

## Representing the contradictions of selfhood in Jean Rhys's "Wide Sargasso Sea."

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### ABSTRACT

*I would like to work on the 'revision, rediscover and refashion' of Victorian self in Neo-Victorian era as reflected in the text **Wide Sargasso Sea**. The text encapsulates not only the woman protagonist's self but that of Jean Rhys's psychologically intricate character Rochester too. Herein may come the Post-modern context, where under macro-powers, gheraoed individual soul struggles to establish its identity and reclaims due right out beyond the constricted territory. The nagging suspicion drives Rochester's self-contempt and irrational need to assert his patriarchal dominance:*

Everything is too much; I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger. (Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, pg 59)

On the other hand, if we look from a little different angle, we can see that the Postmodern problematics of otherization enables the mad woman emerge herself as a mystery, as a

treasure in labyrinthine Neo-Victorian era. The author herself says that as

everyone loves treasure, no one can speak of it. Plus, there are backlashes on the system of justice, power-plays of marriage in the text.

Death of flesh is not the finality; death of identity is no less of oblivion: "If I was bound for hell, let it be hell. No more false heavens." (P-135).

Neo-Victorianism skillfully demonstrates that the reinterpretation of the Victorian is actually a tool for negotiating the present scenario blurring the distance between 19th century and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The legitimization of metatextuality and metacriticism renders Neo-Victorian texts irresolutely self-conscious mapping out memory and mourning, sex and science, spectrality and secularity. The quest for the protagonists to return to their origins and the quintessence of their journey are somewhere linked to our own engagements as contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century readers with literary and cultural history. It is germane in this regard that Postmodernism itself is supposed to entail not an outright

rejection but a critical recasting of Neo-Victorian individuality and rationality. Interest in Postmodernism that has been stagnated over the past has come to be replaced by a concern with globalization. With its lamentable complicity in cultural commodification of capitalism, the text *Wide Sargasso Sea* champions the radical claims of multifaceted phenomenon which in Leotard is “incredulity towards metanarratives”. The text entangles us in a performance of illusionism, it reveals to the audience that the construction of reality is, in fact, the effect of smoke and mirrors. This is imagined as a window on reality, presenting the readers as peering at the display glass that has become a mirror. In light of Spivak’s notion of the silence of the subalterns, the text propounds “central commitment to political revisionism”. The relation between the forms of culturally authoritative knowledge and other subaltern ways of engaging the world is no longer a concern. Rather than signaling the impending crisis that many thoughts were portended by these cultural shifts, the contemporary world has been integrated into the current social order. Postmodern era is like a ‘panopticon’, which induces in the inmates a state of conscious and permanent visibility. In the midst of disciplinary mechanism, self is fragmented under constant surveillance.

Therefore, scrutinizing one’s own self is of permanent importance in the present scenario. Finally quite substantive is what Rhys has stated that we are alone in this most beautiful world.

**Key Words** (Rediscover, Victorian self, Postmodern Context, Identity, Right, Otherization, Metacriticism, Globalization, Mirror, Commodification, Panopticon, Fragmented, Surveillance, Alone.)

## Introduction

Exploration of “self” in this Post-Modern era should be a prerequisite. This realization makes us feel closer to the neo-Victorian epoch. Self is saturated in a solid identity. Identity is an old term. It can be a definition of personhood that is with sameness or continuity of the self across time and space. It can be that uniqueness differentiating a person from other. Erikson uses the term ‘identity crisis’ to refer to an individual having lost the sense of continuity<sup>1</sup>. He typifies a healthy state of identity development as an invigorating subjective awareness of continuity. The membership of social groups is internalized as part of the self-concept and as such forms an integral part of the identity of the individual. It entails the



compromise to solve the internal conflicts between two contradictory needs. These needs are, on the one hand, the need of an individual to be unique, and, on the other hand, the need for security and assimilation. The conceptualization of identity lies at the root of struggles to reveal the essence of a particular identity, the search for the essence of being<sup>2</sup>. Herein comes the exploration of history to reveal the hidden roots. It recognizes points of difference in the course of history in what we are and what we have become. This involves becoming as well as being, belongs to the future as well as the past. Although rooted in cultural identity, it undergoes constant transformation, positions themselves in relation to present realities. The changing nature of identity is emphasized by Barth who has brought in the question of boundaries<sup>3</sup>. Boundaries can be socially, psychologically, culturally, politically defined. It is a dynamic process in which the cultural practices, symbols, traditions of a group might change due to interaction with physical, social, cultural, economic, political environment.

## FRACTURED SELF IN GLOBALIZATION

The spectacular rise of the discourse on identity since the last part of the 20th century should be perceived as a reflection of human experience in the age of globalization. Circumstances in the current world have not changed the process of identity formation, but have added to new dimensions to both personal and collective identity. Continuity is a solid basis upon which people anchor themselves; the rapid changes have eroded most of the bases on which people used to anchor their identity. The struggles are closely interconnected and often represent different facets of the various homogenizing and diversifying process associated with globalization. In an era characterized by what Max Weber called “instrumental rationality”<sup>4</sup>, human relations are perceived to be functional to individual's striving towards self-actualization and personal happiness. Freedom of movement is regarded as having a primary or meta-value that stands above all other values. They imply commitment and the acceptance of responsibility of the consequences of an enduring relationship. Globalization and modernity have brought about the collapse of a sense of community. The loss of safe shelter offered by communal relationship has, in turn, reinforced the fear and anxiety

associated with identity achievement. The contradictory forces of globalization and localization are, in fact, affect the pulverization of society. Globalization has become the intractable force of the world. It is an inextricably complex and multifaceted phenomenon. There is the tendency towards synchronization, integration, unity and universalism. On the other hand, there is propensity for heterogeneity, localization, differentiation, diversity, pluralism. These processes are intricately interwoven and represent two faces of the same coin. Globalization is not a ubiquitous or uniform process, but involves various terrains; there has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years round the concept of identity. The discussions on 'justice' and equality are debated in terms of "recognition". Culture, the concept is studied in terms of individual, categorical differences and concepts such as 'realization' and 'hybridity'.

### **NEO-VICTORIANISM AND POSTMODERNISM...**

The Oxford English Dictionary puts forth the relevant definition of the prefix 'neo' as a compound referring to a new, revived, or modified term of some doctrine, belief,

practice, language style e.t.c. ,or designating those who advocate, adopt or use it. Importantly, within the study of Neo-Victorianism, the title of the genre is disputed, and it is not even always Neo-Victorianism! Many critics prefer the term 'Post-Victorian'. Kirchnopf sees the current re-engagement as suggesting different emphasis, with retro- and Neo-Victorian highlighting the emphasis on the past and the future respectively, and Post-Victorian striking a balance between the two. Creative Neo-Victorian texts are at least somewhat self-conscious (if not fully meta-critical), that talk back to Victorian culture and literature, in order to create original works that speak to and for the contemporary age. It is highly engaging, interdisciplinary field. It 'self-reflexively' employs Victorian backdrop to explore them in more depth. It is, truly, 'the afterlife of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the cultural imaginary', a huge expanding industry.

Neo-Victorian texts participate in Postmodernism's 'nostalgic mode', in which the absent past is appropriated and refracted through the ideology of the present, in order to create glossy images of 'pastness'. The refraction of the past through present is unavoidable. Neo-

Victorian fiction is not simply a pastiche of mental images of Victorian corsets to satisfy contemporary nostalgia for a more opulent look. Its parodic self-reflexiveness paradoxically leads to the possibility of a literature; while asserting modernist autonomy as art, it also manages to investigate its intricate and intimate relations with the social world in which it is written and read. The relic of the real is crucial marker of the bygone events. The past, according to the cultural logic, becomes a treasure-trove for pertinent connections and similarities to our Postmodern world. What Jameson claims<sup>5</sup> is uniquely qualified to evade the ‘double bind’ of antiquarianism and the postmodern tendency to project contemporary relevance onto history. The former posits an artificial rapture between past and present, the latter a false connection. Postmodern aesthetics no longer represent historical past. Rather than mere restoring to us ‘the essential mystery of the cultural past’, these bring back warmth and allow the repressed once more to speak, to deliver the long-forgotten message surroundings utterly alien to it. Victorian fiction addresses a historicity, indeed concerned with recuperating the substance of bygone eras.

This takes a Postmodernist revisionist approach to the past, borrowing from the Postmodernist historiography to explore how present circumstances shape historical narrative. In Postmodern historiography, the historical record is in itself as a text and not merely an unimpeded sequence of raw empirical realities. Postmodern historicity works to widen the gap between representations of the past and their specific historical awareness. It continues to have value, and remains compatible with approaches to history that accept the existence of many possible narratives for any given set of historical facts. Neo-Victorian novels are acutely aware of both history and fiction as human constructs, and use their awareness to rethink the forms and contents of the past.

### **SELF AND SENSIBILITY**

The vulnerability of the self to disintegration is hardly the discovery of Post-Modernism. Jameson claims that it is more characteristically the concern of modernist authors who frequently express anxiety over the readiness of individual identity to break down in “Van-Gough-type madness”. For Jameson, this psychic fragility is allied with modernist alienation, not post-modernist

fragmentation" ( *Postmodernism*, 14). Psychological breakdown of the sort could be viewed as consonant with the emphasis on identity as an artificial construct rather than as something elemental and secure which precedes the individual's social interactions. Most of the novels contain overt commentary supporting the idea that personal identity is the mutable product of transitory historical phases, now an autonomous entity which transcends them. The sense of self may actually be a product of history rather than a timeless bulwark against its ravages; a made-up thing. Whereas Zak in *Star Turn*<sup>6</sup> is diminished, even extinguished by history, Claudia is made greater by it. She has written: "it frees me from the prison my experience also resounds within that experience" (*Moon Tiger*, 159.)<sup>7</sup>. Her private dimension is created by historical forces. Claudia believes that an individual life embodies world history; History can never exist apart from the individual contemplating it. The sense of a core of identity serves Claudia as a source of stability and fulfillment conspicuously absent in Zak's life. Zak's fate gives the lie to some of the positive claims that have been made for the fluid, indeterminate, free-floating Postmodernist self.

Performing self can be viewed as a liberation from the constraining values of liberal humanized more generally from the all pre-existing structures. As Waugh states<sup>8</sup>, this model of identity, closely associated with Work of Nietzsche, is a mutation of a Romantic conception of the self: "an extension of a Coleridgean aesthetic shorn of its secure metaphysical underpinnings" (*Practising Postmodernism*, 116). According to Waugh:

Nietzsche talks of the self in terms which post-Kantian criticism has reserved for art. He extends the romantic concept of the imagination to predict the Freudian sense of the unconscious as a primordially aestheticizing mode arising out of body; here body must be harnessed to a 'technology of self' where self-construction displaces self-knowledge. Human nature is not a hidden essence waiting to be discovered through self-analysis, but an artefact, a sedimented aggregate of those available forms we have chosen to shape into a coherent identity. The emphasis on 'authentic' self-creation seems more in keeping with Post-world war existentialism than Postmodernism. Otherwise, if we have shunned the responsibility of authentic aesthetic self-

creation, we are entirely a fabrication of others. (*Practising Postmodernism*, 115)

The novel exhibits a tension between an urge to uncover some essential or enduring truth about existence and awareness that such a goal is belied by the contingent nature of experience. Revealing a conflict between a desire to see the self as integrated and a postmodern tendency to see it as decentered and fragmented, in themselves, the methods of characterization are not so radical as to prevent us from conceiving of the protagonists as representations of people underlying, if elusive, individual identities, but they undergo experiences which subvert our ability to see them in this way. In this novel, she fails to reciprocate his passion, he sustains his fragile sense of self, they both seem incompatible with highly fluid, multiple identities. They remain morbidly sensitive to the transitoriness of individual identity in the face of mortality. In Barnes's *THE SURVIVOR*<sup>9</sup>, a woman was so overwhelmed emotionally by the threat of nuclear disaster and the degradation of the natural environment that she flees civilization in a small boat. The emotionally incapacitated Zak of *Star*

*Turn*<sup>10</sup> is treated by Freud after political events cause him to lose faith in the Marxist values which have animated him, Fowler's narrator in *A MAGGOT*<sup>11</sup>, for example, states explicitly that modern ideas of subjectivity, are a consequence of the historical forces which produced individualism. The modern protagonists of *POSSESSION*<sup>12</sup> subscribe to the Post-structuralist theory that the various roles that make up an individual's subjectivity are the products of language and other sign systems. The idea of self as an illusion, to be replaced by a discontinuous machinery and electrical message network of various desires, ideological beliefs and responses, language forms, and hormones and pheromones. Bill Unwin of *EVER AFTER*<sup>13</sup> illustrates a highly paradoxical response to the dilemma by turning to history to repair the damage of history. His psychological crisis which seems to be exclusively personal is actually directly attributable to the historical forces which have actually shaped the lives of the immediate family. The Second World War and its aftermath are crucial, the man's guilt played in the development of nuclear weapons. The paradigm of his authentic self can be found in the lives of his forbears. It is to his great-great-grandfather,

that bill turns in his quest for an alter ego. Bill is always aware that his seemingly stable foundation will soon crumble.

## **CRUMBLLED IDENTITIES IN *WIDE SARGASSO SEA***

*Wide Sargasso Sea*<sup>14</sup> is the story of Antoinette Cosway, a white Creole heiress, of her unhappy marriage to a English gentleman, never named by the author. He renames her to prosaic Bertha, declares her mad, and requires her to relocate to England. Cosway is entangled in an oppressive society. She is Rhys's version of *MAD WOMAN IN THE ATTIC*<sup>15</sup>. She is locked into a room, descends into madness from despair at the harshness of displacement and assimilation. She reviews several facets of her life, including her mother's mental instability, her mentally disabled brother's tragic death. The machinations of Daniel impugns Antoinette's reputation, mental state. It aggravates her increased sense of paranoia and bitter disappointment at the failed marriage. The author ties Antoinette's husband's eventual rejection of her to her Creole heritage. He hides her from the world; makes empty promises to come her more, but sees less of her. He ventures away to pursue relationship with other

woman. Bronte failed to give reasons for Bertha's mental state. Rhys changes the way in which we judge their actions, highlighting the flaws in Bronte's character. She uses stream of consciousness to reproduce her erratic thought, echoes Jane's interior monologue when she is at her most vulnerable .wandering the moors after fleeing Thornfield. Rhys rebels against Victorian literary conventions, by using a three-part-structure to split Antoinette's story, each part presents a turning point in her life. By using the husband's point of view to narrate part II, Rhys signifies the moment when Antoinette becomes voiceless. Bertha in *JANE EYRE* is not a character, but a caricature of the ignorant Victorian attitude towards what is foreign. Rhys has made her into a character y providing her voice. Marginal characters take the center stage, reveal flaws in the 19th century towards race, sexuality, mental illness. Rhys reworks on the raw nerves of Bronte's work by telling the story of how and why the anathematized Bertha comes to be the mad woman in the attic. Rhys calls on the collective guilt of a gender and social class by demonizing the Rochester character, whereas Bronte oppressed woman by reducing her to a series of



animalistic qualities: 'dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane'. The binary between demonic Bertha and beautiful Antoinette shows how a drug-fuelled rampage could inspire the image of insanity immortalized in Bertha Mason. Rochester attempts to justify keeping Bertha locked away by explaining that the reason for her condition comes of being of mixed-heritage. Rhys focuses on the patriarchy of the British culture to blame. Rhys shows how Rochester creates the mad woman by hacking away every vestige of her cultural identity, turning her into something he could lock away as a possession kept in the attic for nostalgia's sake—a toy without a mind, a soul or voice. He takes away her name because he no longer sees her as Antoinette by saying 'I think of you as Bertha', the husband takes away the only remaining part of her identity. Rhys strips Rochester of his identity by placing him in an alien landscape, taking away his name. At the end of part 2, when the couples are leaving for England, Rochester expresses his hatred: 'I hated the mountains and the hills. I hated the sunsets of whatever color. Above all, I hated her; for she belonged to the magic and the loveliness.' (Rhys; 111)

Rochester places Bertha as a representation of the indulgence of primal instinct. Rhys uses the stifling heat of the Caribbean to invoke a sense of oppression. Rochester wanted to possess her, to own every part of life. He goes to exclaim: "I have her, I will hold her". The narrative is ordered chronologically with a retrospective, first person narrator. Rochester asks, "Have all beautiful things sad destinies?". Antoinette is a beautiful thing with a sad destiny. Rochester is not a tyrant who ruthlessly seeks to destroy her, but a victim with his own dilemmas. Rochester is often seen as untrusting and selfish, but he is justified in many ways. Rochester is not scheming, calculative, money-grubbing monster, he is conflicted about the choice he makes. He inherits nothing from his father's estate, only for financial survival he has to marry. He is humiliated by his situation. He seems touched by Antoinette, seeing in her vulnerability a mirror of his own. But he ends up doing some pretty awful things. He sleeps with the maid on his honeymoon. One huge hurdle that Rochester can't overcome is his inferiority complex for being stuck out in a colony. His Englishness is all the more important to him to shore up his ego. Everything about



the Caribbean rubs Rochester the wrong way because it is irrational, uncivilized. The exotic natural beauty, racial, cultural diversity exaggerate his own Englishness. Rochester seem conflicted to the very end, experiencing a twinge of regret and nostalgia as he and Cosway leave Granbois. He is not a man entirely comfortable with his own claim that he never loved his wife. Unlike Mason, Rochester remains nameless throughout the novel, referred to only as "that man" or "my husband". Rochester's anonymity underscores the implied authority. He is the nameless creator; his authority and privilege allow him to confer identity on other. For instance, he decides to rename his wife, is an attempt to distance from her lunatic mother, he takes away her wife's voice along with her name, refusing to listen to her side of story. He fragments her identity; he creates the new name of "Marionette", a cruel joke that reflects Antoinette's doll-like pliability. He ultimately refashions Antoinette into a raving woman and treats him like a ghost. Having totally rejected his Creole wife and her relative customs, Rochester descends into rationale for the division of women into "angels" and "abortions". The ideology of passionlessness<sup>16</sup> made it

possible for women to replace the sexual with moral motives and determinants. The idea of virtue in the mid Victorian period, became depoliticized, moralized and associated with domestic sphere, keep from the public sphere of competition, self-interest, economic aggression. Powerful voices from religion, science and the state produced stronger prescriptions about the gendering of public and private sphere for a variety of reasons. "Science"<sup>17</sup> was widely seen as the magic key to the understanding of gender is the main focus in the representation of womanhood. Women's relative physical weakness led inevitably to such failing as her resort to petty arts and petty ways for the securing of her aims, as well as her more commendable deeply -rooted desire to please the opposite sex, which beginning in the terror of a slave, has ended in the devotion of a wife. From a nervous susceptibility to downright hysteria, from that to overt insanity. In the sexual evolution, in the Parturient period, in lactation, strange thoughts, unreasonable appetite .criminal impulses may haunt the mind. Insanity and impure thoughts echo the anxieties articulated in other discourses about every woman's potential for sin. Women in the acute stages of insanity are

indiscriminately violent, impulsive, obscene, and wayward. Elaine Showalter<sup>18</sup> suggests redefined madness “not as a less of reason, but deviance from socially accepted behavior”. A morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, moral dissipations, without any remarkable disorder of the intellect. Sexually aggressive .intellectually ambitious, and defective in proper womanly submission and selfishness. Hysteria was considered a form of female mental infirmity. John Connolly stated woman were particularly vulnerable to hysteria because of the stress placed on the uterine economy. Sigmund Freud's studies on hysteria<sup>19</sup> provided a more systematic history based on the understanding of the consciousness as split. Freud acknowledged hysteria can not be cured by social control, since its roots lie in the unconscious. He sees these controls as unnecessary constraints on the needs and aspirations of young men, even if, in the process of being forbidden any sexual curiosity. Girls were scared away from any form of knowledge, so their intellect was suppressed along with their sexuality. He says that the hysterics are the flowers of mankind..Such sexual differentiation was an essential component of evolution.

Woman's moral sense was seen as central to the survival of the species, her capacity for being as important as male intellect and justice. Woman's equality was summed up in *Of Queen's Gardens*:<sup>20</sup>

Each has what the other has not. Each completes the other, and is complicated by the other. The happiness and perfection of both depends on each. They ask and receive from the other. (90, *Of Queen's Garden*, Ruskin)

American John Humphrey told that sex was an essential and irreplaceable form of human affection, with an important social function. There is a tension between preserving the ideal of the 'pure-hearted' woman, and recognizing the importance of sexuality within marriage. Women suffer more than man do from the entire deprivation of sexual intercourse. Discussions of the female reproductive system also tended to take a pathologized view of the female body as a whole, seeing woman as semi-permanent invalid<sup>21</sup>. Disease in the 2nd half the 19th century was that of the 'reflex irritation', which held that any disorder of the reproductive organs could cause pathological reactions in other parts of the body. This disease is

merely the sympathetic reaction or the symptoms of one disease, a disease of the womb. This provided an all-purpose diagnosis, turning every health problem presenting in a woman a "woman's problem"<sup>22</sup>. Havelock Ellis uses Biblical imagery<sup>23</sup> to suggest a threat which is not merely physiological but moral: "even in the healthiest woman a worm, however harmless and unperceived, gnaws periodically at the roots of life". She would become weak and nervous, perhaps sterile, in a sense more dangerously for society, capable of bearing only sickly and neurotic children. Education in itself was generally thought detrimental to female health. To reinforce this sense of motherhood as woman's normal destiny. Some medical and scientific views point to the common origin of both sexes in a morphological androgynous embryo and thus not to their intrinsic difference. Science was increasingly viewed as providing insight into the fundamental truths of creation with nature as the only foundation of the moral order.

### **Flow of History...**

Periodization is a problematic concept, as it necessarily oversimplifies, homogenizes,

and superficially summarizes an entire era. Since history is continuous, periodization can only occur in retrospect and is more or less arbitrary. Certain characteristics of the Victorians emerge in Neo-Victorian fictions as authors are aware of periodization. Neo-Victorianism is a reconstruction or staged return of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in and for the present across genres and media. Critics have agreed that a certain meta-critical apparatus regarding the adoption of the Victorian are requirements for the texts to be considered Neo-Victorian.

Jameson's well known aphorism "history is what hurts" establishes what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis. Its ruses turn into grisly and ionic reversals of their overt intention. History is what modernists experienced it as Joyce's nightmare or Eliot's immense panorama of futility and anarchy. Predatory capitalist social relations, shattering of beliefs, whether in God, rationality, or the unitary self. Great war on *Star Turn's* narrator, the meaninglessness, futility of individual effort, the feeling that man is subject to an invisible, apparently insane bureaucracy, the blind turmoil of history shattered

private life..History can seem apocalyptic to people of any epoch. The recurrent metaphor of human history ,from its very beginning to the present, as a desperate voyage by a boat or a ship on which people are seeking deliverance from various kinds of catastrophes. The process of historical reconstruction themselves attempt to bridge the gap an deconstruct the lost past. This intent quite self-consciously draws attention of the confusion. He and his estranged wife are actually more similar than dissimilar. Both are essentially orphans, abandoned by their family members to fend for themselves. Antoinette. who was persistently neglected by her mother in favor of his brother. She is left with the burden of a divided cultural identity, the hatred of the blacks, the contempt of the whites, responsibility of a dilapidated state. Both Rochester and Antoinette struggle for some sense of place and identity, and enter the arrange marriage with apprehension and anxiety. Rhys creates further parallels between her two antagonists in their bouts with fever and this twined experiences with dreamed or actual forests.

The ending of *WIDE SARGASSO SEA* is not as romantic and optimistic as their

Victorian forbearers. In Victorian novels love is realized, homes are built, the modern texts are on the destruction of those entities. Antoinette and Rochester's relationship suffers, they suffer as couple, as individuals. While on a micro-level the novel details the way a marriage and two human beings come apart. Antoinette's angst seems to reflect that of her home as a colonized nation. Rochester's coldness and infidelity are symbols of England's cruelty in its colonies. The final pages hinge on despair, detailing the destruction of a couple's home, focusing on each character's conception and experiences of hatred and sadness. Antoinette's identity remains in flux. The question of her identity also addresses questions inherent in how the colonizer (her husband) confuses and destroys her (the colonized) identity, how empire dislocates and depersonalizes both place and people. Unlike in the Victorian novels, where peace and domesticity come to be the source of joy. Antoinette's husband is the source of her pain rather than a source of comfort. The domestic sphere comes to destroy her rather than enrich her. While her husband calls her Bertha. She says. "Bertha is not my name, You are trying to make me someone else". Whereas Jane,

pip, Estella come to affect positive changes within themselves to better understand who they are. Antoinette is not afforded this luxury. She is so removed from herself, she can not recognize her face, "There is no looking glass here and I don't know what I am like now. What am I doing in this place and who am I?" (Rhys, 180). She asks desperate questions with no answers. Antoinette acknowledges that sometimes she looks to the right or to the left but she never looks behind her for she does not want to see that ghosts of a woman who they say haunts this place. She is the ghost that haunts and is paradoxically afraid of recognizing herself. rather than having a clear sense of identity or purpose, Antoinette is demonized by her inability to create a sense of self. One of the most simple and profound aspects of their marriage is that is a loveless one. Unlike Pip, Estella, Jane, who were able to histories together and who loved each other profoundly, there is no tenderness between Antoinette and Rochester. More than once. Rochester thinks to himself that he sleeps with, an act he deliberately wants his wife to hear as to hurt and alienate her. By the end of the novel, there is no warmth, no sweetness. In one particular poignant passage, Antoinette emerges

from her room looking and acting like the ruined woman she is "her hair uncombed and dull, her eyes inflamed and staring, her face flushed and looked swollen. "She is drunk and looking for more liquor to soothe her". The couple's interaction is alive with hate. While Rochester grows angrier with every word, Antoinette smashes another bottle against the wall and glass in her hand and murder in her eyes. "Don't you love me at all?", she asks Rochester, "No. I do not", he replies. Cursing each other and unable to hear each other, Rochester considers her only a "red-eyed, wild haired stranger", a mad woman who he can no longer bear. Their marriage is undone. Rochester thinks to himself "he is tied to a lunatic for life-a drunken, lying lunatic", which contrasts sharply with the domestic bliss or its promise in the Victorian novels. Their marriage and their home come apart with ease as the foundation comes to be built on solid hate.

### **FEMININE VOICE AGAINST QUESTIONABLE EXISTENCE...**

"For men at most differ as heaven and  
earth,

But women, worst and best, as  
heaven and hell"

Tennyson (Merlin and Vivien)<sup>24</sup>

Helen Cixous sees the binary opposition as characteristics of western thought about the sex<sup>25</sup>. Man was considered to be the straightest, woman the most bending. The desire to define woman as single category coincides with an equally powerful desire to distinguish between what Tennyson's Merlin calls "worst" and best woman. Lavater presents woman as a man's savior, he simultaneously suggests the ever-present possibility of her fall from grace. Woman's demand for emancipation from the duties of motherhood and family life was hotly debated throughout the Neo-Victorian period. Late 19th century concentrates on the intersection of scientific, religious and literary discourses relating to women. They exist as parameters with which and against which individuals must either conform to or define their deviance. The two most powerful images of women that emerge from the women that emerge from the Bible, that has dominated western thought for 200 years, underpinned the division of Victorian womanhood into the polarized extremes of 'madness' and 'magdaleness'. The contrasting image of the Virgin Mary

embodies the obedience to God's wishes of which Eve was incapable, free from the taint of sexuality which shock the accustomed readers out of experience. The representation of womanhood engages the attention of the readers by becoming their author's surrogates in their quest to inscribe the reality of the past. *Possession*<sup>26</sup>, *Ever After* both exploit the nostalgia pervasive in British high brow culture for Victorian past with its unambiguously social hierarchy, its reassuringly solid and densely cultured interiors, its seeming confidence, stability and unclouded sense of purpose. Byatt's unfulfilled modern academics envy the Victorian poets whom they are studying for the intensity and vitality of their inner lives. Separated from the Victorians by the chasm dug by Freud, Roland, long nostalgically for the great age of humanism before the splintering of the unitary self. They valued themselves once they knew God valued them. Then they began to think there was no god, only blind forces, so they valued themselves, they loved themselves, attended to their natures. Bertha is an hour glass containing time. She contained past and future, both now cramped together, the need to tap the primordial origins of existence is living in

the Post-Modern age, we imbue our relationship with an aura of the earlier existence, Ash perceives Lamotte as the lady of Shallot or as the fairy Melamine. Many contemporary novelists and theorists grapple with the problem historicism. The skeptical view that objective knowledge of history is impossible because knowledge itself is the product of history. Foucault is the most prominent debunker of a unified view of history, but according to Robert Amico, Foucault himself never overcomes the challenge of historicism .He has no grounds on which to dismiss the empiricism and teleology of the traditional history of ideas, "if all thought is a prisoner of its contemporaneous episteme or all commentary merely description, how can there be criticism?"<sup>27</sup>.The truth of all assertions about history is necessarily relative to the gender, ethnicity, class, age and profession of the would be commentator. Historical contexts are inferences made on the basis of particular texts, not separable realities which pre-exist and anchor those texts. In the words of Julian Barnes:

History is the one thing we have to make up for ourselves. History is not what happened. History is just what historians

tell us. There was a pattern, a plan, a movement, expansion; it is a tapestry, a flow of events, a complex narrative, connected, explicable, just voices echoing in the dark; images that burn for a few centuries and then fade. Our panic and pain are only eased by soothing fabulation; we call it history, self-reflexive mediation.(Julian Barnes: *A History of the World*).

History is inaccessible to us except in textual forms.It can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization Bennet and Jameson, have not found it easy to extricate themselves from the quagmire of textuality in order to establish an unproblematic connection with social reality. They include the notions of origin and end of unity and totality or totalization, of underlying reason or ground of selfhood, consciousness, or "human nature" of the homogeneity, linearity and continuity of time, of necessary progeny of fate, destiny or providence: gradually emerging meaning of representation and truth. A secular historical consciousness was freighted with values broadly religious. Barker writes of a corresponding attenuation of the meaning of history:"In the early 19th



century, history could still be regarded as the transcendent idea realizing itself in the actual. Now in the present time, history is nothing but history, the notion of what has occurred, just as it happened. We can no longer confidently share the realist epistemology or the unquestioned belief in the mimetic adequacy of historical writing. Within the grand design of history, the desire for what has been lost remains. Coherence, closures are deep human desires that are presently unfashionable. They are always both frightening and enchantingly desirable. The historian's picture of the past is in every detail an imaginary picture, and it is necessary that at every point there is a every point of 'priori imagination'.

## CONCLUSION

In my research, I have tried to explore the stance of accentuating the 'neo' of Neo-Victorianism, so as to focus on the contemporary era unearthing the past. As Louisa Hadley puts it, there is an interest in the 'historical specificity of both the Victorian and the contemporary/Postmodern context of Neo-Victorian fiction rather than blending them'. The emphasis is on the new or

present moment, with a strong interest in the use of the past. It implies quest for root, originality. It can not be denied that Neo-Victorianism contribution to recognitive justice as the Postmodern revisionist criterion most likely to exhume the fledgling genre's signature to future generation, as well as to politically marginalized group in the present.

## END NOTES

1. Erik Erikson in *Developmental Review* (Page 1-20) has stated the theory of identity formation, as it pertains to both the identity stage and to the remainder.
2. Henri Tajfel, has mentioned of relation between attitude and behavior in *Psychological Bulletin* (888-918)
3. Fredrik Barth stresses fluid, situational, dynamic character of ethnic identification with focus on boundary, its maintenance, recruitment, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The social Organization and cultural difference*.
4. Max Weber in "Rationality and Modernity" (Page – 19) puts forth the idea of instrumental rationality. The realization of moral and political goals require not a lesser but rather a greater amount of technological rationality.
5. Fredric Jameson in "Postmodernism" or "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" says of the effacement of key boundaries,

the erosion of the distinction between high culture and so called mass or popular culture.

6. The characterization of Zak in “*Star Turn*” dissolves the boundary between individual’s private mental world and the public realm of impersonal historical events.

7..Penelope lively in “*Moon Tiger*” (1987) created Claudia, who has in spades what are considered virtues in men and flower in woman she strides confidently into the male domains of history and war, bisexual freedom, financial independence..

8. Patricia Waugh in “*Practising Postmodernism*”, states that the model of identity is closely allied to the mutation of a Romantic concept of the self. He delineates Nietzsche’s point of view.

9. The degradation of natural atmosphere on women is quoted in Julian Barnes’s “*The Survivor*”.

10. In *Star Turn*, there is a reference to Freud.

11. John Fowler’s belief in the novel “*A Maggot*” illustrates that science is a reifying and self-imprisoning system. He is more in tune with the mystery and hazard, ongoing of existence.

12. A.S. Byatt in “*Possession*” unfolds the failure of confidence; it lacks the univocal status as objective reality located not only in our own time, but also in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

13. In “*Ever After*”, Graham Swift seems to be asking rhetorically, possibly spans the unbridgeable gulf of death.

14. Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 1968.London: Penguin

## END NOTES

15. Gilbert, Sandra; Gubar Susan, *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, 1984publications

16. “Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology”, “*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*”,4(1978),219-36(p.228),Cott also argues that the ideology of passionlessness offered women a way to assert control in sexual encounters ,both outside and within marriage.

17. *Science Corrupted: Victorian Biologists Consider “The Woman Situation”*,*Journal of the History of Biology*,11(1978)

18. Elaine Showalter, “*Victorian Women and Menstruation*”. Suffer and be still, pp-38-44.

19. Breuer and Freud, “*Studies in Hysteria*”, quoted in Showalter, p.158

20. John Ruskin speaks of the equality of women in “*Sesame and Lilies*”, *Lecture II, Of Queen’s Garden*.

21. *Madness and Civilization: A history of Insanity in the Age of Reason*”(Tavistock,1967)

22. Insanity produced, quoted in Tuana.

23. Havelock Ellis speaks of omnipresence of sex in “*The New Spirit*”.
24. Alfred Lord Tennyson, Merlin and Vivien, *Idylls of the King*, lines 812-13, and published as “*Vivien*” in 1859.
25. “The Newly Born Woman”, The Helen Cixous Readers ed. Susan Sellers (Routledge, 1994) p.p.-37-45.
26. A.S. Byatt in “*Possession*” inscribes the reality of the past.
27. Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: Panopticism*, describes the control upon individuality
28. Julian Barnes in “*A History of the World*” describes history as self-reflexive mediation.

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