

**The Indigenization of the Colonial Language in  
Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*: A Rewriting of Charlotte  
Bronte's *Jane Eyre*  
L'indigénisation de la langue coloniale dans *Wide Sargasso  
Sea* de Jean Rhys : une réécriture de *Jane Eyre* de Charlotte  
Brontë**

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### **Abstract**

Nineteenth century literary arena was mainly dominated by writers who tamed the English language and employed it to serve the interests of the British colonial ideology. However, the postcolonial period witnessed the rise of writers from the ex-colonies who sought to decolonize their culture and history from the hegemony of the colonial discourse. Accordingly, they endeavoured to accomplish their objective by appropriating the colonial language and employing it to meet the requirements of their postcolonial contexts. The present article examines the way Jean Rhys' postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* manipulates the norms of standard English as evoked in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, to come up with a new language, namely Caribbean "English." The article probes how Rhys' abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language has contributed to the rewriting of Brontë's narrative through an indigenization of the language and the decolonization of the Caribbean native culture and history.

### **Keywords**

Abrogation, appropriation, Caribbean English, indigenization, postcolonial discourse, postcolonial novel.

## Résumé

La littérature du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle fut principalement dominée par des écrivains qui employèrent la langue anglaise afin de servir les intérêts de l'idéologie coloniale britannique. Cependant, la période postcoloniale a vu l'émergence d'écrivains originaires des anciennes colonies et qui eurent pour objectif de décoloniser leurs cultures et leur histoire de l'hégémonie du discours colonial. Ils entreprirent de s'appropriier la langue coloniale et de l'utiliser afin de répondre aux besoins des contextes postcoloniaux. Cet article analyse la façon avec laquelle le roman postcolonial *Wide Sargasso Sea* de Jean Rhys manipule les normes de l'anglais standard évoqué dans le roman *Jane Eyre* de Charlotte Brontë, et comment le premier promeut une 'nouvelle' langue, l'anglais caraïbein. L'article se penche sur les techniques d'abrogation et d'appropriation utilisées par Rhys afin de réécrire le récit de Brontë, et ceci à travers une indigénisation de la langue coloniale et une décolonisation de la culture et de l'histoire des Caraïbes.

**Mots clés:** abrogation, appropriation, anglais caraïbein, indigénisation, discours postcolonial, roman postcolonial

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, literature was monopolized by the colonial and imperial centre. Western writers tamed the English language and directed it to serve the interests of the existing British colonial ideology. However, the postcolonial period witnessed a major upheaval in the literary arena. A new wave of writers emerged from the ex-colonies with the tendency to decolonize their culture and history from the confinements of the colonial discourse. In their path to cultural decolonization, postcolonial writers headed toward the abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language, namely English. They sought to transform it as an adequate tool for their postcolonial context, a tool that could reflect their marginalized culture and history and interrogate their misrepresentation in the colonial narrative. Postcolonial writers were deeply convinced that the colonial narrative that

imposed a hegemonic standard language was nothing but a form of "imperial oppression" (Pinto, 2010, p. 69).

Indian novelist Salman Rushdie asserts that the English language is "no longer an English language," but it "now grows from many roots; and those whom it once colonized are carving out large territories within the language for themselves" (as cited in Brennan, 1990, p. 48). In fact, many postcolonial writers have engaged in the abrogation and appropriation of the English language, and West Indian writer Jean Rhys is no exception. In light of Rushdie's argument, the present paper examines the way Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* manipulates the norms of standard English as evoked in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and comes up with a new language - Caribbean "English" - to portray the experiences of the colonized in the West Indies. Accordingly, the paper uncovers how Rhys' abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language and narrative have contributed in the indigenization of the colonial language, and in the decolonization of her native culture and history.

## **2. Postcolonial Abrogation and Appropriation of the Colonial Language: Theory and Concepts**

Postcolonial theory represents an attempt to explore the struggle that have characterized the colonizer-colonized relationship. The theory digs into the multitudes of experiences lived by the peoples of the different former colonies and their constant struggle to gain their independence. Many postcolonial writers and theorists are engaged in the interrogation of colonial narratives. Through their writings, they contribute in transmitting the voice of the colonized to the world. Accordingly, different literary forms and processes are incorporated within postcolonial theory. These forms liberate the colonized people's language, culture and history from the control of what they commonly call "the centre."

Postcolonial writers and theorists have used the oppositional use of language as an act of liberation to question colonial narratives. This endeavour denotes the way postcolonial writers seize the language of the colonial centre and appropriate it to reconstruct the world of the colonized (Haberkamp, 2005, p. 246) through their own lens rather than through the lens of their colonizer. The most commonly used forms of postcolonial literary analysis is the indigenization of the colonial language by way of abrogation and appropriation.

Abrogation and appropriation are two complementary processes which engage in a conflicting relationship with the colonial language (Britton, 1999, p. 33). Zekmi (2011) defines abrogation as "the rejection of normative forms of the colonizer's language as opposed to its non-standard and dialectical use in the colonies" (pp. 58-59). As an essential form in the postcolonial discourse, abrogation tends to reject any possible control of the means of communication by the centre. It is an act which breaks away from the colonizer's language, aesthetic values and cultural norms. As a first phase in the process of language subversion, abrogation seems to replace the "prestige and power of the colonial language with that, newly created, of an indigenous language" (Britton, 1999, p. 33). Following the phase of abrogation, many postcolonial writers reject the concept of standard English which is used in Western discourse as opposed to "inferior dialects or marginal variants." Actually, abrogation makes it possible for postcolonial writers to adapt and employ the cultural tool of the imperial master - its language - for liberation purposes (Ashcroft et al, 2000, pp. 3-4).

The second phase in the process of rewriting the colonial discourse is appropriation. This concept refers to the way the postcolonial counter-discourse takes certain aspects of the imperial culture (including language and forms of writing) and transforms them to voice the colonized people's cultural identity (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 9). The language that has been subverted in the first phase is now appropriated. Accordingly, it becomes adequate to transmit the colonized people's experience. In that sense, Chinua Achebe purports that language must "bear the burden of their experience"(as cited in Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 9). Instead of being dominated by the colonizer's language, postcolonial writers prefer to transform it and to produce a language that can translate their own cultural realities (Ashcroft, 2014, p. 67). Through appropriation, postcolonial writers also unveil the way the imperial centre - the source of control - claims hegemony over the culture that it has once surveyed and dominated (Ashcroft et al, 2000, p. 15).

Through the appropriation of the colonial language, the postcolonial writer readapts a relevant vehicle to transmit and publicize the colonized culture and to draw their difference from the centre. In so doing, the postcolonial writer is able to address the colonizer through his appropriated language: "I am using your language so that you will understand my world, but you will also know by the differences in the way I use it that you cannot share my

experience." The reader is subsequently exposed to an "other culture," introduced through a postcolonial discourse instead of the one presented in the colonial discourse (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 75).

Postcolonial experiences are hybrid in nature. Postcolonial theorists therefore believe that such nature rebuts "the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any monocentric view of human experience" (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 40). To confirm this view, postcolonial writers follow a process of challenging the authority of colonial discourse by engaging in a "linguistic hybridity" of the colonial language (Bhati, 2010, p. 525). This involves the use of a number of devices and techniques which are referred to as "devices of otherness" (W. Ashcroft, 1989, p. 72). The latter are employed by postcolonial writers to express their resistance to the authority of the colonial discourse. These devices serve to highlight the uniqueness of the postcolonial discourse, to emphasize the sense of difference, and to signal the writers' "local indigenous identity" (Bhati, 2010, p. 531). Among the most common textual devices utilized by postcolonial writers in their abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language are code-switching, glossing, untranslated words, and the manipulation of the basic norms of standard English in grammar, spelling, and pronunciation.

### **3. The Abrogation and Appropriation of the Colonial Language in Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea***

The English language has always been an effective weapon employed by the colonial power to exercise its hegemony and to impose its culture on the colonized (Iseke-Barnes, 2004; Ravishanka, 2020). Accordingly, the colonial discourse presents the centre and its language as a sign of order, and it portrays the colonies at the margin, with their language variations as a sign of peripheral disorder (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 87). As a response to this kind of linguistic domination, postcolonial writers have headed toward the rewriting of canonical discourses. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is of significant example in this attempt to abrogate and appropriate colonial language and make it convenient to postcolonial world. Through her abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language, the one exhibited in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Rhys uses textual strategies to produce a language that is able to decolonize her native culture and history and to translate the suffering and exploitation of her people.

### 3.1 The Decolonization of the Natives' Culture

Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges the claim of a superior colonial language by subverting the norms of standard English. This abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language appears in a variety of ways in which a new language is produced and embodied in "Caribbean English." The latter incorporates a specific linguistic code (Ashcroft et al, 1989, pp. 7-8) as it carries the cultural identity of the colonized people in the West Indies. In her counter-discourse, Rhys (1966) manipulates the standard rules of English grammar which appear through the dropping of the "s" of the simple present with the third person pronouns as in the following examples: "That's not what she hear...She hear all we poor like beggar...when it rain...Old Mr Luttrell spit in their face if he see how they look at you." (pp. 22-23); "In the end he come to find out what you do, how you get on without him, and if he see you fat and happy he want you back ...Jo-jo my son coming to see me, if he catch you crying, he tell everybody." (pp. 100, 102).

The manipulation of standard rules of English grammar is also reflected through the unusual use of the auxiliary "to have and "to do" with the third person pronouns as in the following examples: "She have eyes like Zombie...She have no money and she have no friends " (Rhys, 1966, pp. 45, 87); "He don't know how old he is, he don't think about it...She don't care for money" (pp. 62, 138). Moreover, Rhys produces new words out of the abrogation of the English language. This appears through the use of verbs as adjectives "Look don't you provoke me more than I provoke already...It's she won't be satisfy" (pp. 136, 143). In this example, Rhys uses the verbs "provoke" and "satisfy" as adjectives. In so doing, she tames the colonizer's language and makes it "meet the demands and requirements of the place and society in to which it has been appropriated" (Ashcroft et al, 1995, p.284); namely, the Caribbean context.

Another instance of "linguistic deviation" (Teke, 2013, p. 72) in the novel is embodied in the unusual use of capital letters. In her counter-discourse, Rhys (1966) opens each part of her narrative with capital letters. This serves to draw the reader's attention as letters are presented in a way which stands against the rules of English grammar. Instances of this are noticed in part one: "THEY SAY WHEN TROUBLE comes close ranks, and so the white people did." (p. 15), in part two: "SO IT WAS ALL OVER, the advance and retreat, the doubts and

hesitations" (p. 59), and even in part three: "THEY NEW THAT HE WAS in Jamaica when his father and his brother died" (p.159). This abrogation of the English language recurs inside each part to confirm that this unusual use of capitalization is not accidental. Rather, it is meant to transform and appropriate the colonial language for "new and distinctive usages." (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 6).

In addition to the unusual use of capitalization, Rhys (1966) also makes unusual use of italic type within the text's normal type. In the second part of the novel, long paragraphs (sometimes covering more than one page) are written in italic. Instances of this are reflected through the letter which Mr. Rochester, the English man, writes to his father providing him with news about the success of their plan:

*Dear Father, we have arrived from Jamaica after an uncomfortable few days. This little estate in the Windward Islands is part of the family property and Antoinette is much attached to it. She wished to get here as soon as possible. All is well and has gone according to your plans and wishes. I dealt of course with Richard Mason. His father died soon after I left for the West Indies as you probably know. He is a good fellow, hospitable and friendly; he seemed to become attached to me and trusted me completely... I will write again in a few days' time.* (pp. 68-69)

Through the above italicized passage, Rhys abrogates the conventions of standard English established in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, the colonial novel in which the text and even the letters written by the protagonist Jane are written in normal type. In so doing, Rhys does not only abrogate and appropriate the colonizer's language through italic type but she also uncovers the cunning nature of the colonizer embodied in Mr. Rochester and his father, and their plotting against the colonized Antoinette (Mr. Rochester's wife).

Rhys' abrogation of the colonial language is also reflected through the use of what Ashcroft et al call "an ethnographic tool" (1995, p. 284). In her counter-discourse, Rhys integrates songs to highlight the oral tradition of the West Indies. Instances of this are reflected through the character Antoinette who asks her aunt to sing for her the song of "*Before I was set free.*" The aunt accepts: "Before I was set free...the sorrow that my heart feels for ...the sorrow that my heart feels for" (1966, p. 43). Through this song, Rhys spots

light on the history of slavery and sufferings of the natives in the West Indies before emancipation. She also highlights the tensions between Creoles and blacks in the local community. Ethnic hybridity of Creole natives reminds the blacks of the white colonizer and increases their animosity toward them. This hatred appears through the song which the black servant Amélié sings to insult the Creole Antoinette:

The white cockroach she marry  
The white cockroach she marry  
The white cockroach she buy young man  
The white cockroach she marry.(Rhys, 1966, p. 91)

In this song, Amélié blames Antoinette for her mixed ethnicity and for her white husband who married her for her money.

Through abrogation and appropriation of standard English, Rhys indigenizes the colonial language and employs instead a new version of English which serves to challenge the "old-fashioned imperialistic vision of dominant cultures and more or less prestigious languages" (Cavagnoli, 2014, pp. 357-358). This indigenized English brings the colonized people's culture and traditions into the forefront. In addition to the aforementioned linguistic deviations, Rhys' counter-discourse integrates also other textual strategies to abrogate the colonizer's language and to express her opposition to the colonial discourse displayed in *Jane Eyre*. These strategies foreground the uniqueness of the postcolonial discourse and highlight the culture of the indigenous people, one that is meant to be different from and extraneous to the colonial centre.

### **3.2 Textual strategies in Rhys' counter discourse**

In her text, Rhys employs other textual strategies to decolonize her native culture and history. These strategies consist of code-switching, untranslated words, and glossing.

Code-switching is a linguistic technique of hybridization in which a shift between two languages or dialects takes place (Hamamra and Qararia, 2018, p. 126). In a discourse where English is the dominant language, any language contact that occurs in the novel with another language is regarded as code-switching (Jonsson, 2012, p. 213). In Rhys' counter-discourse, this subversive strategy is displayed through the shift from the natives' "French patois" (1966, p. 61) to English. Instances of this strategy in the novel include the words

uttered by Antoinette's mother, a Creole woman from Martinique: "*Qui est la? Qui est ta?* Don't touch me. I'll kill you if you touch me. Coward. Hypocrite. I'll kill you" (1966, p. 42). French patois is introduced and highlighted in italic while English is introduced in normal type. Another instance is reflected by Antoinette when she explains to her English husband Mr. Rochester whether the snakes he has seen in her island are poisonous or not: "Not those. The *fer de lance* of course" (1966, p. 80). Trying to make Mr. Rochester familiar with her native culture, Antoinette switches codes from English to French to explain how fireflies are called in their local patois: "Ah yes, fireflies in Jamaica, here they call a firefly *La belle*" (1966, p. 73). On another occasion, reacting to Mr. Rochester's admiration of her wedding dress, Antoinette switches codes to her native tongue to highlight their cultural distinctiveness from the colonial centre. As her dress is made in Martinique, one of the islands in the Caribbean, she clarifies to her husband that the natives "call this fashion à *la Joséphine*" (Rhys, 1966, p. 72).

Most remarkably is when Rhys makes Mr. Rochester switches codes from English to the natives' French patois. When Mr. Rochester informs the native servant Baptist that Antoinette is asleep, he says "Asleep, *dormi, dormi*" (Rhys, 1966, p. 148). In fact, by shifting from English to French patois, the Mr. Rochester tries to make Baptist understand his language. This shift indicates the insufficiency which exists in the colonial language and which is compensated by a shift to the natives' language.

In postcolonial counter-discourse, code-switching could also take the form of interjection and sentence filler (Cavagnoli, 2014, pp. 150-151). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the black servant Christophine switches codes from local patois to English when she addresses Antoinette: "Aie Aie Aie! Look me trouble, look me cross!" (Rhys, 1966, p.122). In this example and in the aforementioned ones, code-switching within Rhys' counter-discourse has an empowering function (Jonsson, 2012, p. 212) in which the language of the colonized is legitimized. This intermingling between the two languages is done for the purpose of expressing resistance to the colonial discourse and to the allegedly prestigious colonial language. Indian theorist Gayatri Spivak (1985) describes the language used by Christophine as "incorrect English" (p. 252), an abrogated version of English that breaks the rules of the

standard one exhibited in *Jane Eyre*. Instead, it serves to highlight the colonized people's culture.

In addition to the above mentioned strategy of abrogation and appropriation of the English language, Rhys' counter-discourse incorporates also untranslated words. The latter highlight the culture of the natives and express some kind of opposition to the colonial discourse of *Jane Eyre*. In fact, the use of untranslated words does not hinder the understanding of the text as their meaning can be deduced through the context. This is the case with some vernacular words presented within English sentences by the postcolonial writer (Ashcroft, 2014, p. 58).

Instances of untranslated words in *Wide Sargasso Sea* include the Spanish word "Sangoree." When some members of the black community attacked and burned Antoinette's family house, her Aunt Cora threatened one of the assailants with perpetual fire as a punishment from God for their deed: "And never a drop of Sangoree to cool your burning tongue" she said (Rhys, 1966, p. 40). Although no English translation is provided for this Spanish word, the reader can deduce its meaning that may refer to a refreshing drink.

In addition to the aforementioned examples, the black servant Christophine also uses one of the Caribbean words "béké" when she talks with Mr. Rochester about Antoinette. She explains that Antoinette "is not *béké* like you" (Rhys, 1966, p. 140). As no English translation is provided for this word, the reader is sometimes required to extend his knowledge by searching in other sources apart from the text itself. According to the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, the word "béké" alludes to those people of Martinique who "descended from white Creoles or 'békés', Africans, Orientals, from Indian China and Annam, and Europeans known as 'békés'..." (Allsopp, 2003, p. 91) and who have settled the West Indies. The ambiguity that surrounds the word is created on purpose by the writer in order to highlight the "cultural distinctiveness" (Ashcroft, 2014, p.58) of the West Indies people from the colonial culture which is depicted in *Jane Eyre*.

Another instance of this strategy is reflected through the word "soucriant" which is uttered by the black servant Christophine when she practises the spiritual healing of obeah on Antoinette: "Your face like dead woman and your eyes red like *soucriant*" (Rhys, 1966, p.

105). In Caribbean folklore, the word "soucriant" or "soucouyant" refers to a woman who is ordinary by day, but who metamorphoses at night. Then, the woman

shed her skin, transformed herself into a ball of fire, flew about the community, and sucked the blood of her unsuspecting neighbours. Afterward, she would return home and slip back into her skin, and the repeated practice made her human form unusually wrinkled. (Anatol, 2015, p. ix)

The fact that no English translation is provided for the word "soucriant" makes the reader aware of the need to extend his knowledge outside the text in order to grasp its meaning. Thus, this word highlights that the language which is used in the text is "an/other language" (Ashcroft et al., 1989, pp. 63-64), and the absence of an immediate English translation gives Rhys' counter-discourse a specific interpretive function. Through these examples of abrogation and appropriation of the English language, Rhys demonstrates her ability to master the colonial language in a way that "it would no longer master [her]" (LaRocque, 1990, p. xxvi).

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys uses also the strategy of glossing. She chooses to provide "an approximate English translation" (Wright, 2016, p. 69) for certain words of Caribbean origin. The translation she provides serves to emphasize her native West Indian culture. Instances of these words include the word "da" which is used by Antoinette when she speaks about the black servant Christophine: "And here is Christophine who was my da, my nurse long ago" (Rhys, 1966, p. 65). In Caribbean culture, the word "da" is used to refer to a nurse. Though Rhys can use the English word "nurse," she prefers to employ the word which foregrounds her native culture. In fact, Rhys' recourse to the word "da" indicates that the language of the colonizer (the English word nurse) cannot convey the culture of colonized people. Another instance is reflected through the word "bull's blood" which is used by Christophine when she speaks to Mr. Rochester: "Taste my bull's blood, master." In Caribbean culture, the expression "bull's blood" means coffee (Rhys, 1966, p. 77). The fact of using this cultural phrase instead of the English word "coffee" serves to emphasize the gap that exists between the two cultures. It is through this gap that the cultural distinctiveness of the West Indies is highlighted.

Rhys also uses glossing to stress the importance of oral tradition in the West Indies. Instances of this are transmitted by the character Antoinette who tries to teach her English husband songs that are part of her native culture: "*Ma belle ka di maman li*. My beautiful girl said to her mother" (Rhys, 1966, p. 83). The song is in local patois and Rhys provides the English translation for it to make foreign readers familiar with the oral tradition of the West Indies. In so doing, Rhys shifts from "unlearning English" to "learning how to curse in the master's tongue" (Gandhi, 1998, p.147).

Other instances of glossing include the word "*Morn*," a Caribbean term which means mountain. Rhys uses it because the natives of the West Indies believe that "mountain is an ugly word" (Rhys, 1966, p. 151). In this way, Rhys makes the reader who is not acquainted with Caribbean culture aware of this important detail. Another instance is when the character of Daniel uses an expression which could be understood only by natives of the West Indies: "*nancy stories*" (Rhys, 1966, p. 90). The English translation he provides for this expression makes its meaning clear and serves to uncover the uniqueness of the natives' culture. Speaking to Mr. Rochester, Daniel warns him that "Richard Mason is a sly man and he will tell you a lot of nancy stories, which is what we call lies here" (Rhys, 1966, p. 90). Another occurrence of glossing is shown when the same character of Daniel speaks to Mr. Rochester "to hear the woman jump over a precipice '*fini batt'e*' as we say here which mean finish to fight" (Rhys, 1966, p. 88). Since Mr. Rochester is an Englishman who is not familiar with West Indian culture, Daniel provides the English translation for the cultural expression he uses. However, the English translation he provides does not devalue the native's local patois or their culture. On the contrary, it serves to highlight the natives' language and differentiate it from the colonizer's language (English expression), the latter working only as a referent to it. Another instance is presented through the word "*ajoupa*" which is used by Antoinette when she points to a house in Granbois. In Caribbean culture, this word means a "thatched shelter" (Rhys, 1966, p. 80) and the foreign reader gets to know its meaning from the translation which Rhys provides in the text.

#### **4. The Decolonization of the Natives' History: the Colonized History Reconstructed**

Rhys argues that society sometimes damages literature. By literature, she refers to the artistic works within the English society that reinforce the dominant ideology. Literary writers belonging to the colonial centre and power try to tame and appropriate their conception of truth to make it serve their prevailing ideology. On this basis, Rhys believes that "if books were brave enough the repressive education [of the ant civilization] would fail but nearly all English books and writers slavishly serve the ant civilization (...)" (as cited in Gregg, 1990, p. 111). Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* might be seen among those books which serve the British colonial creed of the nineteenth century Victorian society. This creed manipulates history by glorifying the British presence in the West Indies as a noble duty. Accordingly, Rhys' appropriation of the colonial language contributes to the production a powerful vehicle to decolonize the history of the natives, one that has been distorted by the imperial centre.

In the colonial discourse displayed in *Jane Eyre*, Brontë spots light on colonial history and presents British expansion and hegemony in the East as a missionary task. The latter seeks to transmit its superior civilization and religion to the dark and inferior regions. In *Jane Eyre*, this exaltation of British history is reflected through the character of St. John who devotes his life for the fulfilment of an allegedly pious mission in India on the ground that God has chosen him, and for the purpose of securing a place in Heaven. A noble task he will never think to give up:

God had an errand for me; to bear with afar, to deliver it well, skill and strength, courage and eloquence, the best qualifications of soldier, statesman, and orator, were all needed: for these all centre in the good missionary ...Relinquish! What! my vocation? My great work? My foundation laid on earth for a mansion in heaven? My hopes of being numbered in the band who have merged all ambitions in the glorious one of bettering their race - of carrying knowledge into the realms of ignorance - of substituting peace for war - freedom for bondage - religion for superstition - the hope of heaven for the fear of hell? Must I relinquish that? (Brontë, 2003, pp. 514, 531)

The character of St. John embodies the hubris of colonial power. He claims that he is among the chosen people. He is assigned the divine mission of spreading knowledge and religion to

the inferior places of the non-Western world. Through his claim of the missionary errand, the colonizer seeks to justify British presence in the East and thus to hide the real objectives behind the colonial project.

Through the counter-discourse displayed in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys invents a "new creole literary space" (Raikin, 1996, p. 112) that enable her to respond to and interrogate the history of British colonialism in the West Indies. In return, she inscribes her native history, one that has been erased in the dominant colonial discourse. Through the deconstruction and rewriting of the colonial narrative exhibited in *Jane Eyre*, Rhys' counter-discourse reconstructs West Indian native history from an indigenous perspective. She does so by unveiling the different forms of exploitation and suffering her people have been exposed to.

Through her female narrator Antoinette, Rhys emphasizes one of the blind spots in the history of the West Indies: slavery and its devastating effects on the local people. The novel opens with the passing of the Emancipation Act, the legislation that frees slaves of the West Indies but that does not end their exploitation. Through the character of Annette, Antoinette's mother, Rhys exposes the way the white colonizers have accumulated their wealth through the enslavement and the exploitation of blacks. After the emancipation of slaves, many whites have lost their wealth and have ended in mental break down. This is the case with Mr. Luttrell (Rhys, 1966, p. 15). Rhys also spots light on the way native women have been reduced to presents of marriages, as it is the case with the character of Christophine. Annette tells her daughter Antoinette that the black servant Christophine "was your father's wedding present to me - one of his presents. He thought I would be pleased with a Martinique girl" (Rhys, 1966, p. 19). As Antoinette's mother is from Martinique, one of the islands in the West Indies, her English husband has thought that the best gift for her would be a servant from Martinique whom he looks at as an object rather than a human being.

Although the Emancipation Act has been meant to put an end to slavery and to free slaves, Rhys' counter-discourse unveils the deceit of the colonial power in the sense that nothing has changed in the lives of blacks in the West Indies. In this regard, Antoinette confirms their conditions by alluding to the white men:

These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up peoples feet. New ones worse than old ones - more cunning, that's all. (1966, p. 24)

Antoinette's words spot light on the way the colonizers manipulate things under the cover of law in order to attain their objectives. Hence, the only change is seen in those new men (colonial magistrates and law enforcers) who have replaced the old ones (slave holders) and who have followed their strategy to exploit the natives. Antoinette emphasizes the only difference between the two: the new are more malignant.

In addition to the above mentioned facts, Antoinette's half-brother Daniel unveils the duplicity of the colonizer embodied in his English father, Mr. Alexander Cosway. The latter has written a motto in Latin on a "white marble tablet" of an English church built in the West Indies. The motto glorifies his deeds as a white man who has done good to the natives: "Pious...Beloved by all...Merciful to the weak" (Rhys, 1966, p. 111). As an illegitimate son of this white man, Daniel is familiar with his father's tricks and lies, and he is not deceived by these words which hide his real intentions. On the contrary, Daniel challenges the colonial narrative displayed in *Jane Eyre* and emphasized by St John. To Daniel, this Latin motto serves the objectives of the colonizer as it does not mention anything about the natives who were bought and sold by his father like cattle. Contrarily, it presents the white colonizer as an angel sent from heaven to do good to the natives. Thus, in an ironic tone, Daniel stresses the colonial deceit and unveils the hypocrisy of his father in the following passage:

Merciful to the weak...Mercy! The man have a heart like stone. Sometimes when he get sick of a woman which is quickly, he free her like he free my mother, even he give her a hut and a bit of land for herself ... but it is no mercy, its for wicked pride he do it. I never put my eyes on a man haughty and proud like that - he walk like he own the earth... I can still see that tablet before my eyes because I go to look at it often. I know by heart all the lies they tell - no one to stand up and say, Why you write lies in the church. (Rhys, 1966, p.111)

Through her counter-discourse, Rhys also spots light on other aftermaths of colonialism which are parts and parcels of their erased history. This is illustrated in racial tensions that have been ignited by the white colonizer and the enslavement of the colonized blacks of African descent. After emancipation, blacks developed great animosity toward all people with white skin. This had its negative effect on those Creoles who found themselves victims of the colonizer's strategies whose effects are long lasting. Antoinette is among those victims as she is a Creole with white skin; a source of trouble for her since she resembles white colonizers. Antoinette highlights the social gap created by colonialism in the West Indies. Colonial rule has divided the society into whites, blacks who were formerly enslaved, and coloured people who are rejected by blacks although they are also victims of colonialism.

Instances of racial tensions in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are reflected through the attacks some of the black community made on Antoinette's Creole family and that has led to the burning of their house (Rhys, 1966, p. 36). These tensions are due to the history of Antoinette's English father who was a former slave owner, and to the situation of Creoles who resemble whites. Blacks' rejection of Antoinette and her family is also reflected through the mocking words expressed toward her mother (Rhys, 1966, p. 16). Rhys grants a narrative voice to the character of Antoinette who finds a room to echo the different racial tensions and offences she and her family have experienced despite their indigeneity.

The colonial order and the institution of slavery have created a social gap and rupture between black and creoles communities. Antoinette's family have lived isolated and detached from their community as no one has befriended or visited them. Antoinette acknowledges that

no one came near us. I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped - perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass ...I had longed for visitors" (Rhys, 1966, pp.16, 20).

They have lived like people who have been denounced in their society for a sin they have not committed. That rejection has led Antoinette to seek refuge in nature. There, she recalls the racial insults she has experienced from the black community. She views those insults as more harmful than a pain caused by a razor grass or the feeling of seeing a snake. To her, "if

the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think 'Its better than people'... once I saw a snake. All better than people" (Rhys, 1966, p. 25).

To question the missionary claims of British colonization, Rhys exposes the continuous exploitations of the natives and their land even after independence. She highlights the way white men have got married to women from the West Indies in order to get their money and properties. Mr. Mason is one of those English men who has moved to the West Indies to accumulate more wealth and estates. In order to attain his objectives, he has married Antoinette's mother (Rhys, 1966, p. 27). He has then decided to import workers whom he refers to as "coolies" (Rhys, 1966, p. 32) to work in his estates. According to the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, the word coolies "came to be applied to all East-Indian persons in post-immigration times ...this term is generally regarded as offensive" (Allsopp, 2003, p. 168). Those imported labourers have been exploited as indentured labourers with a contract but without wages. Through the term "coolies," Rhys harkens back the whole history of colonialism and exploitation of the colonized in the West Indies; a piece which is missing in the colonial discourse of Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Colonialism has sought to obliterate the culture and history of the colonized through its language and discourse. However, its attempts have been resisted by postcolonial writers and Jean Rhys' discourse and narrative are the best examples. It is sensible to conclude that through abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language, the West Indian novelist Rhys has managed to create a powerful vehicle to highlight the native culture and history of the West Indies, ones that have been marginalized and misrepresented in the colonial discourse of *Jane Eyre*. Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* comes up with an indigenized language that conveys a different discourse, a postcolonial one. Rhys' work unveils a different perception of the colonized people, culture and history in the West Indies, far from the Eurocentric images provided in the colonial narratives.

By abrogating and appropriating the colonizer's language, Rhys sends a message to the colonial power: what she is transmitting through her text is the culture and the history of the "other," reconstructed from the perspective of the colonized rather than that of the

colonizer. In so doing, Rhys asserts that the colonized are not only physically liberated from colonialism but also mentally freed from its hegemonic discourse and language, and its manipulation of their culture and history. For that reason, the use of the colonial language by a postcolonial writer should be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Rather, it must be viewed as a sign of strength, for the postcolonial writer addresses the colonial power by using its own weapon, namely language.

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