

Unsettling the Empire: Tayeb Salih and Jean Rhys Parody British Canonical Narratives from A Post-Colonial Lens

Dr. Malika AFILAL

Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Ibn Zohr University Agadir, Morocco

ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
Rewriting European literary texts from a postcolonial perspective is a provocative strategy that exposes and parodies the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized. Through reimagining, subverting, or undermining canonical works, post-colonial writers foreground the histories and identities of the marginalized, while confronting the lingering effects of colonial discourse. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Homi Bhabha and Bill Ashcroft, I investigate how Jean Rhys and Tayeb Salih write from a space of cultural hybridity-a "third space" as Homi Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes-where colonial legacies are negotiated rather than simply rejected. Rhys's <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> (1966) reclaims the silenced voice of Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's <i>Jane Eyre</i> (1847), recentering the narrative through a feminist and Caribbean lens. Similarly, Salih's <i>Season of Migration to the North</i> (1966) counters Joseph Conrad's <i>Heart of Darkness</i> (1899), dismantling its portrayal of Africa as a dehumanized and static "other." Both writers engage in what Ashcroft et al. (1989) describe as "counter-discourse," reshaping the colonial canon from within by revealing its internal contradictions. Rhys and Salih assert narrative authority through intertextuality, complicating the colonizer/colonized dialectic without entirely rejecting the Western literary tradition. Their works do more than resist; they reconfigure dominant narratives, making visible the hybrid identities, suppressed histories, and cultural ambiguities that European literature often effaces. In doing so, they challenge the authority of the canon and make space for alternative modes of representation grounded in post-colonial experience. KEYWORDS: the empire, self/other binary, hybridity, third space, cultural identity.	Published On: 12 June 2025 Available on: https://irijsh.com/

1. INTRODUCTION

Rewriting European literary texts from a postcolonial perspective is a subversive strategy that critiques and reimagines the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized. By using canonical texts to write back to or rewrite through the European canon, postcolonial writers can foreground the experiences, history, and culture of the once-dominated society while at the same time recognizing the effects colonialism has had in shaping and reshaping them. Rewriting back to the canon offers numerous possibilities for post-colonial writers to reverse, revisit, rewrite and problematize Western discourse. Writing from the vantage point of the colonized creates new vistas on colonialism and its effects. Post-colonial writers such as Tayeb Salih and Jean Rhys do not write in a vacuum; their work is situated within and informed by a position of difference. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Bill Ashcroft and Homi Bhabha, I examine how Tayeb Salih and Jean Rhys write back to British canonical texts, namely *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. I explore how Salih and Rhys negotiate and reinterpret the colonial narratives embedded in these European texts. Salih revisits and reinterprets many themes of representation found in these colonial texts, thereby initiating a literary dialogue with *Heart of Darkness* and *Jane Eyre*. Salih's *Seasons of Migration to the North* revisits the colonial tropes in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that helped perpetuate the offensive image of Africa and the portrayal of Africans as "denigrated others." Similarly, to bring the White Caribbean voice to the forefront, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* rewrites *Jane Eyre*. It gives Bertha the voice she was denied in the earlier text, where Charlotte Brontë dehumanized the character of Bertha and degraded the Caribbean culture. Reimagining canonical Western narratives as a foundation or an inspiration can allow modern post-colonial writers to illustrate the hybridity of their cultures without either favouring the European tradition or ignoring it. Destabilizing

hegemonic discourses in *Heart of Darkness* and *Jane Eyre* allows Salih and Rhys to correct the false discourse embedded in these texts. In this process, Salih and Rhys may undermine, appropriate, or venerate it, but they will not lose their subjectivity.

Rewriting canonical English texts from a postcolonial perspective is more than just an oppositional stance against metropolitan tradition. While this writing strategy can be classified as "counter-discourse," we should remember that counter-discourse is inextricably intertwined with the discourse it attempts to counter. Bill Ashcroft et al. (1989) identify post-colonial writing as a "counter-discourse" because it "obtains its meaning through conflict and contradiction" (p. 101). Rhys and Salih move the text beyond its former boundaries. They inscribed themselves where they had formerly been excluded and, in doing so, forced alternative readings of old texts. This subtle method of subversion, neither fawning imitation nor bitter opposition, often effectively counters misrepresentations and uncovers unheard voices. However, because these writers subvert classic Western stories by rewriting them rather than attempting to portray a pristine pre-colonial culture, the impact is more lasting and ultimately more successful. Rewriting canonical texts, post-colonial writers refer to the perpetuation of the hegemony of English literature even as they claim to challenge many of the notions in those texts. The relationship between the revisited text and the canonical is simultaneously adversarial and intimate, but never simply imitative. If *Heart of Darkness* narrates the history of modern British imperialism from a position deep within its metropolitan center, *Season of Migration to the North* presents itself as a counter-narrative to the same traumatic history. Just as Conrad's novel was deeply embedded in the context of Britain's imperial enterprise, Salih's counter-narrative engages with the enduring legacy of that same project by 'writing back' to the colonial power that once dominated Sudan.

Both Rhys and Salih strategically employ the language of the colonizer to give voice to the oppressed Other and subvert dominant cultural narratives. In this regard, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (1986) argues against the intrusion of English in African universities and for the return to the use of native languages in creative works by African Authors. For Ngũgĩ, decolonization of the mind must occur before a subject is truly liberated. He believes that this decolonization is possible only when accompanied by a complete rejection of the tools of the colonizer, including language and text. He says: "By our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, we are not on the cultural level continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit?" (p. 26). However, appropriation of those tools can clear a space for the post-colonial writer- a space that Bhabha would call the "third space." Bhabha (1994) argues that we should be critical of the "positive aesthetic and political values we ascribe to the unity or totality of cultures, especially those that have long and tyrannical histories of domination and misrecognition" (p.35). Bhabha argues that we must approach cultures critically because they are neither internally unified nor merely defined by a simple opposition between Self and Other. Instead, meaning is created through the interaction between these positions within a "Third Space." For Bhabha, all meaning must move through this "third space." In no situation can art be situated simply as "Self" or "Other", or in this case, "colonial" or "post-colonial." In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha challenges the essentialist notion that cultures are coherent, unified, and oppositional entities, such as colonizer versus colonized or Self versus Other. Instead, he argues that cultures are constructed through hybrid, contested and shifting encounters. The Third Space is the in-between, liminal site where cultural meaning and identity are negotiated rather than fixed. It is a space of translation and transformation, where the dominant narratives of power can be disrupted and rearticulated.

Importantly, the Third Space is not simply a blending or mixture of two cultures. Instead, it is a dynamic site where meaning is constructed through differences, contradictions, and negotiations. This space reveals the instability of cultural authority, opening up possibilities for new forms of identity, voice and political resistance. As Bhabha asserts, "all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" (p. 37). In literary terms, the Third Space enables post-colonial texts to respond to colonial narratives not by entirely rejecting their language or forms, but by appropriating and subverting them from within. It is precisely within this Third Space that Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* operate, each navigating the cultural and textual terrain between a canonical colonial narrative and its post-colonial reimagining. Rhys repositions Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through a Caribbean lens, while Salih engages in a critical dialogue with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* from a Sudanese perspective. The novels resist being neatly positioned as either colonial or post-colonial, instead adopting a hybrid form that exposes the fractures within cultural identity and literary authority. In this sense, the meaning for Bhabha is never pure or complete; it always occupies and emerges through the productive tensions of the Third Space, which undermines binary oppositions and creates new possibilities for cultural articulation and critique.

2. SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH PARODYING HEART OF DARKNESS

Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* parodies Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* through the lens of colonialism, identity, and the legacy of the colonial encounter. Salih subverts the colonial narrative embedded in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which tells the story of European colonization in Africa, presenting a rather one-sided view of the "dark" continent. Marlow, the protagonist, embarks on a journey into Congo, ultimately depicting Africa through a Eurocentric, imperialist lens. Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* challenges this perspective by presenting the North (in this case, England) as the site of exploitation and moral decay, flipping the colonial narrative. Mustafa Sa'eed, the novel's protagonist, migrates to England and, rather than remaining passive in the face of colonialism, asserts his agency by actively subverting the colonial structures he encounters.

Season of Migration to the North can be seen as a mimic text to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, engaging in intertextuality by repeating and altering key elements from the original. Characters such as Mustafa Sa'eed can be associated with Kurtz, the unnamed narrator with Marlow, and Hosna' Bint' Mahmoud with Kurtz's Intended, creating clear parallels. Thematic reverberations also emerge, including the portrayal of Sa'eed and Kurtz as victims of colonialism, the narrators' responsibility to handle their documents after their deaths, and recurring motifs like stereotypes, patriarchy, fantasy, and contrast between light and darkness. However, to reduce these similarities to a singular, rigid interpretation would mirror the structuralist tendency to impose a fixed meaning, disregarding the complexity and individuality of each text. Nevertheless, to say that the depiction of similarities can be shaped within one structure of meaning would be to repeat the Structuralists' epistemic violence in imposing a particular form on comparing two literary works. In both novels, the central characters grapple with questions of identity and their sense of belonging. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow reflects on his connection to European colonialism and the sense of alienation he feels when confronted with the moral and cultural complexities of the African Congo. In *Season of Migration to the North*, Mustafa Sa'eed faces a similar dislocation. However, Salih explores how this alienation works both ways; he is not simply a victim of European colonialism but also someone who can manipulate the power dynamics between the colonizers and the colonized. Sa'eed's narrative illustrates how colonial subjects are shaped by imperial forces and capable of reshaping the structures that seek to dominate them.

Season of Migration to the North challenges the colonial notion of a fixed, immutable identity by presenting a post-colonial agency that resists writing within the dual framework of colonial discourse. Salih's primary and secondary characters reflect those in *Heart of Darkness*, yet they expose the ideological gaps and contradictions within the original text. Instead of directly replicating the characters, Salih's characters displace and substitute them, symbolizing difference rather than complete similarity. They negotiate meanings through their elusive and shifting identities, reflecting a metonymic presence that resists a simple, rigid comparison with their counterparts in Conrad's text.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the journey into the heart of Africa is also a journey into the heart of human darkness. Marlow's descent into the jungle exposes the darkness at the core of European civilization. Similarly, Salih critiques the "civilized" North, but in his narrative, moral corruption is embedded within the colonial legacy itself. Mustafa Sa'eed's experience in England is one of manipulation and destruction, challenging the myth of the moral superiority of the colonizers. Hence, the North is depicted as a site of corruption. While Conrad exposes the horrors of imperialism through Africa's darkness, Salih shifts the focus to the moral void at the heart of colonial power structures in Europe.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the post-colonial subjects are elusive and resistant to Western representation, disrupting the binary of Self/Other and Colonizer/Colonized. They mimic and reshape the characters in *Heart of Darkness*, using them as tools to articulate their own identities and challenge the colonial discourse. By doing so, Salih enters a complex intertextual dialogue with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, not merely referencing it but actively challenging and deconstructing its colonial discourse through a strategic shift in representation. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism, Salih's novel engages in what Bakhtin calls "polemicization," a form of critical response that does not passively absorb the source text but instead interrogates its assumptions, mimics its language with ironic exaggeration, and exposes its ideological underpinnings. In this way, *Season of Migration to the North* serves as a counter-narrative that destabilizes the authority of *Heart of Darkness*, recontextualizing its themes and language from the perspective of the formerly colonized. Salih's narrative thus becomes both a critique and a reappropriation, offering an alternative vision that resists the reductive binaries and silences of the colonial canon (Bakhtin, p.129). By reworking Conrad's narrative strategies, Salih engages in a dialogic confrontation that both mimics and destabilizes the colonial discourse embedded in the original text. Through this process, *Season of Migration to the North* not only critiques the representations of Africa and Africans in *Heart of Darkness* but also reclaims narrative authority for the once-silenced colonial subject.

Both *Season of Migration to the North* and *Heart of Darkness* explore the dynamics of colonial power, but Salih recenters the narrative by foregrounding the exploitation of women and challenging Western portrayals of the East. In Conrad's text, women are largely absent from the African world, yet they remain central to the European characters' ideals and fantasies. Salih, however, places women at the forefront of his narrative, showing how the relationships between Sa'eed and the European women he encounters reveal the intersections of race, power, and sexuality. The exploitation of these women reflects the ways colonial relationships are not just about economic or political power but also about the psychological and sexual manipulation inherent in the colonial encounter. In these ways, Salih's novel not only "writes back" to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* but also rewrites the colonial narrative, offering a critique of both the West and the way the East has been portrayed in Western literature. Salih's protagonist becomes a counterpoint to Conrad's Marlow, not simply a victim of colonialism but a figure who challenges and distorts the colonial structures of power.

This dynamic is further illustrated when Mustafa Sa'eed addresses the women he seduces. He deliberately mimics and exaggerates the Orientalist style in their depiction of colonial subjects. His speech becomes a revisiting — and a distortion — of the colonial phantasmagorical representation of Africa. Sa'eed's repetition of racial fantasy ties directly to a similar theme in *Heart of Darkness*, where Marlow, in his search for Kurtz, describes him as "an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle." Here, Africa is transformed into a space of fantasy, danger, and desire — a projection of colonial imagination. Similarly, in *Season of Migration to*

the North, Sa'eed not only allows but actively amplifies this colonial trope, particularly in his seduction of Isabella Seymour. As Salih writes:

I related to her fabricated stories about deserts of golden sands and jungles were nonexistent animals called out one another. I told her that the streets of my country teemed with elephants and lions and that during siesta time crocodiles crawled through it. Half-credulous, half-disbelieving, she listened to me, laughing and closing her eyes, her cheeks reddening...curiosity had changed to gaiety, and gaiety to sympathy and when I stir the still pool in its depths the sympathy will be transformed into a desire upon whose taut strings I shall play as I wish. (38)

By doing so, Salih enters a complex intertextual dialogue with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, not simply alluding to it, but actively challenging its colonial representations through a subversive shift in narrative voice and perspective. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Salih's novel "polemicizes" with Conrad's text by parodying and exaggerating its language and assumptions, thereby exposing its ideological flaws. For instance, the narrator recalls how he told a European woman fantastical tales of Africa: "I told her that the streets of my country teemed with elephants and lions and that during siesta time crocodiles crawled through it... curiosity had changed to gaiety, and gaiety to sympathy... and the sympathy will be transformed into a desire upon whose taut strings I shall play as I wish" (38). This moment mimics and mocks the exoticizing gaze of colonial narratives like Conrad's, turning it into a tool of manipulation rather than victimization. In exaggerating the clichés that Western readers expect, Salih not only parodies the language of Orientalism but also reclaims agency over representation. Through such dialogic play, *Season of Migration to the North* becomes both a critique and a revision of *Heart of Darkness*, offering an alternative discourse that dismantles the epistemic authority of the colonial canon. Sa'eed further explains that Isabella ends up seeing him as a naked subject. Moreover, she can neither believe nor disbelieve Sa'eed's exaggeration of the Orientalist texts. The effect of Sa'eed's telling oscillates between truth and lies, between reality and fiction. By stirring "the still pool in its depths" (an expression which Sa'eed frequently repeats), he relates the metaphor of water to an immutable image of the Other. Isabella's reiteration of this discourse and her desire for Sa'eed's body reveal the influence of the colonial discursive practices that show the racial Other as a rapacious and virile "savage" who is on constant demand. By repeating the Orientalist discourse, Sa'eed's narrative becomes the representation of the Western representation. It gazes back at the Western language while the latter depicts the Other within its phantasmagorical fantasy. In his counter-discourse, Salih decolonizes the English word and empties it of its essence since it inserts a different meaning. Through his self-objectification as the desired body of the 'negro,' Sa'eed can dramatically employ poetic expressions and manipulate the stereotype, adapting its meaning to suit each situation. When meeting Isabella, he assures that "with the instinct of a gambler I knew that this was a decisive moment" (p.37). By repeating and improvising the lies inherent in the racial representations, Sa'eed implicitly shakes the narrative validity of the stereotypes about the Other. Instead of being the object of the gaze as the represented subject, Sa'eed plays with the means of representation to serve his ends. He dramatically adopts different personas within English society, assuming various names and roles; at times, he is portrayed as both a slave and a god. In this sense, Sa'eed cannot be represented in a simplistic manner. In his reading of Fanon's "Algeria Unveiled," Bhabha (1994) asserts that resistance can be achieved by manipulating the stereotype: "if truth and identity are always moments of slippage and unease, resistance within 'postmodernist' cultures may fruitfully reside in playing with metaphor and cultural code" (p.66). Bhabha suggests that because truth and identity are constantly subjected to instability and shifting, resistance to dominant power (especially in post-colonial or postmodern contexts) can happen by "playing with and manipulating" stereotypes, metaphors, and cultural symbols. Instead of rejecting the stereotype outright, resistance can involve "using" it creatively to expose its contradictions, undermine its authority, and disrupt the fixed ideas imposed by colonial narratives.

Sa'eed's lies enable both the repetition and revision of Marlow's claims to be true. As Marlow pursues Kurtz, he admits that he 'went near enough to a lie' (p. 38), suggesting his attempt to distance himself from Kurtz, who has become closely associated with Africa. If Africa is presumably contained within the Western language of representation; then for Marlow, Kurtz becomes just a word, not a man. Since Kurtz is known to Marlow only for his discoursing, Kurtz may be understood as the creation of Marlow's language, and his discourse might be contained and misappropriated by Marlow's master discourse; he may, therefore, be the product of Marlow's unrestrained imagination. Ironically enough, Kurtz becomes both a distant same and a fantasmatic other that Marlow keeps chasing. In *Season of Migration to the North*, when Sa'eed says that he is a liar in the court, he squarely criticizes the colonial fantasy in its depiction of the colonial Other. It is as if Sa'eed were opening a dialogue with Marlow for misappropriating Kurtz's words with his lie to the Intended.

Thus, the repetition of Western history's lies about the Other destabilizes the text from within its structure of meaning while it misappropriates the African reality. Sa'eed's lecture at Oxford University and his lies about the Arab poetry in front of the Orientalists and the people who embrace their principles is a dramatic scene in which Sa'eed demystifies the power of the Orientalist discourse. Yet, Sa'eed does not directly indict the misrepresentation of the West; instead, he, as a jester and as a user of the technique of "direction by indirection", manipulates the situation and parodies the Orientalist representations. To use Bakhtin's words, there is a hidden polemic in which, in stylization, an author uses someone else's speech, but in this case, unlike stylization, the author inserts an opposing intention into that speech. A second voice enters and actively clashes with the original voice, forcing the speech to

serve aims that are directly contrary to its original purpose. As a result, speech becomes a site of conflict between opposing forces (p. 111).

Sa'eed's critique directly targets Western history for perpetuating a distorted, fantasized image of the "Other." He challenges how colonizers use history as a tool to validate their dominance, while dismissing alternative historical perspectives as false. By revealing the hidden truths behind historical narratives, Sa'eed exposes the lies embedded in the mainstream story. After his lecture, the audience enthusiastically applauds him, but Sa'eed is struck by the realization that the sexualization of the "Other" allows falsehoods to be accepted as truth, turning history into a tool of manipulation, where the deceiver becomes the ruler, and the fool becomes the powerful figure.

Sa'eed's life embodies a fixed identity, yet his movement within the liminal space offers the potential for an argument rooted in cultural dialogue. This movement calls for cultural exchange that challenges essentialist discourses. His use of the phallic image symbolizes the dynamic interaction between his own culture and that of the West. Within the "simulacrum" of an Eastern room - a "bicultural" space neither fully inside nor outside England - Sa'eed can both repeat and revise the phantasmagorical discourses of the West. By opening a dialogue with these discourses, he paves the way for a negotiation and reimagining of them. Much like Salih's work, Sa'eed's discourse resides on the threshold of cultures, constantly in motion. To borrow from Bhabha, it allows newness to enter the world, representing a language capable of articulating the voice of the void that exists between cultures, offering a space for continuous reinvention.

3.ECHOES OF JANE EYRE IN WIDE SARGASSO SEA

In a similar vein, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys functions as a powerful counter-narrative to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), interrogating and ultimately destabilizing the original novel's portrayal of racial and cultural "otherness." Rhys reclaims the voice of Bertha Mason — the so-called "madwoman in the attic" — reimagining her not as a monstrous foil to Jane, but as Antoinette Cosway, a complex, psychologically vulnerable White Creole woman caught in the violent legacies of slavery, patriarchy, and imperialism. Rhys's reworking challenges Brontë's Eurocentric assumptions, foregrounding the silenced traumas and hybrid identities that *Jane Eyre* marginalizes or erases. The narrative, though tethered to Brontë's plotline, transcends its source material by offering a post-colonial and feminist perspective that critiques the binaries of civilization/savagery, sanity/madness, and self/other. In this regard, Rhys's work parallels Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), which also reconfigures the imperial encounter by inverting the traditional colonial travel narrative. While Rhys writes from the liminal position of a White Creole — both privileged and marginalized within the colonial hierarchy of the Caribbean — Salih offers the perspective of a Sudanese intellectual whose journey to England becomes a dark parody of the colonial mission, exposing the violence and psychological fragmentation inflicted by empire. Both novels expose the contradictions at the heart of colonial discourse, but from different perspectives: Rhys writes from the interstice of whiteness and displacement, while Salih writes from the vantage point of the formerly colonized subject confronting the lingering effects of imperial domination. Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, then, deepens our understanding of *Jane Eyre*, not simply by responding to it, but by revealing its unspoken anxieties and illuminating the ideological frameworks that shaped it.

Before the emergence of post-colonial studies in the 1980s, the West Indies were overlooked mainly in scholarly discourse, except when portrayed as exotic curiosities or viewed through the lens of imperial interests. Notably, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which had a significant impact on revealing how the image of the colonized people was formed by Western scholarship, in which the Orient was described as inferior, irrational and depraved. Said applied his theory specifically to Islam and Muslims, but it is also applicable to the formation of the image of the West Indian areas and their people. This is evident in Brontë's portrayal of the white "Creole" woman born in Jamaica, a former British Caribbean colony. In *Jane Eyre*, she is depicted not as a speaking character, but as a madwoman who "growled like some strange wild animal" (p. 258). Due to her perceived insanity, the Creole woman was confined to the attic of an English estate by her husband, who came to regret their marriage and felt ashamed of her. Following Said's concept of *Orientalism*, the Creole figure represents a kind of "Oriental other" for Western readership. The presence of the Creole element in *Jane Eyre* went largely unrecognized for a long time and only began to receive attention in the 1960s. It was due to Jean Rhys's famous novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, that the Creole women in *Jane Eyre* came to be recognized dramatically because Rhys took up the Creole women as the protagonists in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Thus, Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is often seen as a "prequel" and a rewriting of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. The novel challenges and reinterprets central elements of *Jane Eyre*, especially the depiction of Bertha Mason, famously portrayed as the "madwoman in the attic." In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys reimagines Bertha's character with greater depth and humanity, while also critically examining the colonial, racial, and gendered power structures that Brontë's narrative largely overlooks.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys rewrites the story of Bertha Mason, the mad wife of Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. In her counter-narrative, Rhys creates a history for Bertha, making her a colonial of French and English descent with strong physical and emotional ties to her birthplace of Jamaica. This position is an ambiguous one, placing Bertha/Antoinette in the marginalized position of a colonial but at the same time, at least in the eyes of the islanders, in a superior position to the descendants of slaves in the Caribbean.

Her mixed European ancestry only adds to this ambiguity. Antoinette feels that she belongs to no culture - not that of the English, not that of the blacks, and not that of the English colonials on the island. In telling her husband how the blacks on the islands call her a "white cockroach" and the English women call her a "white nigger", she says: "so between you and I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why I was ever born at all" (p.102). Antoinette's displacement is heightened by the fact that almost every facet of her life presents her with this borderline status.

Rhys's departure from the island of Dominica in the 1920s marked the beginning of a lifelong sense of dislocation that profoundly influenced her literary work. Her identity remained fluid and unsettled; she did not fully align herself with Britishness, nor did she wholly claim a Caribbean identity. In a 1979 interview, when questioned about her nationality, Rhys offered an evasive and ambiguous response, consciously avoiding identification as West Indian, English or French. Her hesitation highlights a profound inner conflict regarding home, belonging, and cultural identity, these central themes that permeate her literary work. Although she resisted labels and names, she would not abandon the Creole identity entirely, and this commitment constantly led her back to a novel she had read as a child. While she admired Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre*, she was always troubled by the characterization of Bertha. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë gives Bertha no voice and reduces her to a specter haunting Thornfield Hall. Jane's description of Bertha compares her to a wild animal. Brontë writes:

In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal; but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (p.321)

Rhys voiced her displeasure in a letter to her friend Selma Vaz in 1958:

I've read and re-read *Jane Eyre*... the Creole in Charlotte Brontë's novel is a lay figure---repulsive which does not matter, and not once alive, which does. She's necessary to the plot, but always she shrieks, howls, laughs horribly, attacks all and sundry---off stage. For me ... she must be right on stage. She must be at least plausible, with a past, the reason why Mr. Rochester treats her so abominably and feels justified, the reason why tries to set every thing on fire and eventually succeeds. I do not see how Charlotte Brontë's madwoman could possibly covey all this. (Letters 156-57)

Rhys was disturbed by Bertha's lack of agency, as she represented, albeit fictionally, Rhys's own class—white Creole women—who were similarly marginalized. Since its publication, countless people have read *Jane Eyre*, many of them young women, and Rhys found it difficult to reconcile her own understanding of Creole society with the widely circulated and widely accepted portrayal in the novel. Rhys is adamant to do justice for the misrepresentation of Bertha's identity. She believes that the link between fact and fiction, truth and legend, is a crucial factor in the images people have of themselves and of others. Rhys believes that there were countless 'Berthas' in the world, and through *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she sought to rehabilitate them all.

In presenting Antoinette's story from a perspective distinct from that of *Jane Eyre* or Mr. Rochester, I argue that Rhys is not concerned with "accuracy" or "truth" in the traditional sense. Instead, she highlights how different perspectives can converge to form a more nuanced and comprehensive whole. Through her reworking of chronology, cultural differences, and Brontë's plot, Rhys illuminates the complex position of the white Creole woman, emphasizing its particularity. In rewriting *Jane Eyre*, Rhys challenges not only the narrative of the original text but also the broader metatext of hegemonic English discourse. With its multiple narrators, Rhys's text is inherently unstable, mirroring the precariousness of both the Caribbean and the position of the white Creole. This instability reflects the historical moment in which the novel is set—after the Emancipation Act—and the period of decolonization in the 1960s, when Rhys herself published the novel. Thus, by rewriting a canonical text, Rhys, reminiscent of Salih, questions the veracity of the world representation Brontë created in *Jane Eyre*. To expose the implausibility and the fabricated portrayal of the English portrayal of the West Indian Creole woman, Rhys conducts a cultural analysis that situates Brontë's text within a broader discursive context. She reads the earlier novel as a product of its cultural and social ethos.

In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë uses the colonies of the Caribbean to give Rochester a wife. This aspect of the plot has often been seen as a minor one that could largely have been disregarded in the discussion of the novel's themes. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1983), however, Edward Said notes that in the cultural sphere, British imperial power was "elaborated and articulated in the novel, whose central continuous presence is not comparably to be found elsewhere" (p.73). Said explains that while the motivations of nineteenth-century British novelists may do little more than mention or refer to the Empire, these novels further the idea that imperial domination is the norm (p. 33). He says: "The nineteenth-century English novels stress the continuing existence (as opposed to revolutionary overturning) of England. Moreover, they never advocate giving up colonies... the idea is that (following the general principles of free trade) outlying territories are available for use, at will, at the novelist's discretion, usually for relatively simple purposes such as immigration, fortune exile. (p.74). Nowhere in Brontë's novel is colonialism explicitly addressed, making it a compelling example of Said's theory. In contrast, *Wide Sargasso Sea* brings this issue to the forefront, and by making colonialism the central focus of its own narrative, it alters the way readers perceive Brontë's novel.

Rhys deliberately turned to Brontë's earlier text because the English portrayal of the Creole, both during the mid-19th century when *Jane Eyre* was written and in 1967 when *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published, played a pivotal role in shaping the Creole's self-perception. This representation was not merely external but deeply internalized, influencing how Creole identity was imagined and

understood. Only by adding to, and thus significantly changing, an established British text of imperialism could Rhys adequately explain her difficulties defining Creole identity. However, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is more than a Caribbean treatment of her own country and its history. It is also a penetrating examination of the relationship between English culture and Caribbean existence. As Rhys wrote in 1958, "it might be possible to unhitch the whole thing from Charlotte Brontë's novel, but I don't want to do that. It is that particular mad Creole I want to write about, not any of the other mad creoles" (Rhys, 1984, p. 153). In other words, Rhys is intrigued by this Mrs. Rochester, the product of English imagination. By making this figure the focal point of her novel, she brings to the forefront the issues of economics, gender relations, and autonomy that Brontë addresses only in relation to Jane. In granting Bertha/Antoinette the subjectivity denied to her in *Jane Eyre*, Rhys explores these themes within the context of British colonialism, race relations, and international economics—issues that are only subtly hinted at in Brontë's text.

In addition to examining the relationship of the colonial to her European ancestry, *Wide Sargasso Sea* dissects the historical and social methods by which the whites in the Caribbean have been constructed over and against the images of the blacks. To create Antoinette's identity, Rhys gives her a mirror image in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the young black girl Tia. At the end of the novel, Antoinette dreams of jumping from the house's roof, where she is imprisoned. In her dream, she looks over the edge and sees Coulibri, with Tia beckoning to her to jump. This final image of Antoinette illuminates her ambiguous feelings about race and identity as a white Creole, especially in the aftermath of the Slave Emancipation Act. Even in her madness, she still strives to connect racially and culturally with someone or something. England and Mr. Rochester have not provided that connection, and in the end, she looks to Coulibri and Tia to fulfil this role. However, I suggest that Rhys deliberately crafts Antoinette as a reflection of Jane, despite Antoinette's limited presence in the later stages of *Jane Eyre*. By drawing parallels between Tia and Jane for Antoinette, Rhys clearly highlights the complexities of Creole identity both in reality and in Victorian literature.

In rewriting *Jane Eyre*, Rhys undertakes a cultural critique that is notably absent from Charlotte Brontë's original novel. Rather than merely negating Brontë's portrayal of Bertha, Rhys enriches it by exposing the silences and omissions within the original text. Through *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she restores humanity and psychological depth to Bertha—reimagined as Antoinette Cosway—emphasizing that her subjectivity was always present, though denied. By providing Antoinette with a past, a voice, and a consciousness, Rhys invites readers to re-examine the authoritative perspectives in *Jane Eyre* and question whose narrative is being privileged. Furthermore, Rhys challenges the epistemological authority of her own text through deliberate anachronisms and historical inconsistencies. This destabilization of historical "accuracy" functions as a meta-commentary on the nature of colonial literature, warning readers against treating *Jane Eyre* as a faithful historical document of colonial realities. In doing so, Rhys draws attention to the constructed nature of all narratives—colonial and post-colonial alike—and aligns her work with Homi Bhabha's concept of the Third Space: a space of cultural hybridity where fixed identities are interrogated, and meaning emerges through negotiation and contradiction.

Rhys explores the complexities of white Creole identity within the Third Space. This figure is suspended between the roles of colonizer and colonized, belonging fully to neither Britain nor the Caribbean. In the political atmosphere of decolonization during the 1960s, the white Creole's presence was often erased, partly due to their historical alignment with colonial power structures. Yet Rhys insists on their complexity, portraying white Creoles as inextricably linked not only to imperial authority but also to the Afro-Caribbean cultural world they inhabited. Through this nuanced portrayal, *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges binary distinctions between Self and Other, colonizer and colonized, insisting instead on a fluid, hybrid identity that resists categorization—a hallmark of Bhabha's Third Space.

In rewriting *Jane Eyre*, Rhys undertakes the cultural critique that is absent from Brontë's original novel. Rather than invalidating Brontë's portrayal of Bertha, Rhys's work enriches and deepens the complexity of the original characterization. Rhys restores humanity to Bertha/Antoinette, suggesting that it was always inherent. By endowing her with a past and a consciousness, Rhys invites readers to reexamine the characters' perceptions in *Jane Eyre*. In addition, because of the anachronistic use of dates and the historical inaccuracies, Rhys calls into question the perceptions of her own characters and, by extension, the "accuracy" of the text as well. By highlighting the instability of her own text, Rhys highlights the instability of *Jane Eyre* and warns against treating it as a historical artefact truly representing the conditions of colonialism. Moreover, *Wide Sargasso Sea* invites a critical exploration of white Creole identity, revealing the inherent complexities and tensions that accompany this ambiguous social position. In the atmosphere of decolonization in the 1960s, the white Creole's place was easily forgotten, partially because of their inextricable link to the colonizing authorities. Rhys shows, however, that white Creoles are also inextricably linked to the black population of the Caribbean heritage.

Such a rewriting, as seen in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, reconfigures the original text and opens it to alternative, politically charged interpretations. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) asserts, "it should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part in the cultural representation of England to the English. Literature's role in producing cultural representation should not be ignored." (p. 28). Spivak contends that the persistent neglect of imperialism's role in canonical literary texts is itself evidence of the enduring power of the imperialist project that systematically occluded the violence of empire through aesthetic and moral narratives.

In this light, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* functions as what Spivak calls a "reinscription"—a rewriting that not only reimagines the character of Bertha (Antoinette) but also exposes imperialist and racial ideologies embedded in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys does not merely give Bertha a voice; she transforms her into a figure of critique, challenging the colonial erasures and exoticizations in Brontë's novel. Through Antoinette's fragmented narrative and descent into madness, Rhys articulates the psychological and cultural disintegration wrought by colonialism and patriarchal control.

This post-colonial intervention finds a resonant counterpart in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. Like Rhys, Salih rewrites the colonial encounter, but from the standpoint of the colonized rather than the creolized. His protagonist, Mustafa Sa'eed, becomes a troubling mirror to the imperial subject—a man whose seductive power over English women mimics and subverts the colonial domination he once suffered. While Rhys critiques the empire from within its ambiguous margins, Salih does so from its historical aftermath, portraying the psychic and moral fragmentation of a Sudanese man shaped and ultimately destroyed by his encounter with the West. Both Rhys and Salih, then, engage in a process of literary decolonization: they return to canonical European narratives and expose their complicity in the imperial imagination. In doing so, they align with Spivak's call to recognize literature as a site where empire was both imagined and made culturally palatable. By reinscribing suppressed histories and marginalized voices, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Season of Migration to the North* compel readers to interrogate the cultural legacies of imperialism not as past events but as ongoing ideological structures embedded within literary form.

CONCLUSION

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys and *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih are incisive post-colonial responses that challenge Western literary representations of the colonized. Through subversive counter-narratives, both novels dismantle the racial, cultural, and gender hierarchies imposed by imperialism. Rhys critiques the colonial legacy in the Caribbean by giving voice to the marginalized Creole subject, reimagining Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* as a fully human character shaped by the traumas of displacement and racial ambiguity. Salih, in turn, addresses the psychological and cultural residues of British colonialism in Sudan, using Mustafa Sa'eed to explore the inner turmoil of a hybrid subject caught between his African heritage and Western assimilation. Both authors engage in "writing back" to colonial texts—Rhys through her reworking of *Jane Eyre*, and Salih through his dialogue with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Employing techniques of parody, mimicry, and intertextuality, they deconstruct the colonial gaze and the reductive portrayal of the colonized as the "Other." Sa'eed's journey reflects the paradoxes of identity in post-colonial existence, ultimately revealing his self-awareness and the flawed assumptions of colonial worldviews. Likewise, Rhys disrupts the stereotype of the mad Creole woman, offering a textured depiction of Caribbean identity.

By employing repetition with revision, both novels challenge the epistemological foundations of colonial discourse, recasting African and Creole subjects in nuanced, multifaceted ways. The narratives highlight fragmented identities and cultural hybridity, revealing the blurred boundaries of race, place, and belonging. Salih's nameless narrator, like Sa'eed, evolves from rootedness to alienation, embracing the flux of identity as a post-colonial condition.

These works move beyond national or regional recovery—they constitute deliberate acts of literary decolonization. By interrogating and reframing canonical texts, Rhys and Salih expose the limitations and contradictions of colonial representation. Writing from what Homi Bhabha terms a "third space," they destabilize dominant narratives, recenter silenced voices, and offer alternative perspectives grounded in the lived realities of the colonized. Together, their novels confront the imperial imagination and contribute to the ongoing transformation of global literary discourse.

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