such as madness, silence, sex, etc... Antoinette is seen requesting Christophine, a motherly figure to her, to help Antoinette gain her husband's love and affection. Eventually, Rochester's influence became so severe that Antoinette's emotions and expressions are entirely defined by his behavior toward her, and when his ignorance reaches extreme levels, it results in Antoinette losing her mind and going mad as Anja Loomba stated, "*within the framework of psychoanalytic discourse, anti-colonial resistance is coded as madness.*" (Loomba, 2005:119).

One more significant matter to consider here is that in both the novels, the lack of freedom and voice affected the individuals so much that it became a matter of existence for both Antoinette and Susan. The insecurities, doubts, and helplessness were created in their hearts and minds mostly from their interactions with the male characters, which eventually took away their sense of self and existence. The belief in their existence depends on the freedom, voice, and validation that they seek to receive throughout the story.

While Susan and Antoinette both search for their voices throughout the novels, their journeys pass through different paths. In *Foe*, Susan Barton starts as a strong and confident individual, believing in her individuality as a free woman and looking to share her story with the world. However, as the story progressed, she ended up compromising on her ideals more and more and bowing down to the dominating male voices. Foe's power as a writer and his knowledge and skills of manipulation succeeded in confusing Susan about her identity, individuality, and freedom. She ended up losing her essence and substance, as a woman, to Foe.

While she starts out trying to help Friday find his voice, she has lost her own by the end of the novel and ends up trying to free her soul from the overwhelming power of Foe's voice. She acts as a ventriloquist, and although it results in Friday losing his individuality, it is the main force behind us getting to know and understand the character of Friday. (Azam, 2018) On the other hand, as Susan becomes Friday's voice in front of the reader, she starts to lose her individuality.

On the other hand, in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette grew up as a child of silence but found her voice at the end of the novel. Antoinette struggled to find her place in society in her earlier life as she did not belong racially with the surrounding people. She struggled to fit in culturally with her husband. Even after marriage, she had trouble voicing her feelings and emotions to her husband. Rochester, who played a dominant role, subdued Antoinette's voice for a long time. Antoinette succeeds in expressing herself, although Rochester made a continuous effort not to give her space to voice herself. The soul of Antoinette's character becomes evident when she voices her distressed childhood.

However, eventually, after lots of inner struggle with her voice, Antoinette found her way out of the shell she was trapped in and chose to end her husband's oppression and negligence. She resorted to madness and overpowered everyone else so much that they were bound to listen and give significance to Antoinette's presence as an individual.

Antoinette manages to express herself in parts despite Rochester's constant attempts not to give her a space to voice her opinions. The essence of Antoinette's personality comes to light when she ends up expressing her story to Rochester in order to defend her troubled childhood, which turns out to be a futile attempt:

*"No, I said I was always happy in the morning, not always in the afternoon and never after sunset, for after sunset, the house was haunted, some places are. Then there was that day when she saw I was growing up like a white nigger and she was ashamed of me, it was after that day that everything changed. Yes, it was my fault that she started to plan and work in frenzy, in a fever to change our lives. Then people came to see us again, and though I still hated them and was afraid of their cool, teasing eyes, I learned to hide it."* (Rhys, 1966:109)

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

## 5. Conclusion

*"Muffled throughout their history, they have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts."* (Oliver, 268).

The presence of women has affected every culture and society in human history, whether they were oppressed or liberated. Throughout most of history, women were forced to suppress their voices and be subservient to men in each crucial aspect of life, including the one place where true expression of oneself is of utmost importance – literature. Countless years of discrimination in literature, full of male writers who portrayed women as the weaker gender dependent on men, hindered the women's liberation movement even more. The fact that women could not even truly express themselves in literature resulted in them having little power over their representation for hundreds of years. As a consequence, the female voice had been lost for ages.

However, the will to be independent, the desire to be seen as equals to men, and countless years of determined struggle resulted in a robust feminist movement responsible for women's liberation in the postcolonial era. The feminist voice, suppressed for so many years before, also found its way to literature in the 20th century. The postcolonial age has seen more feminine writers, stronger feminine characters, and the true power of the feminine voice. Postcolonial novels like Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* are two hugely influential pieces of work that tried to capture this latest definition of what it means to be a woman in this era.

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

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

Similarly, Coetzee's *Foe* sees Susan Barton aspiring to be an author and determined to publish her tale. However, she is shown to be depending on her male counterpart's help and his

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

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

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### **About the Author**

Nushrat Azam is a lecturer in the School of Communications, Language & Literature at Fiji National University in Suva, Fiji Islands. She is an active researcher with a keen interest in feminism, voices, and gender studies focused on gender performativity. She has completed her Master of Arts in Literature from The University of the South Pacific in Fiji, and her Master's Thesis focused on the voices and silences of female characters in Postcolonial Literature. Nushrat is currently working towards her PhD degree. Her doctoral thesis in Creative Writing focuses on silences and multiple identities of female voices from South Asian backgrounds. She has published research articles focusing on the voices of women. Her journal article (published in an Australian ranked journal) titled "Madwoman in the Postcolonial Era" is being used as a required reading/part of Literature courses at various universities in Europe. It has also been cited by Postgraduate & Masters students from the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Spain. Her Short Story, "Unspread Wings: From Crossing Streets to Crossing Oceans" & "Dusting Stones Buried Deep," got published in the Canadian Feminist Magazine "Roar, Fierce Feminine Rising Magazine." Her book titled "The Girl with a Mirror," A Collection of Short Stories got published in June 2020. The book contains short stories depicting the lives of women of all ages and highlighting various women's issues. This collection, "The Girl with a Mirror," promotes voices of women, identity, and empowerment – something which has been her focus, passion, and mission. Nushrat is also a reviewer for various journals and has been actively reviewing articles in the field of humanities & social sciences.

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