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The Art of De-Idealizing
Victorian Female Servitude in
Wide Sargasso Sea and *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

This article will examine *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a revisionist prequel to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Using the first revisionary ratio of Harold Bloom, *Clinamen*, the article argues that Rhys depicts a proactive female servitude through the figure of Christophine who, unlike Jane and the other female servants in Brontë's text, challenges the patriarchal rule of the unnamed Rochester instead of blindly abiding by it and resists being othered or essentialized by him. This, in a way, liberates the narrative from the filial bond with Brontë's text, providing an original plot that stands on its own. The article will also suggest that despite her so-called limited agency, as suggested by many critics, Christophine masters navigating through the interesting constraints of color, gender, and class.

Keywords: Female Servitude, Subaltern, *Clinamen*, Colonial Patriarchy, Intersectionality

Since its publication in 1966, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been hailed as a reconstructive text of the life of brutalized Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Extremely touched by such essentialist depiction, Jean Rhys was determined to provide a thorough account of Brontë's shrieking Bertha. Abundant criticism has drawn parallels between both narratives; however, most of it has solely focused on Rhys's characterization of Antoinette/Bertha in contrast to that of Brontë. If Rhys has been profoundly affected by Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, then her interest must have surpassed the character of Bertha. As Hai puts it, *Wide Sargasso Sea* could not have had such a critical reception without its servants.² As such, this article will examine *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a revisionist prequel to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Using the first revisionary ratio of Harold Bloom, *Clinamen*, the article argues that Rhys depicts a proactive female servitude through the figure of Christophine who, unlike Jane and the other female servants in

¹ I am a trilingual translator and freelance journalist, with a Master of Arts degree in English and Comparative Literature from the American University in Cairo and a Master of Arts degree in International Relations from Sciences Po Grenoble. As a male scholar based in Cairo, Egypt, I am aware that I stand against any form of gender, ethnic, or religious discrimination and that I use my knowledge and skills to delineate how gender discrimination and patriarchy are manifested in literary texts.

² Ambreen Hai, "'There is always the Other Side, always': Black Servants' Laughter, Knowledge, and Power in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Modernism/modernity* 22, no. 3 (2015): 517.

Brontë's text, challenges the patriarchal rule of the unnamed Rochester instead of blindly abiding by it and resists being othered or essentialized by him. This, in a way, liberates the narrative from the filial bond with Brontë's text, providing an original plot that stands on its own. The article will also suggest that despite her so-called limited agency, as suggested by many critics, Christophine masters navigating through the interesting constraints of color, gender, and class, thanks to her oral mastery of several languages/dialects and her practice of Obeah. This allows her to integrate and survive in any environment. Unlike Hai's argument, this article refutes the premise that all the Black servants in the novel are depicted alike. If Hai suggests that Christophine is neither good nor bad as her fellow servants, then at least she is the most independent of all, owing to her de-eroticized and subversively confrontational stance in standing up for her views.

In his seminal text, *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom defines *Clinamen* as "a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is necessarily a misinterpretation."³ Although Rody is skeptical about placing Rhys's prequel under Bloom's theory, arguing that Rhys's re-writing attempt would be more of a "female affiliation complex," she focuses on one aspect of the anxiety of influence—rivalry.⁴ Bloom's theory is not to be solely read under the oedipal prism. As Bloom himself describes it, *Clinamen* is a deliberate "misreading," because the later poet/writer "insist[s] that a wrong direction was taken at just *one* point."⁵ Rhys expressed that urge in her letter to literary editor and journalist Francis Wyndam:

The Brontë sisters had of course a touch of genius (or much more) especially Emily. So reading "Jane Eyre" one's swept along regardless. But I, reading it later, and often, was vexed at her portrait of the "paper tiger" lunatic, the all wrong creole scenes, and above all by the real cruelty of Mr Rochester. After all, he was a very wealthy man and there were many kinder ways of disposing of (or hiding) an unwanted wife— I heard the true story of one —and the man behaved very differently.⁶

For Rhys, Brontë is neither a rival nor a literary mother with whom she feels affiliated. Had she perceived Brontë as a rival, Rhys could have swerved away from Brontë's novel, developing a new identity for the imprisoned, "lunatic" wife in an entirely new plot. Rhys believes that being natively from the Caribbean makes her more credible to correct "all the wrong creole scenes" depicted by Brontë. Accordingly, Rhys's narrative is a complementary account, a just life history of Bertha Mason whose dehumanized condition in *Jane Eyre* denies her perception as a victim of Victorian patriarchy.

³ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30.

⁴ Caroline Rody, "Burning Down the House: The Revisionary Paradigm of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, ed. Judith L. Raiskin (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 223.

⁵ Bloom, *The Anxiety*, 29.

⁶ Jean Rhys, "Letter to Francis Wyndam," in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, ed. Judith L. Raiskin (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 139.

Having mixed feelings towards Brontë's text, Rhys might have found the description of unproblematic lives of servants at Thornfield no longer fitting in postcolonial Jamaica. In Bloom's understanding, the poet/writer "serves [his/her predecessor's] context that the visionary objects, with their higher intensity, fade into continuum."⁷ What retains the link between *Wide* and *Jane Eyre* is the itinerary of Antoinette/Bertha from Jamaica to England, which Rhys reestablishes in Part III where Antoinette/Bertha is guarded by Grace Poole at Thornfield Hall.

Uraizee holds that Rhys's text not only rewrites history but also develops a subversive narrative, which disentangles itself from the imperialist web to develop an authentic identity of the Creole woman.⁸ "[U]ndermin[ing]. . .the master-narrative of" Brontë's text, Rhys does provide Antoinette/Bertha, and marginalized characters such as Christophine, with textual abundance such that the story of each would be amply recounted.⁹ Nonetheless, Uraizee warns that by accepting to write a prequel to Brontë's text, Rhys cannot write an "anti-history," since she is bound by Bertha Mason's fate already delineated in *Jane Eyre*.¹⁰

It was not until Spivak wrote her essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," that critics shifted their focus towards other characters in *Wide*, notably female Black servants. Jaising, among other scholars, deems Spivak's analysis of the novel a major turning point in criticism.¹¹ It is only then that Rhys's narrative was no longer considered as merely a re-writing of a canonical western text, *Jane Eyre*; instead, recent criticism on the novel has provided a robust analysis of Antoinette/Bertha's Black maid, Christophine.¹² What had been mostly ignored by criticism of Rhys's text is the portrayal of Christophine as a different Black servant, resonating with "the liberal vision of [B]lack humanity expressed in transatlantic pro and antislavery writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries."¹³

"[S]imulatenously recog[nizing] and constrain[ing] black personhood" of Christophine, Rhys deliberately employs the plantocrat perspective at a moment when the colonialist discourse was fiercely antagonized amid escalating decolonization in the 1960s.¹⁴ Neither former colonizing empires nor decolonized nations were ready to revisit the cruel history of slavery.

⁷ Bloom, *The Anxiety*, 42.

⁸ Joya Uraizee, "'She Walked Away without Looking Back': Christophine and the Enigma of History in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Clio* 28 no. 3 (1999): 263.

⁹ Uraizee, "'She Walked,'" 264.

¹⁰ Uraizee, "'She Walked,'" 264.

¹¹ Shakti Jaising, "Who is Christophine? The Good Black Servant and the Contradictions of (Racial) Liberalism," *Modern Fiction Studies* 56, no. 4 (2010): 816, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26286958>.

¹² Jaising, "Who is Christophine?" 816.

¹³ Jaising, "Who is Christophine?" 816-17.

¹⁴ Jaising, "Who is Christophine?" 817.

In 1833, the British Parliament passed the Emancipation Act, which conditionally freed slaves since they were required to spend an apprenticeship period.¹⁵ Turner views that this compulsory period aimed at retaining the labor force of liberated slaves.¹⁶ Black apprentices could enjoy the freedom of mobility and were entitled to a yet meager salary, with forty-five weekly working hours.¹⁷ Apprentices had the right to either accept or refuse being hired by their former masters.¹⁸ Most of the opponents for the working conditions under the apprenticeship system were women.¹⁹ Despite the abolition of slavery, racist prejudices against Black women persisted following emancipation. Bush holds that most English masters and mistresses deemed female slaves more rebellious and “troublesome” than male ones.²⁰ It was “[Black] [f]emale domestic servants” who were repeatedly viewed as lazy-prone, incompetent, and more manipulative in the Creole society.²¹ Ironically, most Black female servants who showed, as a strategy, utmost assimilation to their masters and mistresses’ habits were those who resented “the system” and joined clandestine resistance’s movements.²²

Even in the post-Emancipation period, women’s rebellion became more structured.²³ The practice of Obeah, penalized under the Consolidated Slave Act of Jamaica of 1792, was remarkably violated as Black women continued to practice it.²⁴ Bush argues that Africans practiced Obeah to solve a personal problem, such as making two people fall in love with each other, causing someone’s illness, or even making someone die.²⁵ Women who practiced Obeah were known to partake in “subversive” schemes, exerting a huge influence among their fellow slaves.²⁶ Unable to understand it or to control its possible adverse effects, white people were concerned about Obeah.²⁷ Bush adds that the colonizers in the West Indies could not perceive Obeah as a true religion, and they were skeptical about it being a magical tool of poisoning them.²⁸ It was also believed that Black, old, female servants were suspected of being responsible for possible poisoning of their masters’ food out of their knowledge of herbs’ effects. What was striking is that most reported deaths were confused with illnesses,

¹⁵ Kenneth Morgan, “Labour Relations during and after Apprenticeship: Amity Hall, Jamaica, 1834–1840,” *Slavery & Abolition* 33, 3 (2012): 457, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2011.606629>

¹⁶ Sasha Turner, “Bessy Chambers, Nineteenth-Century Jamaica,” in *As If She Were Free: A Collective Biography of Women and Emancipation in the Americas*, ed. Erica L. Ball et al. (London: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 258.

¹⁷ Turner, “Bessy Chambers,” 258.

¹⁸ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 57.

¹⁹ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 64.

²⁰ Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990), 54.

²¹ Bush, *Slave Women*, 61.

²² Bush, *Slave Women*, 61.

²³ Bush, *Slave Women*, 72.

²⁴ Bush, *Slave Women*, 72,74.

²⁵ Bush, *Slave Women*, 130.

²⁶ Bush, *Slave Women*, 74.

²⁷ Bush, *Slave Women*, 75.

²⁸ Bush, *Slave Women*, 75.

and it was difficult to trace the presence of poison in food or drink. Bush believes that Obeah was a “continuum of resistance,” as it reflects the evolutionary social role of African women.²⁹

Set in the aftermath of the Abolition Act of 1833, *Wide* recounts the life of young Antoinette/Bertha, with an alternating narration between her voice in Part I, that of her husband—the unnamed Rochester—in Part II and recapitulating with hers and that of Grace Poole in Part III. Mardorossian highlights that the deliberate usage of multi-narrating voices is indicative of Rhys’s awareness of the “workings of the ideological system”.³⁰ It implicates an inevitably peripheral position of Black characters, given the interesting constraints or “the axes of power” of race, gender, and class.³¹ Nonetheless, Hai praises Rhys’s depiction of “servitude [which] functions as a complex node or site that enables an investigation of the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and colonial status disallowing a singular focus on any one category in isolation from others.”³² Uraizee argues that “*Wide Sargasso Sea* must be viewed as an example of literary symbiosis (a combination of voices at once powerful and silent).”³³ Despite silencing their voices towards the end of the novel, both Antoinette/Bertha and Christophine are re-centered into the narrative, such that their “marginalized” status would not demolish their stories.³⁴

When it comes to the double perspectives of Antoinette/Bertha and Rochester, Müller coins it an “I-narration” in that “[w]hile telling their stories they keep expressing their spontaneous feelings, associations, memories, and dreams in a way which, at times, comes close to the stream-of-consciousness.”³⁵ Skeptical about such duality, Ashworth argues that this narrative technique undermines reading the novel biographically.³⁶ She also deems Rhys’s style impressionistic, in contrast to Brontë’s incontestable realism.³⁷ Nevertheless, Ashworth is aware of Rhys’s intentionality in providing such a style in order to stress on the impossibility of an “objective reality.”³⁸ Hai also views such double or multiple characters’ perspectives as a way of alerting the reader on the repercussions of leaning towards one side while ignoring others, or what she calls “reading and misreading” of the narrative.³⁹ This is

²⁹ Bush, *Slave Women*, 75.

³⁰ Carine M. Mardorossian, “Shutting Up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” *Callaloo* 22, no. 4 (1999):1072.

³¹ Mardorossian, “Shutting Up the Subaltern,” 1072.

³² Hai, ““There is always,”” 496.

³³ Uraizee, ““She Walked,”” 265.

³⁴ Uraizee, ““She Walked,”” 266.

³⁵ Wolfgang Müller, “The Intertextual Status of Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Dependence on a Victorian Classic and Independence as a Post-Colonial Novel,” in *A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre*, ed. Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger (BRILL, 2007), 65. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401204477>

³⁶ Rebecca Ashworth, “Writing Gender, Re-writing Nation,” in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor, and Alison Donnell (London: Routledge, 2011), 210, https://orbi.uliege.be/bitstream/2268/145778/1/ashworth_caribbean_companion.pdf

³⁷ Ashworth, “Writing Gender,” 211.

³⁸ Ashworth, “Writing Gender,” 211.

³⁹ Hai, ““There is always,”” 497.

what Voicu argues as well, suggesting that readers can easily compare and contrast Antoinette/Bertha's narration from that of Rochester, deciding which one is more reliable.⁴⁰

Ashworth speculates on the authenticity of Black characters' depiction, especially that most of them, particularly Christophine, are introduced through the point of views of Antoinette/Bertha and Rochester.⁴¹ This is why Christophine is perceived as an Othered nurse in Part I, narrated by Antoinette/Bertha, compensating for the absence of the latter's own mother due to her mental illness and her subsequent death. As for Part II, Rochester tries to essentialize her into the Black Other, yet in vain, as her final confronting speech will culminate demystifying his power. Even though the narrators are largely Antoinette/Bertha and Rochester, Christophine and the rest of the servants, with their reported dialogues, widen the scope while "disrupt[ing] the binarism of the married pair."⁴²

The life history of Christophine is recounted by Antoinette/Bertha's mother, Annette, in an essentialist description:

'She was your father's wedding present to me—one of his presents. He thought I would be pleased with a Martinique girl. I don't know how old she was when they brought her to Jamaica, quite young. I don't know how old she is now. Does it matter? Why do you pester and bother me about all these things that happened long ago? Christophine stayed with me because she wanted to stay. She had her own very good reasons you may be sure. I dare say we would have died if she'd turned against us and that would have been a better fate. To die and be forgotten and at peace. Not to know that one is abandoned, lied about, helpless. All the ones who died—who says a good word for them now?'⁴³

Annette's comments divulge the complex attitude which white Creoles had towards Black former slaves.⁴⁴ As Annette is originally from Martinique, her husband, Daniel Cosway, thought that bringing her Christophine might ease her distancing from her homeland; however, Annette could not befriend her as she is socially inferior. Annette's firm belief that Christophine's stay is voluntary simplifies the hardships borne by recently liberated Black slaves/apprentices. As Crenshaw contends, structural intersectionality further entangles "women of color," partly because most established entities help them overcome one among endlessly intersecting burdens which constitute their identity—namely, lodging (1245).⁴⁵ When it comes to Christophine, and while staying with the Cosways is *a priori* out of her loyalty, she is still a Black female subordinate who is no less exploited than before. This is why Christophine's agency is evanescent, being bound to her

⁴⁰ Cristina-Georgiana Voicu, *Exploring Cultural Identities in Jean Rhys' Fiction* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 97, <https://doi.org/10.2478/9788376560687>

⁴¹ Ashworth, "Writing Gender," 211.

⁴² Hai, "'There is always,'" 498.

⁴³ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, ed. Judith L. Raiskin (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 12.

⁴⁴ Uraizee, "'She Walked,'" 267.

⁴⁵ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991), 1245. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>

continuous performance as the strong, daring servant.⁴⁶ Despite addressing colonial prejudices against formerly colonized communities, Rhys re-instills the same anxiety which has been recurrently evoked in western writing, when it comes to the liberation of slaves and their ultimate acquisition of subjectivity.⁴⁷

Annette cannot deny that Christophine's presence protected them from being attacked by former plantation slaves, which would ultimately occur. This is humiliating for Annette, since such interdependence with Christophine makes their survival subject to her continuous commitment. Christophine's kindness applies to Dunkley's insights, based on the testimony of Lady Carmichael on how enslaved women showed mere kindness towards their masters through bringing food and whatever necessary for them, hence "deteriorate[ing] slavery from within. . . [and] erod[ing] the boundaries established on the basis of color and class."⁴⁸ Despite being commoditized, Spivak establishes that Rhys "assigns [Christophine] some crucial functions."⁴⁹ Throughout Parts I and II, Christophine proves to be, as Spivak asserts, a "powerfully suggestive figure" whose strength implicate her abrupt departure from the narrative.⁵⁰

First introduced in Part I through Antoinette/Bertha's perspective, Christophine is multifaceted in such a way that cannot be subdued within the reductionist frame of the Black servant:

Her songs were not like Jamaican songs, and she was not like the other women. She was much blacker—blue-black with a thin face and straight features. She wore a black dress, heavy gold car-rings and a yellow handkerchief—carefully tied with the two high points in front. No other negro woman wore black, or tied her handkerchief Martinique fashion. She had a quiet voice and a quiet laugh (when she did laugh), and though she could speak good English if she wanted to, and French as well as patois, she took care to talk as they talked. But they would have nothing to do with her and she never saw her son who worked in Spanish town. She had only one friend—a woman called Maillotte, and Maillotte was not a Jamaican.⁵¹

Christophine is physically and behaviorally distinct from others, for she has solid ties with her female employers as their confidant and friend.⁵² Dressed in black instead of opting for light-colored clothes so as to lighten her complexion, Christophine shows utmost pride in her Black identity. The fact that she left her child sheds light on the repercussions of the apprenticeship period, during which apprentices were almost totally deprived from having

⁴⁶ Jaising, "Who is Christophine?" 824.

⁴⁷ Jaising, "Who is Christophine?" 830.

⁴⁸ D.A. Dunkley, *Agency of the Enslaved: Jamaica and the Culture of Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Lexington Books, 2012), 32.

⁴⁹ Gayatri C. Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 252.

⁵⁰ Spivak, "Three," 252.

⁵¹ Rhys, *Wide*, 12.

⁵² Jaising, "Who is Christophine?" 819.

private time with their families.⁵³ Her quiet voice contradicts the stereotype of Black people having hoarse voice. Jaising distinguishes Christophine from the emblematic archetype of the good “African subject,” whose “burden” leads him/her to behave nicely within the constraints of the white authority.⁵⁴ Christophine’s baby-talk speech, involving repetitions and endearing words for Antoinette/Bertha, is understandable insofar as Christophine is her nurse and surrogate mother.⁵⁵ Bringing theoretical insights on laughter, which range from emotional relief to claims of self-superiority or even erotic seduction, Hai contends that Christophine does not laugh at all, for she uniquely diverts from the colonial/slavery rhetoric which required Black slaves to be always smiley so as to please their masters.⁵⁶

Through Christophine, being “an alibi” between Antoinette/Bertha and her husband on the one hand and largely between Antoinette/Bertha and the Black community of the West Indies on the other hand, the complex relation between white Creoles and former Black slaves is crystallized.⁵⁷ Halloran claims that Christophine’s facility in mingling with different groups can be attributed to her “linguistic passing” through which she supersedes her identity.⁵⁸ By speaking broken English, Christophine maintains “a strategic performance of class and national identity,” preferring not to use Standard, or rather British English so that she would not be perceived to be effacing her Blackness by emulating the colonizer’s language.⁵⁹ This is what Russell sums up as Christophine’s own appropriation of all the languages that she masters, especially in her usage of English that is influenced by Caribbean Creole expressions.⁶⁰ This is prevalent in her encounters with the unnamed Rochester, where she deliberately employs a mosaic of Dominican, English, French, Caribbean expressions, hence accentuating his outsider status.

In the Caribbean, the “worst features of colonialism” were employed; the depletion of indigenous Caribs and Arawaks, a cruel application of slavery trade, in addition to the “indenture” of Chinese and Indians were among these features.⁶¹ The linguistic tactic ensured the distancing of indigenous groups from their native languages and cultures. As they were only forced to speak their masters’ language, most slaves managed to overturn such rule by using their mother tongue among their peers in order not to lose their identity.⁶²

⁵³ Uraizee, “‘She Walked,’” 267. Also see Turner, “Bessy Chambers,” 258.

⁵⁴ Jaising, “Who is Christophine?” 818.

⁵⁵ Keith A. Russell, “‘Now Every Word She Said Was Echoed, Echoed Loudly in My Head’: Christophine’s Language and Refractive Space in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37, no. 1 (2007): 90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41304851>. Also see Uraizee, “‘She Walked,’” 269.

⁵⁶ Hai, “‘There is always,’” 511.

⁵⁷ Jaising, “Who is Christophine?” 820.

⁵⁸ Vivian N. Halloran, “Race, Creole, and National Identities in Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Phillips’s *Cambridge*,” *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism* 10, no. 3 (2006): 102.

⁵⁹ Halloran, “Race, Creole, and National Identities,” 102.

⁶⁰ Russell, “‘Now Every Word,’” 93.

⁶¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 144.

⁶² Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 145.

In this regard, Parry views Christophine's intentional usage of incorrect sentence structures and/or word orders in English as a way of unveiling the imperialist hypocrisy, which recognizes the brutality of slavery while pursuing the very same abusive attitude towards liberated Black people.⁶³ Nonetheless, Christophine's non-fluent English never undermines the poignancy of the messages she conveys.⁶⁴ Being multilingual, Christophine is in an advantageous position of "cross-cultural creativity," which racially-mixed cultures, such as those in the Caribbean and Guyana, were privileged with.⁶⁵ In spite of the atrocities they bore, Ashcroft et al. hold that enslaved and colonized people of these areas had competencies which their "monocultural" counterparts had not. That is to say that their regular interaction, and usage, of several languages makes them exposed to several cultures and traditions that not only enhance their communicability, hence making them more capable of proactively defending their rights, but also make them more apt to analyze—second-degree understanding—the dialectic (i.e. idiomatic) and/or non-formal use of language with which their masters communicate.

Differently from Antoinette/Bertha's account, Rochester describes Christophine horribly, as he first sees her in Part II:

*'Doudou, checocotte, the elderly woman said to Antoinette. I looked at her sharply but she seemed insignificant. She was blacker than most and her clothes, even the handkerchief round her head, were subdued in colour. She looked at me steadily, not with approval, I thought. We stared at each other for quite a minute. I looked away first and she smiled to herself, gave Antoinette a little push forward and disappeared into the shadows at the back of the house.'*⁶⁶

Hai contends that Christophine, among other servants, "negotiates" rather than "resists" or contests their employers, achieving "limited agency."⁶⁷ However, Christophine masters deflating the arrogance of the English groom, shaking his self-confidence. By gazing at him, Christophine blatantly obliges Rochester to drop his look while reminding him that she is no longer a slave. Christophine's look is daring partly because, even following the abolition of slavery, slaves, freed Black people, were not allowed to stare at their master's eyes.⁶⁸ Rochester feels that Christophine is a "phallic, castrat[ing] mother" whose mastery of Obeah undermines his patriarchal control.⁶⁹ Uraizee describes Christophine as an "outsider" whose practice of Obeah makes her equally feared by white and Black characters in the novel.⁷⁰

⁶³ Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review* 9, no. 1/2 (1987): 38, DOI: 10.3366/olr.1987.002

⁶⁴ Russell, "'Now Every Word,'" 91.

⁶⁵ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 149.

⁶⁶ Rhys, *Wide*, 43.

⁶⁷ Hai, "There is always," 501.

⁶⁸ Hai, "There is always," 507.

⁶⁹ Mona Fayad, "Unquiet Ghosts: The Struggle of Representation in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, ed. Judith L. Raiskin (London: W.W. Norton, 1999), 235.

⁷⁰ Uraizee, "'She Walked,'" 270.

Christophine is strikingly outspoken—with utmost ease—from the outset; she weeps, laments, while invoking the cruelty of both the men she married and male colonizers. As a surrogate mother for Antoinette/Bertha, Christophine has the right to penetrate the bridal bedroom. Through every encounter with Rochester, Christophine manages to undermine any possibility of essentializing her as a Black servant:

She opened them and smiled when I came in. It was the black woman hovering over her who said, 'Taste my bull's blood, master.' The coffee she handed me was delicious and she had long-fingered hands, thin and beautiful I suppose.

'Not horse piss like the English madams drink,' she said. 'I know them. Drink drink their yellow horse piss, talk, talk their lying talk.' Her dress trailed and rustled as she walked to the door. There she turned. 'I send the girl to clear up the mess you make with the frangipani, it bring cockroach in the house. Take care not to slip on the flowers, young master.' She slid through the door.

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

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

'And is this a feast day?'

'She wanted it to be a feast day.'

'Whatever the reason it is not a clean habit.'⁷¹

Christophine's overt allusion to her drink being the elixir of virility denotes her mockery of Rochester's masculinity.⁷² Her imperative tone that he should avoid "slipp[ing]" over the frangipani subverts the imperialist and social hierarchy vis-à-vis Rochester. By referring to his age, Christophine further ridicules Rochester, reproaching his child-like slipping over the flower. It is as if she teaches him mannerisms, while reminding him that her old age overturns his patriarchal control. Rodriguez establishes that Rochester, despite his reluctance to take up the role drawn by his father—marrying Antoinette/Bertha in exchange for access to her wealth, represents the decaying British Empire that has already lost its forced esteem in its colonies.⁷³ This is due to the fact that liberated slaves no longer had any reason to show fear in front of those who had once embodied the colonial power.⁷⁴ The servants' cynical humor and laughter, described by Rodriguez as the "subaltern" language, reveal the awareness of former slaves of the reality about the rank of their so-called masters.⁷⁵ In a postcolonial world where an English plantation owner can no longer exert his patriarchal power, Rochester feels that any sign of disrespect shakes his power. On Christophine's call

⁷¹ Rhys, *Wide*, 50.

⁷² Fayad, "Unquiet Ghosts," 235.

⁷³ Rick Rodriguez, "The Servant's Laughter in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 27, no. 4 (2016): 280.

⁷⁴ Rodriguez, "The Servant's Laughter," 280.

⁷⁵ Rodriguez, "The Servant's Laughter," 281.

for another servant to clean the mess, Hai remarks that this scene sets Christophine in a higher status than the rest of servants.⁷⁶ This particular scene could suggest that Christophine at Granbois is as Brontë's Mrs. Fairfax, for both give themselves a slightly different grade than the rest of subordinates. The difference lies in Mrs. Fairfax's utmost submissiveness to the orders of Brontë's Rochester, whereas Christophine almost deliberately supersedes unnamed Rochester's control. Unable to exert power over Christophine, Rochester finds cleanness to be the fault which could set him apart as the civilized, neat English master from her as an Other whose "trailing" dress unfolds the uncivilized habits of Black slaves.

In addition to Christophine, Rhys provides a diversified portrayal of female domestics. At Granbois, there is Amélie who embodies the stereotypically sexualized Black Other. Subject to the colonial imaginary, Rhys ought to portray "good and bad" Black servants, with Christophine embodying angelic devotion of the loyal servant and Amélie being the exoticized coquette.⁷⁷ Hai disagrees with the scholarly construal of Amélie as Orientalized. According to her, Amélie is not constructed in a racist manner as degraded in her intelligence and a promiscuous sexuality; she is a conscious eyewitness of the uneasy relation between Antoinette/Bertha and Rochester.⁷⁸ Hai adds that Amélie's laughs and looks culminate when Rochester assumes that Antoinette/Bertha is lacking in awareness. In order to humiliate Antoinette/Bertha, Rochester turns to Amélie, making the latter his "surrogate wife" with whom he fulfills his sexual fantasies (Hai, "There is always" 507).⁷⁹ Hai sees in Amélie's departure an escape from patriarchal constraints, those of Rochester, in which only Antoinette/Bertha gets entangled. Applying that to Christophine's disappearance, she could be seen with Amélie as rebellious, as both refuse to conform to Rochester's authority. Unlike the explicitly rebellious Christophine, Hai establishes that Amélie is pragmatic enough through pretending that she submits to the rules of servitude.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Hai contends that Amélie uses the docility "mask" with Rochester only, for upon dealing with Antoinette/Bertha she treats her with utmost disrespect. Amélie is aware that the only attribute she owns is her physique, and that is why she leaves so that she would likely work as a prostitute in Rio, abandoning the servitude "identity".⁸¹

Moving from postcolonial servitude, Rhys provides a different framing of Victorian female servitude other than that in Brontë's text. Reconnecting with *Jane Eyre*, Grace Poole partially narrates Part III, where unlike her enigmatic presence in Brontë's narrative, she comments on her work and that of her fellow servants at Thornfield:

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

⁷⁶ Hai, "There is always," 512.

⁷⁷ Jaising, "Who is Christophine?" 824.

⁷⁸ Hai, "There is always," 506.

⁷⁹ Hai, "There is always," 507.

⁸⁰ Hai, "There is always," 507.

⁸¹ Hai, "There is always," 509.

. . . above all the thick walls, keeping away all the things you have fought till you can fight no more. Yes, maybe that's why we all stay —Mrs. Eff and Leah and me. All of us except that girl who lives in her own darkness. I'll say one thing for her, she hasn't lost her spirit. She's still fierce. I don't turn my back on her when her eyes have that look. I know it.⁸²

Rhys completes the picture by plainly relocating her narrative at the heart of Gothic, thick-walled Thornfield. Nonetheless, the re-depiction of Grace Poole is tricky, since Rhys alters her perfunctory behavior by which she is described in Brontë's text. Here, Grace articulates a non-conformist speech, lamenting on how punitive Victorian patriarchy is for all women, irrespective of their classes, manifested by her own entrapment in the attic with Antoinette/Bertha. Grace's words deconstruct the idealized imaginary which most Victorian male writers described, when it comes to the endless advantages of confining women to domesticity (Lydon 29).⁸³ Moreover, Rody contends that Rhys's Grace is no longer the hard-hearted guard; she has a friendly, if not sisterly, relation with Antoinette/Bertha.⁸⁴

It is significant that Rhys distorts the slightest echo of patriarchal voice and authority throughout the whole novel, which qualifies her work as feminist. She not only throws Rochester into anonymity throughout the narrative, but also alludes yet symbolically to "that girl"—a way of avenging the diabolic portrayal of Antoinette/Bertha—whose name has been carved on one of the most venerated texts in the western canon, Jane. While Grace's description applies to Jane's early tenacity, Rhys could have not named Brontë's governess because of her complicity with patriarchy. Once she becomes a rich heiress and reunites with Rochester, Jane becomes Mrs. Rochester.

The fact that the narrative in Parts I and II is set in the Caribbean Islands explains why submissive female servants of Thornfield, who only signify the patriarchal voice, can no longer have their like at Granbois. As Hai asserts, servants in the Caribbean were aware that since the abolition of slavery they work for a paid service, that their employers have no right to possess them, and that they can leave whenever they feel the urge to do it.⁸⁵

Christophine's role becomes more critical as Rochester discovers through a letter, sent by Antoinette/Bertha's half-brother Daniel Cosway, the lunacy of his wife's mother, and that mental disability is hereditary in the family. Abandoning her, Antoinette/Bertha seeks the help of Christophine by asking her to use her Obeah magic so as to prepare a love potion for Rochester. Christophine suggests that she should leave Rochester, to which Antoinette/Bertha replies:

'But I cannot go. He is my husband after all.'

⁸² Rhys, *Wide*, 105-06.

⁸³ Susan Lydon, "Abandoning and Re-Inhabiting Domestic Space," in *Jane Eyre, Villette and Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Brontë Studies: Journal of the Brontë Society* 35, no. 1 (2010): 29.

⁸⁴ Rody, "Burning Down the House," 225.

⁸⁵ Hai, "There is always," 496.

She [Christophine] spat over her shoulder. 'All women, all colours, nothing but fools. ... [I have] no husband, I thank my God. I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man.'

'When must I go, where must I go?'

'But look me trouble, a rich white girl like you and you more foolish than the rest. A man don't treat you good, pick up your skirt and w'alk out. . . .'

'. . . you must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him.'

'What you tell me there?' she said sharply.

'That is English law.'⁸⁶

Shocked to know that by virtue of the "English law" Antoinette/Bertha is no longer in possession of her inheritance, Christophine urges her to liberate herself from Rochester's control. Having no subjectivity, Oates suggests that Antoinette/Bertha is a passive character whose powerlessness allows her neither to change the course of her life nor that of the plot.⁸⁷ In contrast, Rhys depicts Christophine to be anti-stereotypical of female Black servants; she is active and particularly modest. Christophine embodies what Antoinette/Bertha does not possess; she demonstrates a proactive attitude.⁸⁸ Drake argues that Christophine might be more advantaged than Antoinette/Bertha, since the former, having been a slave, knows how she can fight so as to resist being subjugated.⁸⁹

Placing that into Crenshaw's framework of intersectional subordination, Christophine manages to dismantle what might be her entangled vulnerabilities, social and financial dependence on a husband. In other words, Christophine knows that she is already disadvantaged as a Black, working female servant, which exposes her to manifold exploitation, and that is why she is unwilling to be hindered with marriage. Jaising attributes the confidence which Christophine's mistresses have in her to her chastity, being the "asexual mammy figure".⁹⁰ As the archetype of the loyalty of Black female servitude, the asexual mammy has been always perceived to be the reassuring surrogate mother to her white masters/mistresses.⁹¹

According to Owen, and in spite of having no traces for sexual drives and desirability, the asexual mammy still projects the white supremacy, insofar that she is physically exploited as

⁸⁶ Rhys, *Wide*, 66.

⁸⁷ Joyce C. Oates, "Romance and Anti-Romance: From Brontë's *Jane Eyre* to Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 61, no. 1 (1985): 52.

⁸⁸ Uraizee, "'She Walked,'" 270.

⁸⁹ Sara Drake, "Race and Caribbean Culture as Thematics of Liberation in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, ed. Judith L. Raiskin (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), pp. 197.

⁹⁰ Jaising, "Who is Christophine?" 822.

⁹¹ Ianna H. Owen, "Still, Nothing: Mammy and Black Asexual Possibility." *Feminist Review* 120, no. 1 (2018): 74.

a labor force and her sexuality is being taken care of by white masters.⁹² Owen traces the 1960s as a turning point in the Black discourse, when a plethora of (non-)fictional works of art provided a subversive depiction of the mammy figure as more proactive. It is then no coincidence that Rhys's text, albeit written by a non-Black writer, belongs to this wave of new mammy figures.⁹³

Owen's study provides an alternative reading of the asexual mammy figure. Using the deconstructionist frame, she contends that the asexual mammy bears both "defeat and resistance," in that her sexual abstinence at once denotes how colonial patriarchy represses her desires, forcing her to remain silent, and how she might deliberately refrain from the realm of sexual discourse⁹⁴. If this is the case, Owen posits, then the asexuality of the mammy figure and her decision to "say nothing," not to be "silent," is a subversive act of defiance as she swerves away from the sexual discourse.⁹⁵ In other words, the asexual mammy can evoke her sexuality if she wants to, but she tactically repulses it.

In relation to Christophine, her sexual abstinence is an attribute for her by which she no longer stays emotionally, sexually, and financially dependent on a man. As she advises Antoinette: "When man don't love you, more you try, more he hate you, man like that. If you love them they treat you bad, if you don't love them they after you night and day bothering your soul ease out".⁹⁶ Christophine prefers not to open up about her emotions and be immuned from any emotional influence.

Christophine subscribes to the chastity for which Englishwomen were praised. Rhys allows Christophine an impressive awareness of her rights, not as a Black woman but simply as a woman. Since Rhys' narrative intertwines with *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette/Bertha's linear descent towards lunacy eliminates any possibility of her to take control over the course of her life—resisting her husband's mental manipulation—amid an already-revealed destiny in Brontë's text. As for Christophine who has no like in Brontë's narrative, she arguably embraces the readers' perspective while inciting Antoinette to be stronger.

For Rhys, Antoinette/Bertha's passivity is what Bloom describes as the wrong direction that the writer believed his/her predecessor had taken. Attempting to remedy that without breaking the link with *Jane Eyre* by entirely changing the original plot, Rhys establishes Christophine as the commentator who simultaneously advises her mistress while critiquing Brontë who fuels her characters with a sense of permanent subjection that they cannot overcome.

⁹² Owen, "Still, Nothing," 74-75.

⁹³ Owen, "Still, Nothing," 75.

⁹⁴ In his influential text *The History of Sexuality*, French philosopher Michel Foucault provides a historical analysis on sexuality in the western world, bringing into light how it was subject to both self-surveillance and state surveillance through inscribing a moral code within society and also through the act of confession as received by priests inside churches. Michel Foucault, "Part II: The Repressive Hypothesis," in *The History of Sexuality*, translated by Robert Hurley (Pantheon Books, 1978), 19,22-23.

⁹⁵ Owen, "Still, Nothing," 77.

⁹⁶ Rhys, *Wide*, 65-66.

When Antoinette/Bertha begs Christophine to help her with Obeah so that Rochester would love her again, she reluctantly accepts:

'So already you frightened eh?'

And when I saw her expression I took my purse from my pocket and threw it on the bed.

'You don't have to give me money. I do this foolishness because you beg me—not for money.'⁹⁷

Declining the financial offer, Christophine shows a sign of superiority, since it is Antoinette/Bertha who needs her help. Hai believes that it is only “emotional labor” which inclines Christophine to help Antoinette/Bertha, like a mother who would not stand seeing her daughter in emotional distress.⁹⁸ She might have found in Antoinette/Bertha the daughter with whom all her motherly emotions are expressed.⁹⁹ Drifting away from historical facts, Rhys makes Obeah a threatening magic through which Christophine draws her strength. In reality, Obeah was a religion that the colonizers prohibited the indigenous community from practicing. Christophine primarily declines Antoinette/Bertha's request since Obeah is a “culture-specific” ritual, and it cannot be used in such a scheme.¹⁰⁰ Rhys alludes to that by the fact that Obeah would have a counter effect, leading Rochester to have sex with Amélie instead of reuniting with his wife.¹⁰¹ This is why Christophine warns Antoinette/Bertha that Obeah is potentially dangerous with white people. Cutter contends that with Obeah, Christophine “symbolizes the power of magic to defeat the will of the Colonizer”.¹⁰²

Mardorossian transcends Spivak's view of the unconceivable subjectivity of the Black others, which undermines the historical perception of the limited, if not absent, autonomy. Christophine highlights the undeniable “resistance” of Black people, which destabilizes the colonizer.¹⁰³ What Mardorossian suggests is the fact that if Christophine, or any Black subject, acquires agency, it is a mean towards an end—obliterating “white domination”.¹⁰⁴ Aware of her limited agency, Christophine combats exploitation through every situation she encounters. Whenever there would be an attempt to subjugate her, she would take a proactive step forward while being aware that such action would not entirely disentangle her from the complex node of race, class, and gender.

⁹⁷ Rhys, *Wide*, 70.

⁹⁸ Hai, “There is always,” 516.

⁹⁹ Hai, “There is always,” 514.

¹⁰⁰ Spivak, “Three,” 253.

¹⁰¹ Mardorossian, “Shutting Up the Subaltern,” 1078.

¹⁰² Matthew Cutter, “Finding Your Own Magic: How Obeah and Voodoo Provide Women Agency in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Tiphonie Yanique's *Land of Love and Drowning*,” *Journal of International Women's Studies* 17, no. 3 (2016): 132.

¹⁰³ Mardorossian, “Shutting Up the Subaltern,” 1077.

¹⁰⁴ Mardorossian, “Shutting Up the Subaltern,” 1078.

This has to do with Christophine's ambiguous legal status. While she is no longer an apprentice herself, she is still obliged to work for the Cosways for financial reasons. Neel contends that Rhys chose to set her novel in a period when emancipation is de-facto ineffective, since both the legal rules succeeding the Emancipation Act of 1833 and the Act of Jamaica of 1792 inflicted almost full control upon former slaves.¹⁰⁵ There was such big change that happened, except that they were no longer officially called slaves. For the case of Christophine, she is fully subjugated as a criminal—practice of Obeah—whose civil rights are aborted.

As Rochester succeeds in worsening Antoinette/Bertha's state, making her believe that she is mentally unstable and calling her Bertha, he summons Christophine, presumably to save her. The real reason for calling Christophine is to seize the opportunity to scold her, under the pretext that she tried to poison him with the potion she gave to Antoinette/Bertha. In total equanimity, Christophine overtly articulates her resentment to Rochester:

'She marry with someone else. She forget about you and live happy.'

A pang of rage and jealousy shot through me then. Oh no, she won't forget. I laughed.

'You laugh at me? Why you laugh at me?'

'Of course I laugh at you—you ridiculous old woman. I don't mean to discuss my affairs with you any longer. Or your mistress. I've listened to all you had to say and I don't believe you. Now, say good-bye to Antoinette, then go. You are to blame for all that has happened here, so don't come back.'

She drew herself up tall and straight and put her hands on her hips.

'Who you to tell me to go? This house belong to Miss Antoinette's mother, now it belong to her. Who you to tell me to go?'

'I assure you that it belongs to me now. You'll go, or I'll get the men to put you out.'

'You think the men here touch me? They not damn fool like you to put their hand on me.'

'Then I will have the police up, I warn you. There must be some law and order even in this God-forsaken island.'

'No police here,' she said. 'No chain gang, no tread machine, no dark jail either. This is free country and I am free woman.'¹⁰⁶

By telling him that Antoinette/Bertha could be happier with another man, Christophine once again knows how to humiliate Rochester by casting doubt on his manhood. Being unable to tolerate or even visualize his wife with another man, Rochester pragmatically

¹⁰⁵ Alexandra Neel, "'Qui Est Là?': Negative Personhood in Jean Rhys's *'Wide Sargasso Sea,'*" *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 50, no. 2 (2017): 179, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45158934>.

¹⁰⁶ Rhys, *Wide*, 95-96.

relies on his status as the legal owner of Granbois who can use the law against her. Despite reducing Christophine into the Black servant and threatening to throw her out of the mansion, she reminds him that she is in a stronger position; insofar as she is feared by everybody out of practicing Obeah. Moreover, Christophine reminds him that the master-slave discourse which he employs, alluding to torture and order as a way of reestablishing his imperialist power, would not work. This is due to her awareness of her legal status as fully emancipated woman.

Despite her remarkable upbraiding of Rochester, Christophine's exit from the novel, Spivak claims, has to do with the impossibility of her remaining in a canonical text that reflects the "imperialist project".¹⁰⁷ Both Russell and Uraizee reject Spivak's reading of Christophine's departure as a sign of capitulation. In spite of "walk[ing] away," Christophine's words continue to echo in both Antoinette/Bertha's mind and that of Rochester.¹⁰⁸ Embodying newly liberated slaves who turned to paid servitude, Christophine grants herself spatial mobility to which fully emancipated Black people had access. Hai describes Christophine as "uncategorizable" since she moves freely beyond the ideological frames of race, gender, and class.¹⁰⁹ While her power is limited to the social sphere within the Creole society, inasmuch that being a Black female servant curtails her ability to have a fully autonomous life by virtue of law, Christophine manages to maneuver and to survive in whichever sociopolitical context she would be in.

Unable to domesticate her as a doll or an object, through calling her Pheena as he calls Antoinette/Bertha, Rochester keeps calling Christophine devil whenever he remembers her.¹¹⁰ Christophine's words destabilize his peace of mind and patriarchal power. In contrast to Spivak's reading as well, Parry believes that Rhys chooses the right moment for Christophine to refrain. As Rochester is determined on taking Antoinette/Bertha to England, the attributes that account for Christophine's strength would disappear if she would accompany them there.¹¹¹ It is the rule of law that works in Britain, not Obeah magic.

Feeling that she has no choice but to leave Antoinette/Bertha, she reaffirms that she has hesitantly prepared the potion:

I said loudly and wildly, 'And do you think that I wanted all this? I would give my life to undo it. I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place.'

She laughed. 'And that's the first damn word of truth you speak. You choose what you give, eh? Then you choose. You meddle in something, and perhaps you don't know what it is.' She began to mutter to herself. Not in patois. I knew the sound of patois now.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Spivak, "Three," 253.

¹⁰⁸ Russell, "'Now Every Word,'" 99. Uraizee, "'She Walked,'" 265.

¹⁰⁹ Hai, "There is always," 499.

¹¹⁰ Russell, "'Now Every Word,'" 99.

¹¹¹ Parry, "Problems," 38.

¹¹² Rhys, *Wide*, 96-97.

This is the first time for Christophine to laugh, which marks a triumphal gesture. In one of her historical accounts, Bush sheds light on the testimony of one of the English masters, Monk Lewis, who witnessed a case of a girl who was accused of poisoning her master (62).¹¹³ Despite her bluffing performance so as to deny the accusation, she was condemned to death, and surprisingly she was laughing after she heard the sentence.¹¹⁴ Moreover, Christophine laughs because she manages to drop the mask off Rochester's face, and that his opportunist intention has surfaced. Hai argues that Rochester's blindness in Brontë's text seems to be a curse from Christophine.¹¹⁵ This has to do with the fact that she tells him, when he complains about being at Granbois, that he has looked for it, accepting his father's deal to marry Antoinette/Bertha so that he would inherit her fortune.

Representing the new generation of liberated slaves, Rhys rewrites through Christophine a progressive, anti-Victorian servitude that ardently resists and permanently negotiates postcolonial patriarchy, thanks to her linguistic subversion and mastery of Obeah through which her intersectional subordination diminishes. Even when she comes to a limit amid Rochester's manipulative scheme, as per the rule of law, she "walks away without looking back," being sure that with her "uncategorizable" persona, as Hai puts it, she will navigate until she finds her place. Still significant is Christophine's choice not to remarry again, which is radically established as the only guarantee for her autonomy. Given her former status as an objectified slave, and presumably her bad experience in her former marriages, Christophine makes a strategic decision not to lose her autonomy by marriage. In addition to the aforementioned skills, Christophine's age reinforces her self-confidence enough so that she could face the unnamed Rochester with all he embodies as representative of colonial patriarchy.

It is important to note that Christophine's story takes place every day in every corner of the world. Whenever patriarchy exists, women, especially those who are racialized, underprivileged, and minoritized because of their religion are subjected to exploitation. Although all laws theoretically incriminate any form of violence, there is still a lot of effort to be made to eliminate gender violence. Some women of color, such as Christophine, continue to hold underpaid jobs with oppressive working conditions. From housekeepers, cooks, cleaners, or nurses, these women are invisibilized from media and public discourse. Although their stories might be recounted in horrid feminicide features, we never know the complete story. That is why it is essential to retain the complex nexus of class, race, and gender when addressing the struggles of working women whose identities cannot be framed in one category while ignoring the others. There are still many Christophines who fight for a decent life and many Rochesters, who might be husbands or work bosses, and consider themselves as superior by their gender and their whiteness, hence the timeless of the plot that Rhys crafts to serve as a reminder for every Rochester. Even though Christophine can be

¹¹³ Bush, *Slave Women*, 62.

¹¹⁴ Bush, *Slave Women*, 62.

¹¹⁵ Hai, "There is always," 514.

penalized by patriarchal and legal rules, she can still stand up against any false accusations and "walk away" proudly without looking back neither in shame nor in fear.

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