

***Wide Sargasso Sea* : A Catalyst for Discourse in Postcolonialism, Cultural Identities, Feminism, and Colonialism**

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Abstract

Literature has long been a vital vehicle for the exploration of complex ideas and the advancement of discourse in human civilization. Jean Rhys' novel, 'Wide Sargasso Sea', stands as a pivotal work that significantly enriches and expands discourses in various academic fields, including post-colonialism, cultural identities, feminism, and colonialism. This paper aims to trace the influential role of this literary text across these diverse discourses and draw upon specific illustrations to underscore the profound potential of literature to serve as a catalyst for critical dialogues. Wide Sargasso Sea is a purposeful piece of literature designed to captivate academic readers and critics alike, actively engaging with broader discourses through its persuasive narrative technique. Furthermore, it contributes to the evolution of discussions initiated in public forums, thereby demonstrating the enduring relevance and impact of literary works in contemporary discourse.

This paper endeavors to shed light on the multifaceted contributions of the novel to these discourses, highlighting its capacity to stimulate critical engagement and propel important conversations forward. This abstract provides an academic examination of the novel's pivotal contributions to this discourse, emphasizing its thematic exploration of colonialism, cultural hybridity, and identity formation while acknowledging the diverse critical perspectives it has engendered.

Keywords: Discourse, Post-Colonialism, Cultural Identities, Feminism, Literature, Colonialism.

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Discourse is very essential for human civilization. Seyed Mohammad Khatami, the former President of Iran, states in his article "Dialogue Among Civilizations: Contexts and Perspectives" published in the *UN Chronicle* that "one can say that dialogue among civilizations has been one of the few initiatives able to create such a considerable, if not the greatest, wave during the past decade" (Khatami). Those civilizations that have attempted to establish the exclusivity of any space, knowledge has always withered away. For every discourse to occur, it moves one step at a time with interactions and estimations. The impact of ideas on the direction of a society is significant. Ideas can shape critical questions of the times, advance humanistic studies, and promote intellectual and economic freedom. Civilizational advances, intellectual freedom, and moral progress have often been associated with the exchange of ideas and the development of cities, where people come together to compete and innovate. Therefore, ideas and intellectual discourse are fundamental to the development and progress of societies, shaping their values, knowledge, and direction.

Discourse, as we attempt to define it, seems to extend itself from the idea of Greek Philosophies' dialogue. The fields of sociology, anthropology, continental philosophy, and discourse analysis all view discourse as a system of thought, knowledge, or communication that constructs our experience of the world. Since control of discourse amounts to control of how the world is perceived, social theory often studies discourse as a window into power. Within theoretical linguistics, discourse is understood more narrowly as linguistic information exchange and was one of the major motivations for the framework of dynamic semantics, in which expressions' denotations are equated with their ability to update a discourse context. This is set aside from what we term a popular discourse, which at times is used as a substitute for narratives and includes its many forms. Popular discourse refers to the public conversations and debates that occur on a particular topic. It can be used to describe the language and ideas that are commonly used and understood by a particular group or society. Popular discourse can be found in various forms of communication, such as speeches, articles, and social media. It is often used to describe the language and ideas that are commonly used and understood by a particular group or society. Popular discourse can be a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and influencing the direction of a society. It can also be a source of controversy and conflict, particularly when different groups have conflicting views on a particular topic. Therefore, popular discourse is an important aspect of human communication and can have a significant impact on social consciousness. Though at times the most influential of these dialogues translate into popular opinion, what we attempt to define as discourse in this context is the academic interaction between ideas.

Ideas become discourse through the verbal interchange, conversation, speech, or writing that conveys and discusses these ideas. Discourse involves the formal and extended expression of thought on a subject, and it is a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete

contexts. When individuals or groups engage in conversation, debate, or written communication about specific ideas, they contribute to the development of discourse on those topics. This process can occur in various forms, such as academic discussions, public debates, or social media interactions. Therefore, ideas become discourse through the active exchange and examination of those ideas in speech or writing, often in a way that suggests a deep understanding of the subject matter. These ideas that gain more prominence are dictated though censored, or popularized by the elite, dictate the social order. It finds its position among the population through the prevalence of a problem, its relevance, its impact, and its ability to render perspectives and solutions to that which is suffered by the larger populace. The ideas that revel in the minds of people lend themselves to thesis and antithesis through this process of synthesis.

Literature serves as a powerful vehicle for the transmission of culture, the enlargement of experiences, and the exploration of ideas. It is not merely a reflection of social reality or a medium for the figment of elusive truth, but rather a form of writing that transforms and intensifies ordinary language, representing, in the words of the Russian formalist Roman Jakobson in his "Two Aspects of Language," organised violence committed on ordinary speech" (Eagleton Essay). Literary works have the unique ability to cultivate the imagination, allow readers to encounter diverse cultures, and inspire individuals in ways that can be profoundly life-enhancing. Additionally, literature is recognized as a powerful tool for connecting individuals to the broader cultural world of their society. Through the exploration of literature, individuals can engage with powerful ideas, gain actionable knowledge, and connect to fiction in meaningful ways, ultimately impacting their lives and perspectives. Therefore, literature plays a vital role in shaping and expanding the intellectual and cultural landscape, making it a potent vehicle for the dissemination and exploration of powerful ideas.

Literature has always been at the forefront of engaging with discourses that affect the social evolution of human civilization that could translate into economic and political engagement. Literature of the socratic order that renders itself for the didactic nature without so much as being obvious seems to pass off for the subtle and enlarge its impact on the audience. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an illustration of such a piece of literature that has had its impact on the discourses of post-colonial, colonial, feminism, cultural identities, etc., are some of the many discourses that this piece of literature seems to have had its impact on.

Wide Sargasso Sea has become one of the members of an exclusive group of literature that has engaged with a larger population and as an extension has modified the academic discourse. The discourses that have been modified because of the *Wide Sargasso Sea* include post-colonialism, Feminism, Colonialism, Cultural Identities. This paper aims at marking this engagement with these fields of enquiry that have benefited from Jean Rhy's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The rest of the paper is going to be an enumeration of the discourses and an illustration of this literature's impact on each of those discourses.

Jean Rhys' impact on the feminist discourse is one that is unforeseen. Rhys' attempt at rewriting the narrative around the character of "the madwoman in the attic" as a prequel to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* had an impact that was magnified by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The impact of Jean Rhys' fiction, along with Cixous and Showalters, has been highlighted in "Female Island: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*". According to K. Kamalova, by exploring the similarities between feminist criticism in Cixous's and Showalter's articles and Rhys's novel, she aims to show that although *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a revolutionary novel with its ability to give the mad woman back her individuality, it is not strong enough to create a world where this woman can experience her individuality (Kamalova 51). This expanded the discourse on Feminism and also allowed for the mainstreaming of the Black Feminism who are doubly oppressed, i.e., suppression because of being women and also the other later suppression from being black.

In "The Challenge to Patriarchy and Colonialism in the *Wide Sargasso Sea*" by Xiaotian Wei, he argues that the *Wide Sargasso Sea* demonstrates Rhys's revolutionary subversion of the authority of patriarchy and colonialism (Wei). This particular piece of literature can be credited with carrying the emotion of a black feminist to the white academy. *Wide Sargasso Sea* privileges the very qualities that Bronte--and Wollstonecraft--denigrates is the observation made by J. Gilchrist in his chapter titled Women, Slavery, and the Problem of Freedom in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Gilchrist 488).

The feminist perspective, a critical lens often employed within academic discourse, finds an intricately woven subject in the novel. Antoinette's narrative underscores the vulnerability of women in patriarchal societies, where their identities are frequently subsumed by the dominant male figures in their lives. The dynamics between Antoinette and Mr. Rochester underscore the profound power imbalances inherent to relationships and underscore the consequences of women's subjugation within such structures.

The post-colonial perspective is established from the beginning with reference to the Emancipation Act and the state of affairs of the house in which she and her mother live and how they are treated. These have made a compelling case for the perspective of a White's misdeeds for which the consequences are suffered by everyone else and the suffering of the white privileged male is only that he isn't able to enjoy the privilege of being able to treat someone else as a lesser human than himself. In "Shutting Up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", the author Carine M. Mardorossian argues that *Wide Sargasso Sea* exposes the conventional cultural constructions through which Antoinette, like Rochester, represents her racial others, but it paradoxically also resists assigning the subaltern the function of a mere "repository of Eurocentric assumptions." (Mardorossian 1077).

Wide Sargasso Sea occupies a prominent position within the realm of postcolonial literature, driving scholarly discourse forward by delving deeply into the

intricate interplay of colonialism and identity. *Wide Sargasso Sea* functions both as a prelude and a subversion of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, adeptly offering a counter-narrative that meticulously dissects the colonialist undertones inherent in the classic work. Rhys confronts and fills the chasms of silence in Brontë's narrative by granting agency to Antoinette Cosway, the Creole woman relegated to the role of the infamous "madwoman in the attic" in "*Jane Eyre*." This act of literary revisionism serves as a potent catalyst for challenging entrenched power structures within academic discourse, beckoning us to reevaluate prevailing paradigms related to identity and colonialism.

Chief among its contributions is the unswerving scrutiny of the ramifications of colonialism on individual identities. The transformative journey of Antoinette, from a young Creole girl to the tragic figure of "Bertha Mason" in *Jane Eyre*, serves as an emblematic representation of identity disintegration under the oppressive yoke of colonialism. This profound transformation serves as an unequivocal invitation for readers to grapple with the inherent violence of colonialism and its capacity for dehumanizing those ensnared within its web.

Moreover, the novel undertakes a profound exploration of the concept of cultural hybridity. Antoinette's mixed racial and cultural heritage relegates her to the margins of both the European and Caribbean worlds, thereby spotlighting the intricate tensions and convolutions intrinsic to navigating multiple cultural identities. Rhys' portrayal prompts scholarly discourse to embark on a broader examination of the repercussions of cultural hybridity within a postcolonial milieu.

The cultural identity question is also raised on so many levels, from the initial state in which she wonders why no one visits them anymore to her mother trying to reconcile her identity. The treatment from the white man as inferiors, while the blacks treated the Creole's as outcasts and betrayers of the race. These allow for a state of questioned identity. These that accumulated over the course of the entire narrative culminate in her acting insane, and she is treated as insane.

Intriguingly, the novel's narrative structure further amplifies its impact within academic circles. Rhys deliberately employs a fragmented and non-linear narrative style, thereby accentuating the disjointed nature of colonial experiences and memories. This stylistic choice compellingly necessitates active reader engagement in piecing together the fractured identities and narratives of the characters, mirroring the broader postcolonial experience marked by disrupted histories and identities.

Lastly, *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges conventional literary boundaries through its artful utilization of intertextuality with *Jane Eyre*. This dialogical approach beckons scholars to probe how a postcolonial reinterpretation can disrupt and enrich canonical texts, urging them to scrutinize colonialist and imperialist themes embedded within classical literature with a fresh perspective.

In summation, *Wide Sargasso Sea* transcends the realm of mere literature, serving as a transformative force that propels discourse in postcolonial studies,

identity formation, and cultural hybridity. Jean Rhys' magnum opus compels scholars and readers alike to confront the profound repercussions of colonialism on individual and collective identities while simultaneously exploring the intricacies and complexities of postcolonial existence. As an exemplary exercise in literary revisionism and a poignant portrayal of the human toll exacted by colonialism, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has assumed an indispensable role in advancing scholarly discourse on these pivotal issues.

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