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VULNERABILITY OF WOMEN IN JEAN RHYS' SELECTED NOVELS

Hiba Meteab Faja & Ruzy Suliza Hashim*

ABSTRACT

The female characters in Jean Rhys' two books, *Quartet* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, are examined in this article. Rhys was born in Dominica but lived the remainder of her adult life in the United Kingdom; her unusual life experience, which incorporates English and Caribbean landscapes, resulted in literary works that represent women and men caught up in their lives' surroundings due to their pronounced cultural, social, and economic differences. Gender and psychological viewpoints have dominated Rhys scholarship; however, studies on vulnerability remain a vacuum that needs to be filled. Rhys' loneliness, existentialist outlook, and complex subjectivity are reflected in her novels, with her characters' troubled lives highlighted by feelings of emotional and physical estrangement. We can infer Rhys' characters' subjectivity due to migration and colonial culture by categorizing the causes and consequences of vulnerability.

Keywords: Jean Rhys, vulnerability, women, patriarchy, colonisation

INTRODUCTION

Jean Rhys (1890–1979), a Caribbean modernist novelist, offers literary critics valuable interpretations of her novels based on gender studies, formalism, feminism, post-colonialism, and psychoanalysis, among other important lenses. Her unusual life story, which blends English and Caribbean spheres, resulted in literary works that depict women and men trapped in life circumstances as a result of noticeable human, social, economic, and environmental changes. Her characters' subjectivity reveals the complexities of their realities – the past of various locations, the uncertainty of family relationships, financial difficulties, and the need to love and be loved are among the topics that appear to pervade her heroines. The reader is provoked with multifaceted altered ways of understanding her as a result of these interconnected complexities, particularly in the light of a changing and dynamic universe (Savory, 2009).

Rhys wrote five novels, two collections of short stories, and an unfinished autobiography until her death. For the majority of her life, her writing career ebbed and flowed, and she struggled with personal, social, and financial issues. Rhys took inspiration for her works from her own life. Rhys' childhood in Dominica, gradual move to England, and subsequent love affairs and marriages were all depicted in her novels. Her stories depict female protagonists at varying points in their lives and illustrate the events that contribute to their actions. Helen Carr (2102: 19) notes critics' evaluation of Rhys by quoting one of them saying, "to encounter [Jean Rhys]... was to be introduced to Sasha, Julia, Marya, Anna, and Mrs. Rochester." According to Diana Athill (1979: 7), who revised Rhys' autobiography and helped it get published posthumously, "most of [Rhys'] life had already been 'used up' in the novels," and these writings serve as a "therapeutic function" in purging her unhappiness. As E. Johnson and P. Moran (2015: 1) testify, "from her despairing diaries written at the age of twenty to her death nearly seventy years later, Rhys examined in meticulously polished prose a set of themes including the workings of the mind and emotion, gender and gender relations, colonial history … and a certain spectrality of existence". This article extends the scrutiny of Rhys' heroines by focusing on their vulnerability and efforts at resistance. In most feminist-oriented analysis, women's vulnerability is premised on the weakness of women. However, in this article, we juxtapose weakness with defiance to show how, when confronted with injustice, Rhysian women either withdraw into desperation or rise to break free from the shackles of patriarchy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since her texts overlap identity, ethnicity, and culture, scholars are interested in researching and interpreting them from various reading lenses. Using Homi Bhabha's parlance, it is possible to see Rhys' version of the Caribbean world of social "in-betweenness." Bhabha (2018: 182) describes the interstitial structure as "the basic 'interruption'... through which the colonial text utters its questioning, its contrapuntal criticism" in his mapping of the cracks within the interstices. This is precisely the topic that Rhys addresses in her novels: the mechanisms compel Rhys' white Creole heroines to have a social and cultural duality, which is the true image of colonisation, that is possessing many identities and being separated into two societies, their own and the coloniser's. Hence, feelings of alterity, diaspora, exile, and lack of identity are the product of this hybridity.

Rhys' writings are a representation of West Indian literature. This opinion is shaped not only because of Rhys' West Indian origins, but also because the environment and characters are used to incorporate main Caribbean issues. The collision between European and West Indian perceptions and consciousness, as well as the genesis of Caribbean culture and history, are examples of this clash of ideology. In her first novel, *Voyage in the Dark*, her protagonist Anna experiences the contrast between the comfort of a close-knit island society and the materialistic life of a bleak and stagnant English landscape because of her feelings of exile and being an outcast in Britain. Rhys expands on the idea of solitary womanhood in her consequent novels, though she sets *Quartet* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the same setting and uses the particular problems of a white Creole as a metaphor for the West Indian plight. Therefore, issues of vulnerability arise because of this disconnected physical existence.

Most research findings indicate similarities between reality and fiction owing to the similarity to episodes of Rhys' own life. Any study of Rhys, according to Angier (1990), will be incomplete without a close examination of her biographer. Angier accompanied Rhys throughout her life, researching her internal changes through her books, plays, the unfinished biography, and letters. Angier argues that Rhys was entirely reliant on men to support her in her life by posing her in the context of the times in which she lived. Elaine Savory (2009) drew on Rhys' life as well, stressing her race, religious education, and social status in her novels. As Savory so aptly puts it, Rhys belonged to the aristocracy in the colonial Caribbean, but in England she served as a chorus girl and was an underdog as a Creole. She reinvented herself many times and yearned to be free of the labels placed on her by others. Ledent (2018), in a much later review, arrived to the same conclusion, claiming that Rhys used her life condition to relieve her psychological distress. As a result, the interconnectedness of Rhys's own experiences drives most of her fiction, making them insightful readings into the novelist's personal life.

Other reading approaches have also played a part in understanding Rhys' novels. Psychoanalytical studies are common, particularly for exposing the novelist's characters' numerous states of mind and relationships. Simpson (2005: 20) applies psychoanalytical ideas from Klein, Riviere, Winnicott, and others to her thorough analysis of Rhys' works. Duffy (2015) reflects on the part of the Oedipal complex that absorbs Anna in *Voyage in the Dark* in a later review. Any relationship between a young woman and an older man, according to Freud, is the product of her need to relive childhood love, which acts as a psychological barrier to protect her current self from mysterious men. This is the foundation upon which Anna and Walter's relationship is built.

A number of researchers have focused on the mother-daughter relationship. Mother-daughter relationships seem fraught with conflicts. Mothers seem to be absently present; for example, Victoria Burrows (2004) argues that Anna, in *Voyage in the Dark*, craves companionship that is linked to her desire to be loved by her mother, who prefers black children. Many important elements of her fiction are revealed through the psychological prism, causing relationships and feelings to be dissected and understood.

Reading Rhys' novels from a feminist postcolonial viewpoint is by far the most popular form of investigation. Her works are about a marginal woman who has been excluded by her culture and sexuality. The fractured perception of the Rhysian woman and her silent voice represent the contemporary reality of alterity, hegemony, and exile. In their paper, Hiba Meteab Faja, Ruzy Suliza Hashim, and Amrah Abdul Majid (2020) use the concept of alterity to highlight how Rhys' heroine, Anna, is caught in a vortex of rejection and unhappiness brought about by her feelings of otherness. Her ethnicity, gender, and class confuse herself as much as they confound those around her.

In her conceptions of character awareness and individuality, Rhys, like other modernist authors such as Virginia Wolf, James Joyce, and Dorothy Richardson, was driven to clarify the inner side of her characters (Emery 1982). The Rhysian woman, often isolated from their native origins in the Caribbean, making them estranged like strangers in the domestic traditional world and trespassers on masculine boundaries, appears in all of Rhys' books, starting with *Voyage in the Dark*, *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, *Good Morning Midnight*, and *Wide Sargasso Bay* (E. L. Johnson, 2015). Rhys' heroines became the emblematic "other" as a result of a multitude of situations – gender, age, and race. They are often told about their inadequacy, and they are unable to find any possibilities for a happy life. Women's eroded self-esteem contributes to enslavement and ruin in the long run. Helen Carr (2012) notes that feminist scholars show ambivalence about accepting Rhys as a feminist writer, saying that she embellished economic, class, colonial, and sexual oppressors that abuse the disadvantaged. However, Rhys' stories expose the realities of her time. As will be shown in this article, while economic, class, colonial issues contribute to the vulnerability of Rhys' heroines, the novelist also provides instances where they rebel against the oppressors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The two novels are explored from the perspective of vulnerability. Two female protagonists from each novel form the crux of analysis. Rhys' novels are based on her own experiences, demonstrating how her narratives, regardless of how intimate or private, can provide significant insights into gender dynamics and feminism. By examining each of Rhys's women individually, we can infer the obstacles they face as they negotiate their love relationships and survival. Reflections on their rebellious acts and existential struggles bring to light women's injustice and exploitation. Women who are impoverished and trapped in degrading and subordinating situations are more likely to experience defiant feelings. To circumvent patriarchy, these women violate patriarchal boundaries based on primitive survival instincts. Protest points are frequently revealed to be organic, emerging from deeply ingrained key forms of resistance to oppression.

It is first necessary to understand the term “vulnerability” which comes from the Latin *vulnus* that refers to both a wound and the quality of those that are easily injured. As Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds (2014:1) opine, "human life is conditioned by vulnerability." As human beings, we have needs that are hierarchical in nature. Maslow (2015) theorises a five-tier hierarchy of needs comprising physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualisation. By virtue of our needs, deprivation from any of them leads to the condition of being vulnerable. Thus, vulnerability is described as the ability to suffer, which is a natural part of being human. Vulnerability entails being susceptible to harm and suffering; it is an unavoidable aspect of our humanity. Butler (2004, 2009) and MacIntyre (1999) consider human beings as infallible in this way. Also, human beings have an organic susceptibility to illness and sickness, death and dying are inescapable, and that aged bodies are vulnerable to impairment and disability. Indeed, MacIntyre (1999) emphasises our human animality—that our bodies, as animal bodies, are vulnerable to illness and injury.These observations further connect our physical vulnerability to the inherent sociality of human life: as social beings, we are both vulnerable to others' actions and dependent on others' care and support to varying degrees at various points in our lives.

The fundamentally social or relational character of vulnerability points to its susceptibility to causing harm to certain people who are incapacitated in some way (C. Mackenzie, W. Rogers, and S. Dodds, 2014). Certain groups of people cannot protect themselves because they are unequal in terms of power, either socioeconomically or physically disabled. For women, their vulnerability originates from a patriarchal culture that legitimises male power. First, institutional power also extends vulnerability where the justice system and structures do not address the marginalised subject's social, ethnic, and linguistic disadvantages. Second, insecurity is contextual, which means that it is determined by main and secondary behavioural relationships that reinforce vulnerable circumstances. Men's efforts to control and exploit women are closely linked to the ability to engage in violence, and the form and level of such behaviour varies by community, with certain societies appearing to be particularly severe. In certain circumstances, physically or mentally abused women do not have the means to seek escape routes. This state of dependency manifests itself not only in concrete conditions of cultural and material poverty, but also, and perhaps most importantly, in close relationships where the stronger subjects oppress the weaker ones.

Brené Brown (2012) sees vulnerability in another way. Instead of seeing it as a capacity to be harmed, she sees it as a mark of courage. She says:

> *Vulnerability is not a weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional. Our only choice is a question of engagement. Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our*

> *purpose; the level to which we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and disconnection (18).*

People wear various ensembles of armour to protect themselves from being hurt by being detached, disinterested, and indifferent in their dealings with other people. As Brown (2012:24) further illustrates, the different tactics are "built on the same premise: Keep everyone at a safe distance and always have an exit strategy." She reiterates that feeling vulnerable is not a bad thing. It is the cradle of passion, joy, bravery, empathy, and imagination, not a sign of weakness.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Vulnerability in *Quartet*

In *Quartet*, the story focuses on the heroine, Marya, a chorus girl who has married her Polish partner, Stephan Zelli, a young man who deals in pilfered art works. Marya, homeless and lonely in a foreign capital, is left penniless after Stephan is sentenced to a year in prison. She moves in with affable Englishman H. J. Heidler and his painter wife Lois, whom she knows socially, at Stephan's urging from behind bars. She learns of Heidler's past of asking young women to stay in his spare room and conducting relationships with them while Lois remains silent. Heidler and Lois discourage Marya’s visits to prison. Soon Marya succumbs to Heidler's advances, alone under his roof and reliant on his generosity. Heidler and Lois accompany Marya through their social haunts in a charade of respectability to divert speculation and speculation about their peculiar situation of wife, husband, and mistress living under the same roof. When Stephan is released from prison, he discovers his wife’s infidelity, and Marya is filled with remorse. Heidler tries to persuade Marya to choose between him and Stephan, while refusing to give up his own marriage to Lois. Marya is torn between pity and resentment towards Stephan. When Marya's romance with Heidler falls apart, Stephan flees, leaving Heidler and Lois to decide her destiny.

In the novel, Rhys presents Marya as a "reckless, lazy. A vagabond by nature … " (*Quartet*, 14). She spends "the foggy day in endless, aimless walking" when she is left to fend for herself (*Quartet*, 33). Her vulnerability is made overt:

> *It was a vague and shadowy fear of something cruel and stupid that had caught her and would never let her go. She had always known that it was there – hidden under the more or less pleasant surface of things. Always. Ever since she was a child. (33)*

Marya’s vulnerability is not caused by her present hardship but it has always been there – a child often seeking to feel safe and belonged. Drawing on MacIntyre's emphasis on the embedded sociality of human life, Marya, at Stephan's persistence, inevitably draws on relationships with others that increase her vulnerability to the acts of others and reliance on others' treatment and assistance.It makes her susceptible to harm, being penniless and neglected. Mistaking it for love, Marya becomes a victim of sexual seduction by Heidler:

> *I love you. And I wish I were dead. For God's sake, be a little kind to me. Oh, you cold and inhuman devil... you don't know anything about me... I want to make you happy. It is my*

> *justification that I want to. And that I will, d 'you hear? In spite of you, I'll do it. She thought: I wonder if taking opium is like this? (Quartet, 60-1)*

Heidler enjoys the privileged position as a respected landlord in comparison to Marya. Moreover, Lois, Heidler's wife, is complicit in her reaction to her husband's betrayal (Moran 65-6). This is a typical patriarchal social construct; it strengthens conventional notions of femininity and, of course, masculinity by associating dependence with passivity, obedience, helplessness, powerlessness, and a lack of agency.

Marya lives in a shortened present that is basically interrupted by her youth, her motherland, and her family roots. Thus, the harsh memories of the past disturb her. Thomas Staley (1979: 40) states that "there is in Marya a sense of a lost past which has been stolen from her, and it is this sense of loss and being plunged into a fearful and 'shallow world' that allows her to move from one circumstance to another finding protection from the shadows." Accordingly, the impact of Marya's psychological disaster is that she sees herself as an "unfortunate dog abasing itself before its master... a grey ghost walking in a vague, shadowy world" (46). Her objectification as a pet is exacerbated by the use of the animal metaphor.Consequently, Marya suffers from cyclical, neurotic thinking patterns that Rhys depicts as mechanistic and clocklike, which is clear in her name "Mado", a reference to madness (Moran, 2007):

> *I will go mad. You don't know... how can you know? I can't stand it anymore... and then she would tell herself, horrified: 'My God, I'm going mad' little wheels in her head that turned perpetually. I love him. I want him... feeling a horrible despair... she would get back into bed and lie huddled with her arm over her eyes (Quartet, 97)*

Marya's closure is atypical of an epilogue of a typical love tale. She eventually loses her husband, and the novel thus focuses on the loser and outsider character. Marya lacks the courage to believe that her abilities are superior. Lacking skills or devoid of opportunities, she is a solitary and alienated woman who is caught in abusive economic conditions working as a kept woman or a prostitute.

Marya can be seen as a weak and fragile woman who cannot sustain herself or control her life. She does not have the ability to make a choice or make decisions about her condition; she needs herself, the man, to survive. She lacks the atmosphere of a family and a stable home. She spends her life in rented hotel rooms, restaurants, and cafes. Her common sense of identity as an adolescent woman is linked to her association with hotel rooms and it determines her place in the balance of respectability. Thus, Marya's sense of victimization is a result of her social marginality and disempowered in sustaining her social status according to the standard models of femininity.

The harsh poverty and severe circumstances lead Marya to a state of sadomasochism in which she finds herself given to her idol figure, Heidler, and becomes completely submissive to him and subsumed under his control. She gives herself totally to him, and before that, to Stephan, which reflects the relationship between the slave-master couple. When her sadistic lover takes her in his arms, Marya shows her praying to her idol: "How gentle he is. I was lost before I knew him. All my life before I knew him, it was like being lost on a cold, dark night. The weakest creature doomed and all that-such nonsense "(66). For Marya, Heidler takes on the role of protector, and losing him means losing herself that "[s]he felt for the first time a definite sensation of loss and pain, and tears came into her eyes" (117). Such dependence on a man is a construction that keeps women shackled to patriarchal values.

Where is resistance in this portrayal of a young woman's destroyed life? The closure of the book provides small relief. Marya confesses her extramarital affair to Stephan, who then plans to murder Heidler. Stephan's insults became the last straw:

> *'You shan't!' she said again. And then: 'You think I'd let you touch him? I love him. ' A delicious relief flooded her as she said the words and she screamed again louder: 'I love him! I love him! '...*
> *'You left me all alone without any money,' she said. 'And you didn't care a bit about what happened to me. Not really, not deep down, you didn't. And now you say beastly things to me. I hate you. '*
> *She began to laugh insultingly. Suddenly, he had become the symbol of everything that all her life had baffled and tortured her. Her only idea was to find words that would hurt him-vile words to scream at him (232).*

Her chance to express her mind is a brief window of time for defiance. Marya refuses to be silenced in this scene, despite the fact that her right to talk becomes the impetus for Stephan's murder. Rhys elaborates on the aspects of insecurity, reliance on men, and poverty that drive Marya to behave in ways that enslave her to the mercy of others by articulating Marya's life. She has little means of gaining access to wealth or even the opportunity to obtain the basic necessities of life. She is not treated as a true companion or lover, but rather as a vehicle for sexual fantasies. Marya is incapable of defying male authority – when she attempts to assert her rights and takes charge of what she thinks is right, she loses the battle violently.

Vulnerability in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Wide Sargasso Sea is a prequel to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Taking the story of Bertha, Rochester's mad wife in the attic, Rhys provides a backstory to show the other side of story of the fallen woman. Rhys' plot follows Antoinette from her childhood in Jamaica to her miserable marriage to an unidentified English gentleman who renames her Bertha, labels her insane, forcefully relocates her to England, and isolates her in his mansion. Antoinette is trapped in a patriarchal culture that she does not truly belong to, not in Europe nor in Jamaica. Hence, *Wide Sargasso Sea* delves into the influence of male-female relationships while also exploring postcolonial topics including colonialism, migration, and assimilation. Written in the alternative voices of Antoinette and Rochester, Rhys shows their irreconcilable differences that lead to the tragic end of the female protagonist.

In the *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the issue of vulnerability is powerful and complex. The racism hierarchy in Jamaica appeared to be difficult and stressed in the 1830s, with pressure among white people born in England, Creole people or people of European descent, such as those born in the Caribbean, ex-slaves black, and mixed-race people.The main characters in the novel are mainly defined through their alienation from any cultural set. The novel begins with Antoinette stating: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and the white people did. But we were not in their ranks " (7) In spite of the fact that Antoinette and her family are white people, they never belong to that class of Jamaican white people because her mother, Annette Cosway, used to behave in an unacceptable way according to the general standard of the French. This is in addition to the lack of fortune, especially after the death of her father, Alexander Cosway. The different origins between these people make up the reason behind violence and hatred. The heroine Antoinette and her family are frequently called "white cockroaches" (128) by the black people, and are finally removed from their original home by a crowd of unhappy ex-slaves, rendering them to become a double outsider, a "white nigger" for the Europeans and "white cockroach" for the Blacks "(Rhys, 1992). As Murdoch (2015:160) emphasizes, "the racial superiority of whites depends on the economic ascendancy achieved by unpaid black labour. Antoinette's family becomes niggers without money, isolated from the rest of white society. Being rejected by their own community is a dark past that Antoinette bears that increases her vulnerability.

Antoinette's mother, who is presently absent because she alienates her daughter, contributes to Antoinette's experience with her peers which causes rifts that further impact her sense of self. She desires rapport, and yet, each time, her friends snub her attempts to be on friendly terms. For example, on one occasion when Antoinette was walking in the streets, a young girl followed her and sang: "White cockroach, go, go. Nobody wants you here. Go away "(*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 10). Therefore, this animosity builds up Antoinette's vulnerability. Betrayal by Tia, a person she considers as a good friend, is the ultimate treachery:

> *Then, not far away, I saw Tia and her mother, and ran to her because she was all that remained of my life, as it had been. We shared the meal, we slept next to each other, and we bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I would live with Tia and be like her.... When I arrived, I saw the rough stone surface that was holding, but I saw the cast. Nor felt. I just noticed something wet running down my face. I looked and saw her face contorted, as if to like to mourn. We looked, with blood on my face and tears in hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (Wide Sargasso Sea, 30)*

The series of conflicts with her own family members and friends show Antoinette that she may never belong to white or black people. Consequently, she becomes emotionally cast out, considering herself as a stranger and the other.

Antoinette's racially fractured mother-daughter relationship is another blight on her identity and emotional maturity. This relationship is inextricably linked to patriarchal inequality, ethnic and class dominance, and the exploitation embedded in white capitalist society. Rhys' emphasis on a tortured relationship between a white Creole mother and her daughter offers a poignant examination of the ambivalent dynamics of white-on-white racism. Marooned in a place that has become hostile, her mother transfers her antagonism to her daughter. In an attempt to bridge the gap, Antoinette tries to foster closeness "but she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her." (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 18). This maternal rejection is another layer of vulnerability that continues to plague her as she searches for attachment and intimacy.

Antoinette's marriage to Rochester further exacerbates her situation of being estranged. In her yearning to find love, she misconstrues her husband's attention. She hopes that she would get the love, care, acceptance, and happiness that she desires from him. However, their personalities clash with Antoinette loving her homeland, and Rochester detesting everything connected to the place. "Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers are too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger "(*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 59). He first notices the extremes of nature, but it soon transfers onto his servants and wife. Antoinette remains a stranger to him; he becomes obsessed with his racial paranoia and superiority over her. He uses his patriarchal control to deceive her in all those aspects. His refusal and psychological rejection towards her increases her feelings of being an outsider and a victim. Rochester is removing her identity by calling her Bertha: "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out the window with her scents, her pretty clothes, and her looking-glass" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 117). Names are important since they are considered as part of one's individuality and the determinant of one's place in the community. Rochester displays his colonial influence when he removes Antoinette's uniqueness and identity and attempts to impose British characteristics upon her. He justifies re-naming her Bertha: "It is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha "(*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 86). Antoinette's objection to this will be justified as madness, much like the mad Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette is aware of his attempt: "You are trying to make me another woman. You want to change everything, even the place where I grew up. You want to take its beauty by driving me to anger and hate and now I am unhappy" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 94-95). In the second part of the novel, when Rochester takes his wife to England, she is completely silent and does not express any kind of feelings; here Rochester was afraid that he had gone too far because his wife is now very passive:

> *I'll watch for one tear, one human tear. Not that blank hating moonstruck face. I'll listen… If she says goodbye, perhaps adieu. Adieu – like those old-time songs she sang. Always adieu (and all songs say it). If she says it or weeps, my lunatic, I'll take her in my arms.She's mad, but mine, mine. What will I care for gods or devils or for Fate itself? If she smiles or weeps or both. For me. Antoinette – I can be gentle too. Hide your face. Hide yourself in my arms instead.You'll soon see how gentle. My lunatic. My mad girl. Here's a cloudy day to help you. No brazen sun. No sun… No sun. The weather's changed (Wide Sargasso Sea, 107).*

However, Rochester fails to subdue his wife. She may appear as an automaton but she defies his oppression. When Antoinette wakes up from her sleep, she learns that she was taken to Thornfield Hall in the first place: to burn it down. She continues her quest after waiting for Grace to fall asleep: "I... unlocked the door, I was outside holding my candle. Now at last, I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage. " (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 112). The self-immolation of Antoinette is an act of resistance, the nucleus that signals that she is not passive.

Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* denies and thereby turns the madwoman's representation by breaking free of her husband's oppression by burning his house. It is this final novel of Rhys that seems to "write back" to the canonical *Jane Eyre*. By writing a prequel, she has now changed the way in which modern readers construct meaning for *Jane Eyre*. In this way, through "writing back" at the canon, Rhys also re-visions the way forward in order to refute the canonical text and change how the events are interpreted.

CONCLUSION

Vulnerability refers to a susceptibility to being harmed or wounded. Rhys draws out the vulnerability by tracing back her heroines' lives that are dotted with conflicts. Parental rejections, confusing identities, uncaring acquaintances, and inept husbands collude to show the magnitude of the women's fragility to deal with the circumstances of their lives. On the one hand, vulnerability correlates with women’s failure to individuate. They remain in a limbo of psychological, social, and economic distress. On the other hand, vulnerability brings out the trait of women’s courage as they dare to feel and expose themselves to suffering.

Looking through Brown’s lens of vulnerability is indeed liberating. Psychological influences have a significant impact on resistance behaviour. Inequality that lasts a long time and puts people in tough positions, sometimes unable to move forward because they become insensitive to the suffering. Individuals also blame themselves and fail to participate in an ongoing attempt to redress such injustices. However, it is not unusual for a latent desire to explode unexpectedly, disrupting the world's order. Rhysian women dare to step into the realm of emotions and intimacy. They are astounded when they realise how powerful and effective their inner refusal powers are, just as Marya feels liberated that she comes to realise that her problems come from Stephan himself. Women take a first step toward liberation as they recognise that order is a societal phenomenon. For them, it is a moment of clarity. Values and convictions are called into question, fate is called into question, and the disillusionment of societal defect is now openly referred to as injustice. In their present psychological states of mind, stirring thoughts of emancipation and experience of conscious turnover on a personal level emerge, as does hope for gender and political reform on a public level. In other words, an agent is born from a resisting woman. It entails a personal victory and a renewal of her outlook. It is at this point that understanding the intimate stories of the two particular women become critical. They bring about destabilisation of individual patriarchal systems, the subversion of social constructions in detail, the reformation of interpersonal relationships in real time, theological transformation, and, above all, the consciousness liberation of past-subordinated-women.

Rhys emphasises the difficulties that exist when a marginalised woman is forced to live in two cultures that are not only dissimilar, but also hostile in nature. The novelist offers several instances of conflicting ideals and standards in both novels. Women’s problems originate from a prevailing patriarchal mentality that is biased against them because of institutional dogmas and personal differences. As Rhys has demonstrated repeatedly throughout her writing career, a person's vulnerability has tragic consequences. However, the heroine's various capabilities for self-reflection, emotional honesty, and the ability to share them with others as an admission of her numerous weaknesses can be considered as a marker of emotional health and a means of establishing connection with others, as shown in her works. The two novels discussed in this article show two ends of a continuum that relates to vulnerability. Both of Rhys’ heroines feel deeply about their situations, and in their monologues, they speak the truth. On one level, their endings are read as the victimization of women, but on another level, the way in which women’s ability to feel and love deeply, in Brown’s parlance, is to take emotional risks. Therefore, there is a shift here in terms of how we understand vulnerability. To show vulnerability is to exhibit the extent of courage, and both of Rhys’ heroines embrace it unequivocally.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

HIBA METEAB FAJA
Centre for Research in Language and Linguistics
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
annakarenina398@gmail.com

RUZY SULIZA HASHIM* (Corresponding Author)
Centre for Research in Language and Linguistics
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
ruzy@ukm.edu.my