

Study Material

CC - XI: Women's Writing

Section-A

❖ **Analysis of 'I cannot live with you' by Emily Dickinson (10 Marks)**

"I Cannot Live With You" is one of Emily Dickinson's great love poems, close in form to the poetic argument of a classic Shakespearean sonnet. The poem shares the logical sensibility of the metaphysical poets whom she admired, advancing her thoughts about her lover, slowly, from the first declaration to the inevitable devastating conclusion. However, unlike most sonnet arguments or "carpe diem" poems, this poem seems designed to argue against love. The poem can be broken down into five parts. The first explains why she cannot live with the object of her love, the second why she cannot die with him, the third why she cannot rise with him, the fourth why she cannot fall with him, and the final utterance of impossibility. The poem begins with a sense of impossibility:

I cannot live with You –
It would be Life –
And Life is over there –
Behind the Shelf
The Sexton keeps the Key to –
Putting up
Our Life – His porcelain -
Like a Cup –
Discarded of the Housewife –
Quaint – or Broke –
A newer Sevres pleases –
Old Ones crack –

Moving from the abstraction of the first four lines, the second and third stanzas enter into the domestic metaphor of china, which is described variously as discarded, broken, quaint, and cracked, put up on the shelf and forgotten. If life is "behind the shelf," it is completely outside the experience of the china, as is the speaker's life. The power of the first line is temporarily muted, and the reader is similarly trapped inside a haunting verse of cups and shelves, eerie in their quietness. That the china is locked away by the sexton, a representative of the official or practical face of religiosity, seems to imply that it is not only the domestic sphere that the speaker is trapped in, but also the binds of the church, or at least the administrative daily function of the church, which Dickinson viewed as being quite separate from the passion behind it.

The lines themselves alternate between long and short, and the disparity between the lines becomes more dramatic in the second and third stanzas. The delicate, halting, "cracked" lines that describe the china seem physically overwhelmed by the lines about the housewife or sexton. Between the second and third stanzas, the enjambment (pausing on "cup") compounded with the

dash, which emphasizes the pause and line break, allows life to be hopefully like a “cup” for the fraction of a second it takes the reader to make it to the next line, where it is discarded “of the housewife.” This line reads as both “The housewife discards the cup” and also “the Sexton puts away the cup discarded by the housewife,” as if what is not good enough for marriage is good enough for the church. “Quaint,” incidentally, is a word that Dickinson used to describe herself in letters, when writing about her reclusiveness; “half-cracked” is a word that T. H. Higginson, her poetic correspondent, used to describe her.

In the second part of the poem, Dickinson imagines that the alternative to living with someone is dying with them, but that also has been denied to her:

I could not die – with You –
For One must wait
To shut the Other’s Gaze down –
You – could not –
And I – Could I stand by
And see You – freeze –
Without my Right of Frost –
Death’s privilege?

These stanzas express not only the fact that if she cannot live with her love she is dead, but also that the “with” is taken from her—she can die, but not with him because death is necessarily a private act. First she argues that she must wait to “shut the Other’s Gaze down,” which might literally mean to close his eyes, but also the word “Gaze” implies that there is something sustaining about the act of looking upon another with love; it is that which creates life, and it must be actively shut down for death to occur. She imagines that he would not be strong enough to do that for her. Her second argument within this section is that, upon his death, denied the “Right of Frost,” she would long for death.

In the third section of the poem, Dickinson imagines the final judgment, and how it might be overwhelmed by her earthly love:

Nor could I rise – with You –
Because Your Face
Would put out Jesus’ –
That New Grace
Glow plain – and foreign
On my homesick Eye –
Except that You than He
Shone closer by –
They’d judge Us – How –
For You – served Heaven – You know,
Or sought to –
I could not –
Because You saturated Sight –

And I had not more Eyes
For sordid excellence
As Paradise

She is unable to see or experience paradise because she is so consumed with her vision of him—not only does his face “put out” the face of Jesus like a candle, but he “saturated her sight” so much in life that she is unable to “see” paradise, meaning, perhaps that he distracted her from piety. The speaker’s experience in this poem is deeply linked to sight, and suggests that that which cannot be seen cannot be experienced. In the stanza beginning “They’d judge us,” there is a complete breakdown of rhyme; when she writes “I could not,” she does not rhyme, and the faltering echoes the broken fragility of the first lines. The pairing of “sordid excellence” is both a metaphysical touch and a characteristic Dickinson moment of transforming an abstraction into its opposite with an oddly chosen adjective.

In the fourth section of the poem, the speaker describes why she cannot be in hell with her lover:

And were You lost, I would be –
Though My Name
Rang loudest
On the Heavenly fame –
And were You – saved –
And I – condemned to be
Where You were not –
That self – were Hell to Me –

Just as she cannot see heaven because his face obscures her view, her perspective of hell is confined to being without him. If she were saved and he were lost, then she would be in hell without him, and if they were both saved, but saved apart, then that would also be hell. In admirable pursuit of the conclusion of this radical argument, which has grown ever more impossible as she chases it, she passionately refuses to believe that there is an alternative where they are both saved together or both condemned.

The final stanza acts structurally like the final couplet of a sonnet, finishing the argument, but leaving a question for the reader to consider:

So We must meet apart –
You there – I – here –
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are – and Prayer –
And that White Sustenance –
Despair –

In the line “You there – I – here” we can see a perfect example of how the poet’s dashes work to hold the words and ideas of “you” and “I” apart.

As in a sonnet, the rhyme scheme tightens up quite a bit in this final section. Dickinson internally rhymes “are” with “ajar,” half-rhymes “apart” and “ajar,” “despair” with “there,” “here” and “prayer,” then closes up the stanza in rhyme. It is as if she intends the final rhyme to show

the perfection of her argument in the poem's conclusion. Additionally, those four words that she rhymes quite eloquently express the problem itself, with prayer standing in for its close synonym, hope. The intricacy of the rhyme leaves "sustenance" as unrhymed, underscoring that "White Sustenance" does not nourish. Incidentally, early publications of the poem replaced "white" with "pale" as if softening the conclusion that she reaches by modifying the degree of her language; "pale sustenance" seems somehow more sustaining.

However, even as she closes the argument, it opens up a little, because in this despair she has found a kind of sustenance, however undernourishing it is. There is something holy about this kind of despair, and "white" seems also to be "heavenly," as if in losing her hope for the afterlife, she has found a new earthly devotion to replace it, and then elevated it to celestial levels. This stanza is notably the first time she uses the word "We," capitalized for emphasis, and creates a paradox where "meet apart" seems possible, or at least more possible than any of the other alternatives she has rejected throughout the poem. She claims that the door is just "ajar" but then compares it to oceans, making "ajar" as wide open as the earth itself, and then linking it to prayer, or hope. In this amazingly deft bit of wordplay, Dickinson reverses everything as she's saying it—the lovers are apart but meeting; the door is ajar, like an ocean; and the speaker is somehow sustained by despair. In a final touch, she ends the poem with an elongated endstop, printed as a dash, and whether it is meant to be "ajar" or more definitively shut is as unanswerable as the final question of the poem.

❖ **Emily Dickinson's "I'm wife; I've finished that" (10 Marks)**

➤ **A Feminist Literary Criticism of Emily Dickinson's Poem**

Feminist scholars have identified a number of Dickinson's poems which directly comment upon the role and experiences of women within a repressive patriarchal order. In addition, some of these critics have suggested that many more poems can be interpreted as the poet's opinion of gender issues if one were to assume that the speaker in each verse is a female. For example, Poem 271 ("A solemn thing—it was—I said—") presents the image of "a woman—white," which may be a reference to a bride, a novice nun, or a female poet. At the conclusion, the speaker of the poem finds satisfaction in her "small' life," which some commentators have suggested is a rejection of conventional female roles in favor of pursuing those that she finds more fulfilling. A similar theme of empowerment has been detected in Poem 657 ("I dwell in Possibility—"), which many critics have maintained is a commentary on the ability of the female artist to subvert the oppressive limitations of the patriarchal order through the transcendental power of poetry. Though her poems were not grouped into published collections during her lifetime, Dickinson did sew certain poems into "fascicles," or small booklets, indicating that she viewed them as related meditations on a central theme. Her fascicle 22, which includes Poem 271, is one example. Scholars have focused on the poems in this fascicle—which reflect on such subjects as domestic life, liberty, human relationships, and

spiritual redemption—as verses indicative of Dickinson’s desire to defy the social and gender conventions of her day.

Dickinson’s poetry reflects her loneliness as we know she was seldom left her house and by the 1860s, Dickinson lived in almost total physical isolation from the outside world. The speakers of her poems generally live in a state of want, but her poems are also marked by the intimate recollection of inspirational moments which are decidedly life-giving and suggest the possibility of happiness. Her work was heavily influenced by the Metaphysical poets of seventeenth-century England, as well as her reading of the Book of Revelation and her upbringing in a Puritan New England town which encouraged a Calvinist, orthodox, and conservative approach to Christianity.

Many of Dickinson’s poems discuss female identity in relation to males and her own identity in accordance to religion, nature, life and love. I think some of her poetry could definitely be grounded in the probability that she might have been thinking of her own identity in a society where first the father dominates and then the husband, but where she has experienced neither. When both don’t exist, the patriarchal system has been undercut.

The poem, ‘I ‘m “Wife”- I’ve finished that’, is written from a female perspective about a woman’s freedom before and after marriage. The female voice in the poem is present however the identity of the woman is ‘made ultimately invisible’. This is because nineteenth century female writers had to ‘make themselves heard’ whilst ‘denying their presence as a female object’ (Grabher, 1998: 231).

Many critics share the view that Dickinson lived in a ‘patriarchal’ society (Martin, 2002:45). Majority of her poems include women living in an oppressive society and the poem is unsurprisingly feminist. Many of Dickinson’s poems have been analysed in order to understand how the poet reacted to the limitations put on women in the nineteenth century society.

Analysis of the Poem

Analysis of the poem “I’m wife; I’ve finished that” (10 Marks)

Dickinson lived a quiet private life; it was in her writings that she revealed a strong feminine supremacy through her inspiring and creative work. She rarely left her house and started to live in almost complete isolation yet her poems demand ‘readerly participation’ (Martin, 2002:6). The poetic voices in Dickinson’s poems are often seeking to want more from life; but they also contain the idea of hope where opportunities for contentment and happiness are possible.

In the poem ‘I ‘m “Wife”- I’ve finished that’ Dickinson wanted to show the difference in becoming a ‘Woman’ and a ‘Wife’. The poetic voice is a young girl who has conflicting feelings about turning into a woman particularly a wife, whilst constantly reassuring herself that it is ‘safer’ and ‘comfortable’ to be so. Her contradictory feelings arise when she realises that leaving girlhood, becoming a woman and then a wife will prevent her from having self-identity, because once she is a ‘Wife’ she is almost labelled as the possession of her husband.

Emily Dickinson portrays an extremely complicated approach regarding marriage in the poem. Although Dickinson was not married, she clearly demonstrated her perception on both situations, of being single and being married.

In the opening verse, the poetic voice is clearly anxious and concerned that she will have to close the chapters of her life as a girl now that she is married. The label 'Wife' given to women is contrasted with 'Czar'; which is commonly associated with men as a wife can never become 'Czar' but a husband can. A woman is capable of becoming 'Czar' on her own, however once a 'wife' becomes a wife it 'Stops there!' with only the husband to appreciate her. It is clear that there are pressures on becoming a wife and the poetic voice is nervous that her life will become dominated by her husband after marriage.

Inequality is present in the first stanza because the female is expected to go through changes to become a woman and then change from a woman into a wife; however nothing is expected of a man. Piercing dashes are used to dismiss any comparisons which may be used in regard to the persona's previous life as a girl (Crumbly, 1997: 123). Capital letters and exclamation marks on the closing line of the poem show the frustration, unfairness and discrimination between men and women in Dickinson's society.

I think the poetic voice is reluctantly accepting the idea that a 'woman' should 'Stop' at becoming a 'wife' and to be nothing more, because a wife has to acknowledge her husband wishes which restricts her from full freedom. In the poem Dickinson is implying that a woman who is not married is capable of more, without having others interfere such as a husband might.

Dickinson did not get married. It is startling then that her view on girls growing up would be to then move on to the stage of marriage. Dickinson is experiencing change because she has never been married before; therefore fantasizing about marriage allows her to explore her imagination and experience male dominance which in reality she does not want. I think the poet believed that it is 'safer' to be labelled and to be given an identity and she reflects this in the poem because it makes her feel protected compared to the identity she has in reality.

Dickinson produces a complicated representation of marriage. In the first verse 'I'm "wife" – I've finished that / I'm "Woman" now – It's safer so,' the poetic voice is trying to reassure herself that now that she is married she has left her girlhood behind and has become a complete woman. I think the point Dickinson is trying to express is that every girl only truly becomes a full woman after she has married. In line 3, 'I'm Czar' illustrates a positive idea regarding marriage however the last line of verse 1, 'It's safer so' is contradictory. In the nineteenth century it was the norm for girls to grow up get married and to have children; therefore in the last line Dickinson ridicules the cultural norms of society for imposing these stereotypical views on girls pressurising them to get married.

In the second line of stanza 2, the marriage is called a 'soft Eclipse' which is the phase the woman is going through whilst reflecting on herself as a girl who has a sceptical feeling on marriage. The inequality of men and women is present when the woman goes through the stages of being a girl and into womanhood. Dickinson's feminist thoughts are reflected in the poem showing that the persona secretly thinks it is more acceptable to be "Woman" instead of "Wife".

However, it could be argued that she is reflecting on the natural stages a girl goes through in life, and she sees marriage as a protection from pain. I think that Dickson is implying that a woman is more secure in marriage having a place in society, a partner to care for you and household full of responsibilities to fulfil the expectations of a “Wife”.

The poet compares being single and married to that of heaven and earth. The ‘Earth’ is used to suggest that single life is hard whereas married life is compared to that in ‘Heaven’.

Emily Dickinson is insecure with the idea of becoming a full woman. She talks about marriage and uses quotation marks around “Wife” and “Woman” because these words seem strange when associated with her, because she does not want to get married. However she visualises getting married and appears to be mocking the concept too.

Becoming a “Wife” was the only responsibility a girl had when she reached womanhood and there is clearly a feeling of regret. Dickinson has no social identity because she was single and women did not want to have this title as it was undesirable in society.

The last stanza emphasises on Dickinson’s feelings about marriage. The point she is making is that married life will bring ‘comfort’ to a girl through marriage. The final verse starts with ‘This being comfort – then/ That other kind — was pain’, this creates contrasting ideas suggesting that marriage can bring happiness however it can also bring problems, sadness and pain.

The pain represents the reality of marriage within the poem. A husband and wife are combined by marriage and may be happy however, if they do not unite problems will arise that threatens the marriage and the home. When this happens it is very often that one person in the relationship will over power the other and it is usually the husband who dominates and suppresses the wife.

Dickinson constantly compares herself as a wife to a woman and a girl from the start to the end of the poem asking ‘why compare?’ because she is confused by the expectations required of a girl to get married, however she is trying to come to a conclusion. The last line ‘I’m “Wife”! Stop there!’ sounds like a command from a man, shouting and ordering the woman to stop questioning herself. The poet is trying to reflect that pain is caused when being alone. A married woman is a woman in her own right, although she will be expected to stop at being a “Wife” because only certain traits will be required of them.

Dickinson finishes the poem in an optimistic manner, stating that marriage should not be compared because she is a “Wife” and her thoughts should stop there. Again she is choosing to identify herself as a “Wife” although in reality she was not, which implies that being a “Wife” was a respectable status, and Dickinson is clearly mocking society by going against it.

A distinct emphasis has been placed on the way Dickinson portrays speech and thoughts, on the poetic voice in the poem. Direct thought is the dominant manner that she uses to display the persona’s expressions because it makes the poem more dramatic. The reader gains an insight into the conscience of the poetic voice and the authors mind; this allows readers to observe the different thoughts and feelings that the author is experiencing and trying to convey. The speech and thought of the poetic voice appears to be very confused talking about marriage with

contrasting thoughts which shows that the poet is incomplete in some way and her thoughts are very disarrayed.

Dickinson clearly wanted to reflect the complicated issues regarding views on women and marriage. The first stanza lines 1-3 show that Emily is in favour of marriage, however the last line contradicts her opinion and she is implying that being married is the safer option, ridiculing society, as they impose these views on girls that they should get married.

She wants to highlight that marriage is respectable in society and provides girls with a secure life however, it can also cause pain and problems especially for women who enjoy their independence which reflects the feminist views that women will be restricted after marriage because they will be dominated by males, their husbands.

The poem compares the confusing thoughts of a female who is pressurised to get married and to follow the norms of society. I think the poem has an extremely feminist approach and is intended to mock society for wanting girls to grow up, marry and live a typical life. This poem contrasts ideas to show that women are independently better on their own; however marriage is the safer option because it is what society expects of them.

❖ **Analysis of Poem “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath**

Sylvia Plath’s poem “Daddy” remains one of the most controversial modern poems ever written. It is a dark, surreal, and at times painful allegory that uses metaphor and other devices to carry the idea of a female victim finally freeing herself from her father. In Plath’s own words:

“Here is a poem spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. Her father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other—she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it.”

“Daddy” was written on **October 12th 1962**, a month after Plath had separated from her husband and moved—with their two small children—from their home in Devon to a flat in London. Four months later Plath was dead, but she wrote some of her best poems during that turbulent period.

• **Line-by-Line Analysis of Plath’s “Daddy” (5 Marks)**

Stanza/Lines	What It Means
Lines 1-5: You do not do, you do not do Any more, black shoe In which I have lived like a foot For thirty years, poor and white, Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.	The speaker says after 30 years, she will no longer live trapped inside the memory of her father. Her comparison of him to a shoe evokes the old nursery rhyme about an old woman who lives in a shoe, and the singsong repetition and the word “achoo” sounds similarly childish. The “you” to whom the poem is addressed is the absent father.

Stanza/Lines	What It Means
<p>Lines 6-10: Daddy, I have had to kill you. You died before I had time— Marble-heavy, a bag full of God, Ghastly statue with one gray toe Big as a Frisco seal</p>	<p>In line 6, the speaker shocks us with the assertion she has already murdered her father—figuratively. A “bag full of God” could mean he’s in a body bag or that his body is just a bag. We get an image of how big he is in her eyes via the heavy, cold corpse so large that it spans the US, his toes in the San Francisco Bay...</p>
<p>Lines 11-15: And a head in the freakish Atlantic Where it pours bean green over blue In the waters off beautiful Nauset. I used to pray to recover you. Ach, du.</p>	<p>...and his head in the Atlantic. She used to pray to “recover” him and she could mean that she wished she could have him back or heal him. This German expression is a sigh of (angry? impatient?) familiarity: “Oh, you.” Plath’s father was a German immigrant.</p>
<p>Lines 16-20: In the German tongue, in the Polish town Scraped flat by the roller Of wars, wars, wars. But the name of the town is common. My Polack friend</p>	<p>The repetition of “wars” gives us the sense that there have been many and of landscapes being repetitively flattened by war.</p>
<p>Lines 21-25: Says there are a dozen or two. So I never could tell where you Put your foot, your root, I never could talk to you. The tongue stuck in my jaw.</p>	<p>This part could mean that the speaker doesn’t know precisely where her father came from (“put your foot, your root”), and that she had no rapport with him.</p>
<p>Lines 26-30: It stuck in a barb wire snare. Ich, ich, ich, ich, I could hardly speak. I thought every German was you. And the language obscene</p>	<p>Trying to talk to her father was dangerous and painful, like sticking your tongue in a trap. “Ich” is the German word for “I,” and here she is reduced to stammering in fear and confusion. Is she scared or nervous or...?</p>
<p>Lines 31-35: An engine, an engine Chuffing me off like a Jew. A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen. I began to talk like a Jew. I think I may well be a Jew.</p>	<p>Trying to speak German makes her feel like she’s trapped on a train, headed towards a death camp: We see the speaker’s mental and emotional conversion here and how she associates her fear and terror of her</p>

Stanza/Lines	What It Means
	father with the struggle of the Jewish people against the Nazis.
<p>Lines 36-40: The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna Are not very pure or true. With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack I may be a bit of a Jew.</p>	<p>In these lines we join the speaker on that train winding through Europe. The white snow and the clear beer contrast starkly to the dark deeds being inflicted by Nazis in the name of racial purity. The speaker is consciously, deliberately choosing sides.</p>
<p>Lines 41-45: I have always been scared of you, With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo. And your neat mustache And your Aryan eye, bright blue. Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——</p>	<p>“Luftwaffe” is the German air force; “gobbledygoo” is another childlike word that conveys her disdain for the German. She calls herself a Jew and her father a Nazi killer. A Panzer-man is one who drives a tank.</p>
<p>Lines 46-50: Not God but a swastika So black no sky could squeak through. Every woman adores a Fascist, The boot in the face, the brute Brute heart of a brute like you.</p>	<p>His Nazism blocks the sun, it’s so huge. Why do women love Fascists? Is it bitter sarcasm or truth? Perhaps she’s saying that in relationships, women are dominated by men. In order to love a man you must be masochistic.</p>
<p>Lines 51-55: You stand at the blackboard, daddy, In the picture I have of you, A cleft in your chin instead of your foot But no less a devil for that, no not Any less the black man who</p>	<p>Now, she’s calling her father a devil. The speaker describes a photo of her father. BTW, Plath’s father was a biology professor (see photo below).</p>
<p>Lines 56-60: Bit my pretty red heart in two. I was ten when they buried you. At twenty I tried to die And get back, back, back to you. I thought even the bones would do.</p>	<p>He broke her heart. He died when she was 10 and she tried to commit suicide at 20 to get “back, back, back” (like earlier, when she tried to “recover” him). The repetition here emphasizes her futile desperation.</p>
<p>Lines 61-65: But they pulled me out of the sack, And they stuck me together with glue. And then I knew what to do. I made a model of you, A man in black with a Meinkampf look</p>	<p>She’s so desperate to be with him that even his bones will do. She figuratively tries to join him in his grave (by killing herself), but they (doctors?) save her. So she changes</p>

Stanza/Lines	What It Means
	her tactic and makes an effigy of him.
Lines 66-70: And a love of the rack and the screw. And I said I do, I do. So daddy, I'm finally through. The black telephone's off at the root, The voices just can't worm through.	She makes a man in her father's image, a sadist, and marries him ("I do, I do"). So now, she no longer needs her father. She cuts off communication with him, the dead, here.
Lines 71-75: If I've killed one man, I've killed two—— The vampire who said he was you And drank my blood for a year, Seven years, if you want to know. Daddy, you can lie back now.	Although she didn't literally kill anyone, the speaker feels as though she has killed both her father and her husband (a parasite who "drank my blood" for 7 years). Perhaps she means simply that they are dead to her now. BTW, Plath was married to Ted Hughes for about 7 years.
Lines 76-80: There's a stake in your fat black heart And the villagers never liked you. They are dancing and stamping on you. They always knew it was you. Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.	She tells her dead father to lie back in his grave. She says she's done with him forever. Maybe she has exorcized or mentally killed him properly this time.

"Daddy" is an attempt to combine the personal with the mythical. It's unsettling, a weird nursery rhyme of the divided self, a controlled blast aimed at a father and a husband (since the two conflate in the 14th stanza). The poem expresses Plath's terror and pain lyrically and hauntingly. It combines light echoes of a Mother Goose nursery rhyme with much darker resonances of World War II.

The father is seen as a black shoe, a bag full of God, a cold marble statue, a Nazi, a swastika, a fascist, a sadistic brute, and a vampire. The girl (narrator, speaker) is trapped in her idolization of this man. She is a victim trapped in that black tomblike shoe, in the sack that holds the father's bones, and—in a sense—in the train as it chugs along to Auschwitz. "Daddy" is full of disturbing imagery, and that's why some have called "Daddy" "the Guernica of modern poetry."

Electra Complex

In psychoanalysis, an Electra complex is the female version of Freud's Oedipus complex. Jung posited that a daughter perceives her mother as a rival for the psychosexual energy of her father, and wants to possess the father. This unresolved desire sometimes manifests as negative fixation on the father or father figure.

What did Plath mean that "Daddy" was 'spoken by a girl with an Electra complex'?

In “Daddy,” the speaker is father-fixated. She’s a “daddy’s girl” and uses the childlike, endearing term “daddy” seven times to describe the man whose memory tortures her. During the course of the poem, the speaker’s goal shifts from an attempt to recover, reunite with, and marry her dead father to an attempt to kill his memory and terminate his dominance over her.

The Trial of Eichmann

Sylvia Plath undoubtedly knew about the Final Solution of the Nazis in World War II. The trial of Adolf Eichmann lasted from April 11, 1961 to December 15, 1961 and was shown on television, allowing the whole world to witness the horrors of the holocaust. (Plath wrote “Daddy” the following year.) As a leading instigator of death in the concentration camp gas chambers, the SS Lieutenant-Colonel became notorious as the ‘desk-murderer’. He was found guilty by trial in Jerusalem, Israel, and sentenced to hang.

Daddy and the Holocaust

As the poem progresses, the narrator identifies herself with the plight of the Jews during the Nazi regime in Germany. There are many direct references to the holocaust in the poem. Why does the poet use such a metaphor? Does it take things one step too far? Is it acceptable to use such an event to drive home a personal message of pain and torment? Is it okay to appropriate someone else’s pain?

Using the nightmarish scenario of the holocaust as a metaphor for the daughter’s relationship with her German father does tap into historical depth and meaning. The poem is ironically depersonalized and taken beyond mere confession into archetypal father-daughter pathos. Sylvia Plath has risked all by introducing the holocaust into the poem; only her astute use of rhythm, rhyme and lyric allows her to get away with it.

➤ Which Poetic Devices Are Used in “Daddy”?

It has 16 stanzas, each with five lines, making a total of 80 lines. The meter is roughly tetrameter, four beats, but also uses pentameter with a mix of stresses. Thirty-seven lines are end-stopped and enjambment is frequently used. Metaphor and simile are present, as are half-rhymes, alliteration, and assonance. The father is compared to a black shoe, a bag full of God, a giant, cold, marble statue, a Nazi, a swastika, a fascist, a sadist, and a vampire.

The speaker uses baby talk to describe truly dark and painful feelings. She calls him “daddy,” she calls a sneeze “achoo,” “gobbledygoo,” she gets tongue-tied and stammers (“Ich, ich, ich, ich”), and uses singsong repetitions. The juxtaposition of innocence and pain emphasizes both.

There’s also the howling, mournful “choo choo” sound of a steam train throughout: “You do not do, you do not do,” “achoo,” black shoe, glue, you, do, du, “I do, I do,” shoe, two, screw, through, gobbledygoo, Jew, blue... This repeated “ooo-ooo” sound gives the poem momentum, energy, and conjures up the image of a train chuffing its way to the final destination (which, in this case, is a Nazi death camp).

➤ Language

This poem is full of surreal imagery and allusion interspersed with scenes from the poet's childhood and a kind of dark cinematic language that borrows from nursery rhyme and song lyric. Every so often German is used, reflecting the fact that Plath's father, Otto, was from Germany and must have spoken in this language to Sylvia in her childhood.

➤ **Stanza-by-Stanza Analysis of Plath's "Daddy"**

Stanza 1: A first line repeated, a declaration of intent, the first sounds of oo—this is the train setting off on its final death march. The black shoe is a metaphor for the father. Inside, trapped for 30 years, is the narrator, about to escape.

Stanza 2: But she can only free herself by killing her "daddy," who does resemble the poet's actual father, Otto, who died when she was 8. His toe turned black from gangrene. He eventually had to have his leg amputated due to complications of diabetes. When young Plath heard this news, she said, "I'll never speak to God again." Here, the bizarre, surreal imagery builds up—his toe is as big as a seal, the grotesque image of her father has fallen like a statue.

Stanza 3: The personal weaves in and out of the allegory. The statue's head is in the Atlantic, on the coast at Nauset Beach, Cape Cod, where the Plath family used to holiday. The father icon stretches all the way across the USA. The imagery is temporarily beautiful: bean green over blue water. The speaker says she used to pray to get her father back, restored to health.

Stanza 4: We move on to Poland and the second world war. There's a mix of the factual and fictional. Otto Plath was born in Grabow, Poland, a common name, but spoke German in a typical autocratic fashion. This town has been razed in many wars adding strength to the idea that Germany (the father) has demolished life.

Stanza 5: Again, the narrator addresses the father as you, a direct address which brings the reader closer to the action. I never could talk to you seems to come right from the daughter's heart. Plath is hinting at a lack of communication, of instability and paralysis. Note the use of the line endings two, you, and you—the train building up momentum.

Stanza 6: The use of barb wire snare ratchets up the tension. The narrator is in pain for the first time. The German ich (I) is repeated four times as if her sense of self-worth is in question (or is she recalling the father shouting I,I,I,I?). And is she unable to speak because of the shock or just difficulty with the language? The father is seen as an all-powerful icon; he even represents all Germans.

Stanza 7: As the steam engine chugs on, the narrator reveals that this is no ordinary train she is on. It is a death train taking her off to a concentration camp, one of the Nazi death factories where millions of Jews were cruelly gassed and cremated during World War II. The narrator now identifies fully with the Jews.

Stanza 8: Moving on, into Austria, the country where Plath's mother was born, the narrator reinforces her identity—she is a bit of a Jew because she carries a Taroc (Tarot) pack of cards and has gypsy blood in her. Perhaps she is a fortune teller able to predict the fate of people? Plath was keenly interested in the Tarot card symbols. Some believe that certain poems in her book Ariel use similar occult symbology.

Sylvia Plath: Summary of the Poem and Analysis of “Daddy”

(10 Marks)

+ Summary

“Daddy,” comprised of sixteen five-line stanzas, is a brutal and venomous poem commonly understood to be about Plath’s deceased father, Otto Plath.

The speaker begins by saying that he “does not do anymore,” and that she feels like she has been a foot living in a black shoe for thirty years, too timid to either breathe or sneeze. She insists that she needed to kill him (she refers to him as “Daddy”), but that he died before she had time. She describes him as heavy, like a “bag full of God,” resembling a statue with one big gray toe and its head submerged in the Atlantic Ocean. She remembers how she at one time prayed for his return from death, and gives a German utterance of grief (which translates literally to “Oh, you”).

She knows he comes from a Polish town that was overrun by “wars, wars, wars,” but one of her Polack friends has told her that there are several towns of that name. Therefore, she cannot uncover his hometown, where he put his “foot” and “root.”

She also discusses how she could never find a way to talk to him. Even before she could speak, she thought every German was him, and found the German language “obscene.” In fact, she felt so distinct from him that she believed herself a Jew being removed to a concentration camp. She started to talk like a Jew and to feel like a Jew in several different ways. She wonders in fact, whether she might actually be a Jew, because of her similarity to a gypsy. To further emphasize her fear and distance, she describes him as the Luftwaffe, with a neat mustache and a bright blue Aryan eye. She calls him a “Panzer-man,” and says he is less like God than like the black swastika through which nothing can pass. In her mind, “Every woman adores a Fascist,” and the “boot in the face” that comes with such a man.

When she remembers Daddy, she thinks of him standing at the blackboard, with a cleft chin instead of a cleft foot. However, this transposition does not make him a devil. Instead, he is like the black man who “Bit [her] pretty red heart in two.” He died when she was ten, and she tried to join him in death when she was twenty. When that attempt failed, she was glued back together. At this point, she realized her course - she made a model of Daddy and gave him both a “Meinkampf look” and “a love of the rack and the screw.” She promises him that she is “finally through;” the telephone has been taken off the hook, and the voices can no longer get through to her.

She considers that if she has killed one man, then she has in fact killed two. Comparing him to a vampire, she remembers how he drank her blood for a year, but then realizes the duration was closer to seven years. She tells him he can lie back now. There is a stake in his heart, and the villagers who despised him now celebrate his death by dancing on his corpse. She concludes by announcing, “Daddy, Daddy, you bastard, I’m through.”

+ Analysis

“Daddy” is perhaps Sylvia Plath’s best-known poem. It has elicited a variety of distinct reactions, from feminist praise of its unadulterated rage towards male dominance, to wariness at its usage of Holocaust imagery. It has been reviewed and criticized by hundreds and hundreds of scholars, and is upheld as one of the best examples of confessional poetry.

It is certainly a difficult poem for some: its violent imagery, invocation of Jewish suffering, and vitriolic tone can make it a decidedly uncomfortable reading experience. Overall, the poem relates Plath’s journey of coming to terms with her father’s looming figure; he died when she was eight. She casts herself as a victim and him as several figures, including a Nazi, vampire, devil, and finally, as a resurrected figure her husband, whom she has also had to kill.

Though the final lines have a triumphant tone, it is unclear whether she means she has gotten “through” to him in terms of communication, or whether she is “through” thinking about him. Plath explained the poem briefly in a BBC interview:

The poem is spoken by a girl with an Electra complex. The father died while she thought he was God. Her case is complicated by the fact that her father was also a Nazi and her mother very possibly part Jewish. In the daughter the two strains marry and paralyze each other –she has to act out the awful little allegory once over before she is free of it.

In other words, contradiction is at the heart of the poem’s meaning. Neither its triumph nor its horror is to be taken as the sum total of her intention. Instead, each element is contradicted by its opposite, which explains how it shoulders so many distinct interpretations.

This sense of contradiction is also apparent in the poem’s rhyme scheme and organization. It uses a sort of nursery rhyme, singsong way of speaking. There are hard sounds, short lines, and repeated rhymes (as in “Jew,” “through,” “do,” and “you”). This establishes and reinforces her status as a childish figure in relation to her authoritative father. This relationship is also clear in the name she uses for him - “Daddy”- and in her use of “oo” sounds and a childish cadence. However, this childish rhythm also has an ironic, sinister feel, since the chant-like, primitive quality can feel almost like a curse. One critic wrote that the poem’s “simplistic, insistent rhythm is one form of control, the obsessive rhyming and repeated short phrases are others, means by which she attempts to charm and hold off evil spirits.” In other words, the childish aspects have a crucial, protective quality, rather than an innocent one.

“Daddy” can also be viewed as a poem about the individual trapped between herself and society. Plath weaves together patriarchal figures – a father, Nazis, a vampire, a husband – and then holds them all accountable for history’s horrors. Like “The Colossus,” “Daddy” imagines a larger-than-life patriarchal figure, but here the figure has a distinctly social, political aspect. Even the vampire is discussed in terms of its tyrannical sway over a village. In this interpretation, the speaker comes to understand that she must kill the father figure in order to break free of the limitations that it places upon her. In particular, these limitations can be understood as patriarchal forces that enforce a strict gender structure. It has the feel of an exorcism, an act of purification. And yet the journey is not easy. She realizes what she has to do, but it requires a sort of hysteria. In order to succeed, she must have complete control, since she fears she will be destroyed unless she totally annihilates her antagonist.

The question about the poem's confessional, autobiographical content is also worth exploring. The poem does not exactly conform to Plath's biography, and her above-cited explanation suggests it is a carefully-constructed fiction. And yet its ambivalence towards male figures does correspond to the time of its composition - she wrote it soon after learning that her husband Ted Hughes had left her for another woman. Further, the mention of a suicide attempt links the poem to her life.

However, some critics have suggested that the poem is actually an allegorical representation of her fears of creative paralysis, and her attempt to slough off the "male muse." Stephen Gould Axelrod writes that "at a basic level, 'Daddy' concerns its own violent, transgressive birth as a text, its origin in a culture that regards it as illegitimate—a judgment the speaker hurls back on the patriarch himself when she labels him a bastard." The father is perceived as an object and as a mythical figure (many of them, in fact), and never really attains any real human dimensions. It is less a person than a stifling force that puts its boot in her face to silence her. From this perspective, the poem is inspired less by Hughes or Otto than by agony over creative limitations in a male literary world. However, even this interpretation begs something of an autobiographical interpretation, since both Hughes and her father were representations of that world.

Plath's usage of Holocaust imagery has inspired a plethora of critical attention. She was not Jewish but was in fact German, yet was obsessed with Jewish history and culture. Several of her poems utilize Holocaust themes and imagery, but this one features the most striking and disturbing ones. She imagines herself being taken on a train to "Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen," and starting to talk like a Jew and feel like a Jew. She refers to her father as a "panzer-man," and notes his Aryan looks and his "Luftwaffe" brutality. One of the leading articles on this topic, written by Al Strangeways, concludes that Plath was using her poetry to understand the connection between history and myth, and to stress the voyeurism that is an implicit part of remembering. Plath had studied the Holocaust in an academic context, and felt a connection to it; she also felt like a victim, and wanted to combine the personal and public in her work to cut through the stagnant double-talk of Cold War America. She certainly uses Holocaust imagery, but does so alongside other violent myths and history, including those of Electra, vampirism, and voodoo. Strangeways writes that, "the Holocaust assumed a mythic dimension because of its extremity and the difficulty of understanding it in human terms, due to the mechanical efficiency with which it was carried out, and the inconceivably large number of victims." In other words, its shocking content is not an accident, but is rather an attempt to consider how the 20th century's great atrocity reflects and escalates a certain human quality.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine that any of Sylvia Plath's poems could leave the reader unmoved. "Daddy" is evidence of her profound talent, part of which rested in her unabashed confrontation with her personal history and the traumas of the age in which she lived. That she could write a poem that encompasses both the personal and historical is clear in "Daddy."

❖ **Advice to Women -- Eunice de Souza (10Marks)**

The Post 1947 era witnesses India's search for her own new identity soon after getting independence and it is partially because she is just a new born nation. This also affects the writings of the contemporary Indian English Writers and Indian English woman poets are no more exception. They also show this search for identity in their poems. But there prevails a difference in thought between earlier generation of woman poets and contemporary woman poets. The poetry of the contemporary new poets is the results of their experience as a woman in a patriarchal society. Their poetry show their woman sensibilities, their raising voice in male dominated society, their desire to get freedom, tensions and frustration issuing out from their forced life style. In that period some woman poets make rigorous attempts to map out new terrains for them and their poetry shows different aspects of feminism in their poetry. One such Indian English woman poet is Eunice de Souza. This paper tries to highlight some features that one can find out in Eunice de Souza's poetry.

Among these Indian English woman poets, Eunice de Souza emerges as a very well known feministic poet who shown how women are treated in a society under patriarchal domination. She firms her position by showing the conscious of the women community by enlarging the boundaries and borders of woman created for them. She is really a poet with rebellious and feminine sensibilities as sometimes she is confessional, sometimes she shows gender biasness and differences, sometimes she shows women's sense of alienation and her protest and satire over all these. She wants to create a position for her and for the whole women being in familiar, domestic and social life. Her poetry also shows the growth of psychological, inner and emotional potentialities. She has portrayed her own experience as a woman also in her poetry. Her collection of poems which seal her position as an Indian English woman poet in world literature are 'Fix', 'Women in Dutch Painting', 'Way of Belonging', 'Selected and New Poems' and 'A Necklace of Skulls'.

Eunice de Souza is a confessional poet as she expresses her anguish, her frustration, her depression. Actually she unlocks her heart to show her pain and also to get some relief from emotional and psychological point of view. She shows her personal life experiences and tries to communicate with the whole woman being socially, culturally and politically. She broadens the border for woman before the world. Woman is the epitome of beauty and this beauty is caged. In a confessional mode she also shows her inner contrasts, conflicts, loss, alienation, gender discrimination and at last satires on the entire male dominated society through her poetry. She is the poet of post modern independence era and her poetry reflects her efforts to liberate the woman soul from primitive, orthodox, traditional male bondage and customs. This confessional mode gives her freedom and flexibility which she uses in a very crafty way in her poetry.

This is a really off-beat poem - comparing a cat's haughtily indifferent attitude towards life, the universe and everything (it's always there – and it's all mine - let it be) to what a woman's reaction must be when jilted by a lover. Her 'Advice to Women' is a poem where she states the dryness of the lost tone with combative, resigns and friendly way. She wants to make

the women aware about the pain they receive from others. Here her prime focus is on the otherness of women:

Keep cats
if you want to learn to cope with
the otherness of lovers
otherness is not always neglect
cats return to their litter trays
when they need to.
Don't cuss out of the window
At their enemies
that stare of perpetual surprise
In those great green eyes
will teach you
to die alone." (*Advice to Women*)

The anti-centric and anti-traditional annoyance and fury which is prevalent in many of her poems bear the imprint of her frustration at the binary way of thinking about women in India. She is definitely an Indian voice of feminism which is not too personal and localized rather decentered and disseminated particularly in Indian context. Eunice's subject is not a particular 'woman' suffering instability and slippages; hers is 'female' as a cultural performer in a peculiar social context. '[F]emale no longer appears to be stable notion; its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as woman.' She contests the inertness of the female 'other' pushed beyond and away in a problematic matrix of patriarchy, notion and tradition. Eunice de Souza also acknowledges that women have to 'take it as it comes'. In her poems Eunice unravels the foundations on which women are laid amid confused and violent world of human affairs. Here gender has simply subsidiary role in comparison to the domestic transfixing of women as a natural 'other'. According to Mohanty: "To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness being 'woman' has nothing to do with race, class, nation or sexuality, just with gender. But no one 'becomes a woman because she is female'".

❖ **Analysis of *Bequest* (10 Marks)**

The crisis the females face is that of the patriarchal structure which control the domestic and social politics in hegemonic impersonation of reality. She strikes at triple dislocation of women in the particular Indian context, as someone's daughter, wife or mother, with every re-location renamed at other's will. She is much too artificial, a creature created with 'multiple and diffused points of origin', a nameless device, a 'plastic flower':

I wish I could be a
Wise Woman
Smiling, endlessly, vacuously
Like a plastic flower,
Saying Child, learn from me. (*Bequest*)

The lifelessness reveals the frustrations and tensions which a woman faces in a patriarchal structure dwindling between the way she wants to live and the way she is asked to live in a mode to desexualize her into some prescribed standard:

Some recommend stern standards
others say float along.
He says, take it as it comes,
meaning, of course, as he hands it out. (*Bequest*)

This lifelessness and inertia of existence, discontinuity and dissonance mark the very nature of the poetry of Eunice de Souza. She is one among the new generation of Indian poets trying to discover their own voice by effectively de-constructing the foundational and hierarchical sexual codes. The codes are related to implicit norms that govern the cultural intelligibility of women in all its aspects. The poetry of Eunice labour hard to break the shackles of tradition that dictate a culturally constructed body in a hegemonic scheme of society. Her poems express the in stress of desire of a woman to break free from the repressive foundations that have restricted her in a hierarchical frame.

In her poems we find that she shows her concern for woman. She shows the dislocation of mother, daughter, wife in a same way as the different roles of woman suffered different problems. She wants to be a device without these particular names as she is created with origin of multiple and diffused points. As she says in 'Bequest':

I Wish I could be a
Wise woman
Smiling, endlessly, vacuously
Like a plastic flower.
Saying child, learn from me. (*Bequest*)

In the space between their central longing for a location, transformation of socio-cultural construction and the deep dissatisfaction with the given world order, she undergoes the pangs of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts. The women in Eunice's conceptual imaginings are thus mystified and bewildered as to what are the 'stern standards' and ultimately they tend to re-emerge rather than to be reduced within a critical boundary in to a new non-compliant stance. In Butler's critical argumentation such condition may be explained as a means to 'radicalize the notion of feminine critique'.

In the concluding lines it can be said that Eunice de souza's poetry offers two levels of meaning. On one hand she shows the suffering and humiliation of women and on the other hand the complexity and rebellious nature of them. A deconstructive reading of her poetry shows all these. Her dissatisfaction with the society, its rules, its attitude towards women and its gender discrimination makes her poetry confessional in tone, dualism in meaning and rebelliousness in nature. Her mode of expression often are satiric, ironic and bitterness in meaning as she is saturated, tired and irritated to see how a girl is treated to shape her and mould her to fit in this society. They are made stereotypical and they are bound to behave according to society. She is not like the early Indian English Women poets as she protests against the inequality of women

both physically and mentally. Due to his inner anger, suppression, suffering, pain, oppression, humiliation and gender indiscrimination, she often becomes confessional in order to share her experience and also to get some relief. She takes stand for all the women through her poetry in order to give reaction against all these.

Wide Sargasso Sea (Non-Detailed Text)

Introduction:

Wide Sargasso Sea is a 1966 novel by Dominica-born British author Jean Rhys. It is a feminist and anti-colonial response to Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), describing the background to Mr Rochester's marriage from the point-of-view of his mad wife Antoinette Cosway, a Creole heiress. Antoinette Cosway is Rhys' version of Brontë's devilish "madwoman in the attic". Antoinette's story is told from the time of her youth in Jamaica, to her unhappy marriage to a certain unnamed English gentleman, who renames her Bertha, declares her mad, and takes her to England. Antoinette is caught in an oppressive patriarchal society in which she fully belongs neither to Europe nor to Jamaica. *Wide Sargasso Sea* explores the power of relationships between men and women and develops postcolonial themes, such as racism, displacement, and assimilation.

The narrative relies upon dream-like visions, fragmented impressions, incomplete sentences, and multiple first-person voices to create an unsettling overall sense of disorientation in the reader; this confusion in turn reflects the experiences of the work's main characters. Perhaps because its multitude of "interpretive possibilities," the novella has attracted a variety of critics, from feminists to deconstructionists to post-colonial theorists.

Undoubtedly the most important piece of contextual information about *Wide Sargasso Sea* is that the novella was inspired by Charlotte Brontë's famous nineteenth-century novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). In *Jane Eyre*, the eponymous heroine accepts a position as a governess at a remote country estate by the name of Thornfield Hall. She falls in love with her employer, the much-older Mr. Rochester, and eventually agrees to marry him. On the day of their nuptials, however, it comes out that Rochester is already married and is hiding his insane wife Bertha in the attic of his mansion. (This explains the evil laughter that Jane frequently hears emanating from the third story, as well as several strange incidents that befall the inhabitants of the house.) Jane, traumatized by the revelation of Rochester's shady past and horrified by his suggestion that she live as his mistress, flees from Thornfield, which the madwoman later burns to the ground. Bertha dies in the blaze and Rochester is temporarily blinded but regains his vision soon after his reunion with and marriage to Jane. The two, presumably, go on to live happily ever after.

Wide Sargasso Sea positions itself as a prequel to the events described in Brontë's tale and offers a much more nuanced and sympathetic portrait of the Creole madwoman Bertha, whom Rhys bestows with the more becoming moniker of "Antoinette." The title of the novella refers to the elongated portion of the Atlantic Ocean that separates England and the West Indies. The work traces Antoinette's life from her early childhood years in Jamaica to her disastrous marriage to an unnamed Englishman who imprisons her in the attic of his ancestral home. The

text is full of ominous foreshadowing, mostly related to Antoinette's ultimate descent into madness and her final violent assertion of agency - setting fire to the house where she is captive.

It should be noted that Rhys made two significant changes to the details of *Jane Eyre* as established by Brontë more than one hundred years earlier. First, she changed the time frame of the narrative, pushing Antoinette's childhood ahead by several decades. In Brontë's novel, which takes place between 1798 and 1808, Bertha Mason is an already a grown woman, but in Rhys's work *Antoinette Cosway* is still an adolescent when the story begins in 1834, one year after Emancipation. This modification enabled Rhys to emphasize the racial tensions as well as the antagonism of the natives toward the colonizer: the revised time frame places Rhys's story as an end-of-empire text, while Brontë's novel takes place at the height of British imperialism. Additionally, Rhys revised the lineage of the madwoman as outlined in *Jane Eyre*, making it so that Antoinette/Bertha is not related by blood to Richard Mason; instead, she is his stepsister. As critic Judith L. Raiskin points out, this enables Rhys to introduce "Antoinette's larger 'colored' family" to the tale and thus, again, to address racial issues in a more direct manner.

Summary of *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Wide Sargasso Sea begins in Jamaica after the Emancipation Act of 1833, under which Britain outlawed slavery in all its colonies. The first part of the novella is told from the point-of-view of Antoinette Cosway, a young white girl whose father, a hated former slaveholder, has died and left his wife and children in poverty. The family's estate, Coulibri, is quickly falling into ruin, and Antoinette's mother, Annette, is rapidly sinking into a deep depression. Since her mother frequently rejects her, Antoinette spends most of her time alone or with her black nurse, Christophine, one of the few servants who has not chosen to desert the struggling family.

One day, for the first time in a long time, visitors come to Coulibri. One of these men, an Englishman by the name of Mr. Mason, proposes to Annette after a short courtship. She accepts, and the two wed in spite of the malicious gossip of the servants and local islanders. For a while things seem to be improving for the Cosways: Mr. Mason uses his wealth to restore the crumbling Coulibri plantation, and this in turn seems to improve Annette's mental state. Still, Antoinette's mother repeatedly expresses a desperate wish to leave Jamaica. She is acutely aware of the fact that the freed blacks still harbor immense hatred toward the white aristocracy that enslaved them. Mr. Mason, however, fails to realize how dire the situation has become. One night, a mob sets the house on fire, and the family is forced to flee forever.

Antoinette wakes up several weeks later at the home of her Aunt Cora in Spanish Town. She learns that her brother has died and that her mother has had a mental breakdown. Aunt Cora enrolls Antoinette in a convent school, where she spends several years learning how to be a lady. During this time Antoinette is largely alone; her mother is confined to the home of a care-taking couple, her aunt returns to England, and her stepfather travels frequently and visits rarely. Then, when Antoinette turns seventeen, Mr. Mason comes to the convent and announces that he has friends coming from England for the winter. He implies that one of these men will marry Antoinette.

The second part of the narrative opens after the marriage has taken place. This section of the work is narrated mostly by Antoinette's new husband, a man who remains nameless throughout the text but who is clearly based on the character of Mr. Rochester from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. As the couple journeys to their honeymoon house, Rochester explains the circumstances that necessitated his hasty wedding. Evidently Rochester arrived in the West Indies and was immediately struck by the fever; as a result he is now questioning his decision to marry a woman he barely knows. Still, he reflects, there was a tremendous incentive for him to do so: his new wife's stepbrother has given him unconditional control of her entire dowry. This money enables Rochester, who is a second son and stands to inherit nothing under the English law of primogeniture, to be financially independent, which is crucial since he has apparently accrued some dishonorable debt.

The wedding party arrives at Granbois, Antoinette's inherited property on another island where she spent much of her youth. Rochester is overwhelmed by the scenery, distrustful of the servants, and generally displeased with the honeymoon house. Antoinette tries to reassure him and help him understand the Caribbean way of life, and for a while this seems to work. Several weeks pass reasonably happily, as the two get to know one another through conversation and finally through consummation of their marriage. Both soon become addicted to sex.

Then one day Rochester receives a letter from a man who calls himself Daniel Cosway and insists that he is Antoinette's illegitimate half-brother. In his letter, Daniel tells Rochester that the Englishman has been tricked into marriage with a madwoman, and encourages Rochester to come and visit him to get the full story. Rochester believes what he reads, and when he returns to the house Antoinette and the servants can sense that his attitude toward her has changed.

The point-of-view then shifts back to Antoinette, who is journeying on horseback to visit the wise old servant Christophine, a woman who is rumored to practice the dark art known as obeah. Antoinette explains that Rochester has become cold and distant, and begs her former nurse to use black magic to make him love her again. Christophine resists, suggesting that Antoinette leave her husband instead. Antoinette refuses, however, noting that under English law all of her money now belongs to Rochester. Christophine, appalled to hear about Antoinette's utter dependence on Rochester, finally agrees to help her.

The perspective then shifts back to Rochester, who receives a second missive from Daniel Cosway and goes to pay the man a visit. Daniel immediately begins to deride the Cosway family, implying, among other things, that Antoinette has had an incestuous relationship with her half-brother Sandi. Daniel attempts to bribe Rochester, saying that he will keep quiet about these matters for a fee. Rochester is disgusted and leaves, but is clearly affected by the encounter.

Back at Granbois, Antoinette confronts her husband about his hatred of her, and he admits that he has been to see Daniel. Antoinette attempts to explain her family history to him but in doing so becomes highly distraught. Rochester suggests that she retire for the night so that they can talk when she is more "reasonable." She agrees but asks him to come to her room. He obliges, and she slips the powder that Christophine gave her into his drink.

Rochester awakens in his wife's bed the next morning and realizes that he was drugged and that the two of them have slept together again. He is sick to his stomach and then furious, and retaliates by seducing the servant girl Amélie within Antoinette's range of hearing. Antoinette is traumatized by her husband's infidelity and disappears for several days. She returns in a state of drunken dishevelment, and verbally lashes out at Rochester for what he has done to her. She loses control of herself entirely.

Christophine also comes to the house and accuses Rochester of psychologically destroying Antoinette, who has been reduced to throwing objects and trying to bite like an animal. The old servant begs Rochester first to try to love his wife again, and then to go back to England without her. Rochester briefly considers the latter, but changes his mind when Christophine suggests that eventually Antoinette might find marital felicity with someone else. He becomes enraged and orders Christophine to leave the premises, threatening to call the police to report her practice of obeah. She has no choice but to go.

Rochester then begins to make plans to return to Jamaica and consult with the doctors there about his wife's unstable mental condition. Symbolically, he sketches an English-style house with a woman standing in one of the third-floor rooms. They depart several days later, and Rochester insists that Antoinette will never see the island again. She betrays no emotion when they leave, but a young boy native boy cries pitifully because he wants Rochester to take him along. Of course, Rochester refuses - he hates everything belonging to the Caribbean.

The short final portion of the novella starts off with a few paragraphs from the perspective of Grace Poole, the woman hired to guard Antoinette in the attic where she has been imprisoned. Grace reveals that she is being paid well for her services. Ironically, Rochester's father and brother have died and left him everything.

The point-of-view then shifts one last time, back to Antoinette. Her account reveals that she is extremely confused and disoriented: she does not know where she is and has no idea how long she has been there, and furthermore she has only vague, fragmented, and conflated memories of events both recent and long-past. Now, perhaps, she really is a madwoman. At night, she explains, when Grace Poole is asleep, she steals the keys to the attic and sneaks about the house. One night, after a recurring dream of fire, she gets up, takes a candle, and prepares to burn down the house.

❖ **Characterization**

Antoinette Cosway Mason Rochester

The novella's protagonist and a character based on the madwoman in the attic from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys imagines the past of Brontë's deranged maniac, whom she depicts with sympathetic understanding. When the work begins, Antoinette is a lonely young girl growing up in post-Emancipation Jamaica. After an escalating series of violent encounters with the newly-freed blacks on the island, Antoinette and her family of white Creoles are forced to flee from their estate. The tumult and trauma drive Antoinette's mother over the edge, and, with no living blood relations, Antoinette is pushed into a marriage with a nameless Englishman (Brontë's Mr. Rochester). The rest of the tale describes how life

with an uncomprehending and unloving husband sends Antoinette, like her mother before her, to the brink of madness and beyond. She is also called "Bertha" and "Marionetta" by Rochester.

Annette Cosway Mason

Antoinette's gorgeous but troubled mother. She is the much-younger second wife of Alexander Cosway, and later of Mr. Mason. A white woman born in Martinique, Annette has never been accepted by the black Jamaicans. Cast as an outsider, she feels alternately abandoned and persecuted, and her instinct for self-preservation ultimately leads to her mental breakdown. After the fire that destroys her family home, she attempts to kill her husband and is locked away for the remainder of her days. She apparently dies when Antoinette is at school, but the exact cause of her death is never made clear, and later even the timing of her passing is called into question. A frighteningly spectral presence for most of the book, Annette shows signs of mental illness almost from the first page. Her ultimate fate is therefore unsurprising.

Pierre Cosway

Antoinette's sickly younger brother who, although he can neither walk nor speak distinctly, is nevertheless Annette's favorite child. He is badly burned in the fire that engulfs Coulibri and dies shortly thereafter. It is never made explicitly clear what is wrong with Pierre, although Daniel insists he was an "idiot from birth," and there are further suggestions that generations of incest lead to the birth of this "cretin."

Christophine Dubois

The dark-skinned, fiercely loyal servant who was given to Antoinette's mother as a wedding gift many years before the novella takes place. She wears a black dress, heavy gold earrings, and a yellow handkerchief tied in Martinique fashion with two points in front. The other islanders - black and white alike - will have nothing to do with her because she is known to practice the dark art of obeah, which at one point she uses to try to help Antoinette reclaim her husband's love. Throughout the work, Christophine exhibits an emphatic independence. She actually encourages Antoinette to leave Rochester, and stands up to him until he takes his wife back to England. Christophine, also referred to as "Josephine" and "Pheena," is Antoinette's only real protector.

Alexander Cosway

Antoinette's father, and also the sire of Pierre, a son also by the name of Alexander, Sandi, and possibly Daniel, although he vehemently insisted that was not the case. When the novella begins, Alexander has died, apparently of alcohol poisoning, and left his family impoverished. A slaveholder and philanderer who squandered his fortune, Alexander was rumored to have madness in his genes. According to Daniel, he died a "raving" lunatic.

Mr. Luttrell

A neighbor of the Cosway family and the "only friend" of Antoinette's mother. He is the owner of the property Nelson's Rest, which is said to be haunted after his suicide very early in the work. Distant relatives, also with the name Luttrell, later stake claim to his property.

Godfrey

A servant of the Cosway family at Coulibri. Godfrey stays on with the family after Mr. Cosway's death, but Annette distrusts his motives for doing so because he is the one who finds her poisoned horse. "The Lord make no distinction between black and white, black and white the same for Him," Godfrey says at one point.

Sass

A boy servant who leaves Coulibri when the Cosways fall on hard times, but returns after Annette marries Mr. Mason, much to Antoinette's delight. His real name, apparently, is "Disastrous Thomas."

Maillotte

The sole friend of Christophine and the mother of Tia. She is a black servant but does not hail from Jamaica.

Tia

Maillotte's daughter who becomes Antoinette's friend and playmate until she steals her pennies and dress one day when they are swimming. After that incident Antoinette does not see Tia again until the night of the fire. Then, catching sight of Tia and her mother on the fringes of the crowd, Antoinette runs toward them but Tia stops her in her tracks by hurling a jagged rock at her face. Antoinette can only stare at her former friend as if "in a looking-glass."

Mr. Mason

The white Englishman Annette marries early in the story. Antoinette does not like him and feels that he does not understand the family's precarious position at Coulibri. In fact, his incredible naïveté puts the family at great risk; believing the newly-emancipated negroes to be as harmless as lazy children, he refuses to leave Jamaica with his new bride. After the fire, Annette apparently tried to kill him and he has her locked up. Then he leaves Jamaica for long stretches of time, returning occasionally to give Antoinette gifts and to tell her that he has arranged for her to enter the marriage market. Mr. Mason convinces Rochester to come to Jamaica from England, but dies before his arrival in the West Indies.

Richard Mason

The son of Mr. Mason by his first wife. After his father's untimely death, Richard assumes the responsibility for negotiating the financial aspects of Antoinette's marriage settlement. Aunt Cora reprimands him for giving Rochester all of Antoinette's inheritance, leaving her with essentially no wealth of her own. Christophine similarly implies that Richard's is not a good man acting in his stepsister's best interests. Later, after Antoinette and Rochester have returned to England, Richard Mason visits Antoinette but hardly recognizes the disheveled madwoman she has become. Enraged that he has allowed her to be locked up for so long, Antoinette flies at him with a knife, in a scene directly from *Jane Eyre*.

Aunt Cora

Antoinette's aunt, although it remains unclear if the two are related by blood or by marriage. Aunt Cora is never specifically said to be Annette's sister, but Mr. Mason implies this by saying that Cora should have done something to help when the Cosways fell on hard times. Antoinette explains that Aunt Cora's slave-owning husband disliked them and refused to let her write or visit. After his death, Cora returns to the West Indies, where she does her best to care for Antoinette in particular. She strongly disapproves of Richard Mason's plan to marry off her niece without legal protection, but there is very little she can do about it. Old and ailing, she gives Antoinette a silk bag containing her rings in case the girl ever needs her own money.

Mannie

The groom engaged my Mr. Mason after he marries Annette and commences the restoration of Coulibri. He is a loyal servant and risks his life to help the family escape from the burning house.

Myra

Another of the servants employed by Mr. Mason to work at Coulibri. She proves to be a traitor to the family when the negroes rise up against them; knowing about the planned revolt she leaves Pierre to die in his burning bedroom but escapes herself.

Coco

Annette's beloved green parrot. Coco perishes in the blaze at Coulibri; symbolically he cannot fly to safety because Mr. Mason has clipped his wings.

Sandi Cosway

Antoinette's mixed-race half-brother whom she refers to as "Cousin Sandi." He is one of Alexander Cosway's bastard sons. Sandi comes to Antoinette's rescue when she is threatened on her way to the convent school. Daniel tells Rochester that Sandi and Antoinette have a history of incestuous intimacy. Antoinette neither confirms nor denies this, but she does remember fondly how Sandi taught her to throw rocks at the monster crab in the pond. Later, once she is imprisoned in the attic room in England, Antoinette has a fragmented memory/hallucination in which Sandi comes to visit her and kiss her farewell.

Louise de Plana

One of three sisters (the other two are named H  l  ne and Germaine) who are students at the convent school Antoinette attends in Spanish Town. The siblings are held up as models of comportment to the rest of the class. Louise, the most beautiful of the three, takes Antoinette under her wing and teaches her about the way of life in the convent.

Mother St. Justine

The lead instructor at Mount Calvary Convent. She gives lessons on the lives of the saints and on good manners and hygiene. The girls, however, find her to be "not very intelligent"; they refer to her behind her back as "Mother Juice of a Lime."

Sister Marie Augustine

Another of the nuns at the convent. She comforts Antoinette after her hellish nightmare.

(Mr. Rochester)

The man Antoinette marries, who actually remains unnamed for the duration of the novella. Despite this, he narrates most of the second part of the text, and from his story it quickly becomes clear that he is based on the hero of *Jane Eyre*. Rochester, an Englishman, travels to Jamaica at the urging of the Mason family, who pressure him into a hasty marriage with Antoinette. He complies, largely because he needs the tidy sum of money they are offering him; as his father's second son, he stands to inherit nothing under the law of primogeniture. Immediately upon arriving in the Caribbean, he catches fever, and he suggests that this also has something to do with the rapidity of his nuptials. Soon after the wedding, he decides that he has made a terrible mistake, as he comes to believe that he has been tricked into marrying a girl with bad blood in her veins. Rochester retaliates for this perceived deception by taking his cruelty out on his new wife. His behavior causes her to have a mental breakdown, after which he takes her back to England and locks her in the attic of his mansion.

Am  lie

A young female servant who accompanies Antoinette and Rochester on their honeymoon. Am  lie's knowing looks and mischievous snickers unsettle the newlywed couple, particularly Rochester, who assumes that she must know he has been somehow duped into the marriage. At one point Am  lie suggests that Rochester is tiring of the honeymoon, and Antoinette slaps her. Am  lie fights back, calls Antoinette a "white cockroach," and shortly thereafter retaliates by

having sex with her mistress's husband. Rochester offers her money the morning after, and Amélie says she is going to use it to start a new life in Rio.

Caroline

Also called "Caro," she is, according to Rochester, "a gaudy old creature in a brightly flowered dress, a striped head handkerchief and gold ear-rings." Apparently a friend of Antoinette's, Caroline offers the honeymooning couple shelter in her house during a rainstorm when they are on their way to Granbois. Rochester refuses, but Antoinette accepts.

Young Bull

A young man Rochester speaks to in the village of Massacre, en route to the honeymoon cottage. Young Bull is a porter who is helping to transport the couple's luggage. "This a very wild place - not civilized. Why you come here?" he asks.

Emile

Another luggage porter and native islander. Rochester asks his age and Emile responds by saying that he is fourteen; then almost immediately he changes his response to fifty-six. Rochester uses this as proof that "these people are not civilized." The Norton edition of the novel points out that this discrepancy makes sense, however, if Emile were born on February 29 in a leap year.

Baptiste

The elderly caretaker of the honeymoon cottage at Granbois. He seems deeply troubled by Antoinette's plight, although he always shows the requisite deference to Rochester's authority.

Hilda

A young servant girl at Granbois. Always underfoot, she frequently giggles at inappropriate moments, and is generally immature. Rochester considers her a "savage," yet expresses regret when he misses the opportunity to say "goodbye" to her.

Bertrand

A negro boy servant at Granbois who almost collides with Rochester at one point.

Rose

Another negro servant girl at Granbois.

Nameless Girl

Possibly a zombie that Rochester sees when he gets lost in the woods. When she sees him she screams, drops the basket she is carrying, runs away, and disappears.

Cousin Julia, Cousin Ada, Aunt Lina

Guests, apparently relatives of Antoinette, present at the wedding ceremony.

Mr. Fraser

A solicitor and acquaintance of Rochester's in Spanish Town. Mr. Fraser writes a letter to Rochester detailing Christophine's practice of the dark arts.

Daniel Boyd/Cosway

A half-caste man who claims to be one of Alexander Cosway's illegitimate children. Fiercely bitter because Alexander would never recognize him as such, Daniel writes two letters to Rochester providing an exaggerated and one-sided account of the family's troubled history. Rochester goes to visit him in his shack on one of the Windward Islands. During this visit, Daniel says that his real name is "Esau" and further claims to be a deeply religious man who is just carrying out his Christian duty.

Jo-jo

Christophine's son and the only one of her three children to appear in the novella. He arrives when Antoinette is visiting to consult her nurse about how to get Rochester to love her again.

Christophine tells Antoinette that Jo-jo is "nothing but leaky calabash," so she had better leave or everyone will know about her marital difficulties.

Nameless Boy

"A half-savage boy," according to Rochester, who follows when he and Antoinette leave Granbois to return to Spanish Town and then England. The boy cries because he wants to go with Rochester and has learned English for this purpose, but Rochester will not allow it.

Mrs. Eff

Evidently Rhys's version of Brontë's Mrs. Fairfax, she is the housekeeper at Rochester's estate in England. Mrs. Eff does not appear in the story but is mentioned in passing by Grace Poole.

Grace Poole

A character directly imported from Jane Eyre, Grace is the servant hired to watch over Antoinette day and night in the attic. She is well paid for her silence, but apparently does talk about her captive charge to Leah - this conversation opens the third part of the book. Grace has a fondness for drink, and when she passes out Antoinette is able to steal the key from around her neck and venture downstairs into the house.

Leah

One of only three servants at Rochester's English estate who know about Antoinette's presence in the attic.

Themes of the Novel:

The Oppression of Slavery and Entrapment

The specter of slavery and entrapment pervades Wide Sargasso Sea. The ex-slaves who worked on the sugar plantations of wealthy Creoles figure prominently in Part One of the novel, which is set in the West Indies in the early nineteenth century. Although the Emancipation Act has freed the slaves by the time of Antoinette's childhood, compensation has not been granted to the island's black population, breeding hostility and resentment between servants and their white employers. Annette, Antoinette's mother, is particularly attuned to the animosity that colors many employer-employee interactions.

Enslavement shapes many of the relationships in Rhys's novel—not just those between blacks and whites. Annette feels helplessly imprisoned at Coulibri Estate after the death of her husband, repeating the word "marooned" over and over again. Likewise, Antoinette is doomed to a form of enslavement in her love for and dependency upon her husband. Women's childlike dependence on fathers and husbands represents a figurative slavery that is made literal in Antoinette's ultimate physical captivity.

The Complexity of Racial Identity

Subtleties of race and the intricacies of Jamaica's social hierarchy play an important role in the development of the novel's main themes. Whites born in England are distinguished from the white Creoles, descendants of Europeans who have lived in the West Indies for one or more generations. Further complicating the social structure is the population of black ex-slaves who maintain their own kinds of stratification. Christophine, for instance, stands apart from the Jamaican servants because she is originally from the French Caribbean island of Martinique. Furthermore, there is a large mixed-race population, as white slave owners throughout the Caribbean and the Americas were notorious for raping and impregnating female slaves. Sandi

and Daniel Cosway, two of Alexander Cosway's illegitimate children, both occupy this middle ground between black and white society.

Interaction between these racial groups is often antagonistic. Antoinette and her mother, however, do not share the purely racist views of other whites on the island. Both women recognize their dependence on the black servants who care for them, feeling a respect that often borders on fear and resentment. In this manner, power structures based on race always appear to be on the brink of reversal.

The Link Between Womanhood, Enslavement, and Madness

Womanhood intertwines with issues of enslavement and madness in Rhys's novel. Ideals of proper feminine deportment are presented to Antoinette when she is a girl at the convent school. Two of the other Creole girls, Miss Germaine and Helene de Plana, embody the feminine virtues that Antoinette is to learn and emulate: namely, beauty, chastity and mild, even-tempered manners. Mother St. Justine's praises of the "poised" and "imperturbable" sisters suggest an ideal of womanhood that is at odds with Antoinette's own hot and fiery nature. Indeed, it is Antoinette's passion that contributes to her melancholy and implied madness.

Rhys also explores her female characters' legal and financial dependence on the men around them. After the death of her first husband, Antoinette's mother sees her second marriage as an opportunity to escape from her life at Coulibri and regain status among her peers. For the men in the novel, marriage increases their wealth by granting them access to their wives' inheritance. In both cases, womanhood is synonymous with a kind of childlike dependence on the nearest man. Indeed, it is this dependence that precipitates the demise of both Antoinette and Annette. Both women marry white Englishmen in the hopes of assuaging their fears as vulnerable outsiders, but the men betray and abandon them.

Madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is intricately linked with images of heat, fire, and female sexuality. Madness is Antoinette's inheritance: her father was mad, according to his bastard son Daniel, as was her mother, Annette. Antoinette's upbringing and environment exacerbate her inherited condition, as she feels rejected and displaced, with no one to love her. She becomes paranoid and solitary, prone to vivid dreams and violent outbursts. It is significant that women like Antoinette and her mother are the most susceptible to madness, pushed as they are into childlike servitude and feminine docility. Their madness consigns them to live invisible, shameful lives. The predominance of insanity in the novel forces us to question whose recollections are trustworthy. The fragmented memory of a madwoman like Antoinette opens up the possibility for alternate stories and imagined realities.

Otherness and Alienation

The problem of otherness in the world of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is all-pervading and labyrinthine. The racial hierarchy in 1830's Jamaica is shown to be complex and strained, with tension between whites born in England, creoles or people of European descent born in the Caribbean, black ex-slaves, and people of mixed race. The resentment between these groups leads to hatred and violence. Antoinette Cosway and her family are repeatedly referred to as "white cockroaches" by members of the black population, and are eventually driven from their

home by a mob of discontented former slaves. These dynamics are further complicated by the fact that inclusion and exclusion in the novel are based not solely on race, but also on geographical origin, appearance, wealth and status, and fluency in shared cultural symbols and values.

As such, the major characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are primarily defined by their separateness from any cultural group. The novel opens with Antoinette explaining, "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and the white people did. But we were not in their ranks." Antoinette and her family, though white, do not belong to the dominant class of white Jamaicans, for many reasons including local disapproval of her mother Annette Cosway's behavior, appearance, and French origins, as well as the family's poverty after the death of Alexander Cosway, Antoinette's father. Christophine, Antoinette's black nurse, suffers a similar type of exclusion. A native of Martinique, she is set apart from the other black people of the region. As Antoinette describes, "Her songs were not like Jamaican songs, and she was not like the other women." The novel makes repeated reference to Christophine's headdress and clothing, which she styles "Martinique fashion," despite having lived and worked in Jamaica for many years. When Rochester arrives in Jamaica to wed Antoinette, he is repeatedly disoriented and paralyzed by his failure to understand Caribbean culture and custom.

It is alienation that leads the characters of the novel to the destructive acts at its center. Annette, driven by her family's exclusion from white society, is driven to seek remarriage to the wealthy Mr. Mason, a union that ultimately brings about the tragic loss of her son, her home, and her sanity. The mob at Coulibri, angry at the disenfranchisement and exclusion that the Mason's opulent house symbolizes, is driven to commit the violence and arson that destroys Annette and Antoinette's family. Later in the novel, Daniel Cosway, the mixed-race, illegitimate child of Alexander Cosway, is obsessed with avenging his marginalized existence. His exclusion from the Cosway family leads him to write a series of letters to Rochester maligning Antoinette and her family. These letters disturb Rochester, and form the catalyst for his ultimate distrust and distaste for Antoinette.

The consequences of alienation become both increasingly isolating as well as increasingly dire as the novel progresses. The tensions at the start of the novel are between groups, "us" vs. "them." Race and class difference leads an entire mob to burn down the house at Coulibri, and the family escapes damaged but together. Over the course of the novel, however, the family is drawn apart, and by the end, Antoinette is alienated even from herself. Rochester denies her even her own identity by repeatedly calling her "Bertha," and in her madness and captivity she speaks of "the ghost of a woman they say haunts this place," unaware that she is referring to herself.

Slavery and Freedom

Freedom in the novel is double-edged and troubled. Its ideal is presented in stark contrast, again and again, to its reality. At the start of the novel, we see that the Emancipation Act of 1833 leaves discontent and violence in its wake. Mr. Luttrell, a white former slaveowner and neighbor to the Cosways, commits suicide after Emancipation, unable to adjust to the new social and

economic landscape. At Coulibri, the local population of black former slaves is deeply angry. As Antoinette remembers at the start of the novel, “They hated us.” Even the children threaten and enact violence on white people. A girl follows a young Antoinette singing, “White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you.” Antoinette’s one-time friend Tia, a black girl, ends up hitting Antoinette in the head with a rock as the mob burns her family’s house down.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, freedom can mean abandonment or isolation, the fear of which leads many to enter complacently and sometimes even willingly into their own imprisonment. We see this with various black servants who elect or wish to stay on with their former slave masters, including, notably, one young boy who cries “loud heartbreaking sobs” because Rochester refuses to bring him to England to continue in his service. Of this boy, Antoinette tells Rochester, “He doesn’t want any money. Just to be with you.” This holds true for relationships as well. After Annette’s marriage to Alexander Cosway, which was characterized by repeated infidelities, ends in his death, she becomes preoccupied with her isolation, referring to her new status as being “marooned,” and enters into another marriage, to Mr. Mason, with restrictive and then disastrous results. When Antoinette’s marriage to Rochester first begins to deteriorate, she imagines leaving him, and is urged by Christophine to “pack up and go,” but does not. This decision leads to her literal imprisonment by Rochester.

Even if it is violent and ultimately tragic, freedom is shown to be inevitable, the necessary path to redemption in the novel on both a societal and personal level. Oppression and imprisonment are unsustainable. Antoinette ends the novel and her life by setting fire to the house in which she is imprisoned by Rochester. Her narration ends with a sense of purpose and self-knowledge that she lacked in the rest of the novel. In reference to her own emancipating destruction, she says, “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do.” This fire connects her to the angry mob that, in an act of protest against their own oppression, sets fire to her family’s house early on in the novel. Both seek freedom in the flames.

Women and Power

The female characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* must confront societal forces that prevent them from acting for and sustaining themselves, regardless of race or class. The two socially accepted ways for a woman to attain security in this world are marriage and entering the convent. Marriage ends disastrously in most cases, especially for the Cosway women. Husbands have affairs, die, ignore their wives’ wishes with tragic results, imprison them, take their money, drive them to madness. In Annette Cosway’s case, her marriages destroy not only her life, but also her children’s lives. Her first husband, Antoinette’s father, carries on multiple affairs publicly, one of which yields a child, Daniel Cosway, who eventually has a hand in destroying Antoinette’s happiness. When Alexander Cosway dies, he leaves the family destitute. Annette’s second husband, Mr. Mason, ignores her pleas to move the family away from Coulibri, leaving them vulnerable to the attack that destroys their home, kills her son Pierre, and precipitates Annette’s decline into madness. For Antoinette’s part, it is clear that her marriage is for the financial benefit of Rochester, who sleeps with their servant Amelie within earshot of Antoinette while still on their honeymoon, and eventually imprisons Antoinette in the attic of his home in

England. It is claimed in a letter from Daniel Cosway to Rochester that madness runs in the Cosway family, but for both Annette and Antoinette, their descent into madness is a direct result of the grief and desperation brought to them by their husbands. The nuns at the convent school, though seeming to be outside of this system, spend their lives training their female students to be respectable wives of wealthy men.

The female characters who embody strength and agency are those who elect to remain outside of these structures. The most notable example is Christophine, a powerful and respected figure in her community. Other servants fear her, largely because of her expertise in obeah, a Caribbean folk magic, and Antoinette depends on her. Christophine tries to counsel Antoinette to protect herself and her fortune by telling her that “Woman must have spunks to live in this wicked world,” and, “All women, all colours, nothing but fools. Three children I have. One living in this world, each one a different father, but no husband, I thank my God. I keep my money. I don’t give it to no worthless man.” There is also Aunt Cora, a widow who does not remarry. She is a relatively stable force in Antoinette’s life, able to control her own health and movements, able to provide for Antoinette’s childhood. She promises safety for the young Antoinette and follows through on it. Amelie, though a minor character, is also pivotal in demonstrating that power comes to women only outside of traditional marriage. She manipulates sex to exercise control over her employers, Antoinette and Rochester. After sleeping with Rochester, she receives money from him, and speaks of her plans to move to Rio to continue this tactic: “She wanted to go to Rio. There were rich men in Rio.”

Female independence is shown to be temporary, though. Women who do assert themselves outside of or in direct defiance of the system of marriage are ultimately thwarted by men in some significant way. It eventually comes out that Christophine is wanted by Jamaican law enforcement for her practice of obeah, and Rochester plans to turn her in. Even Aunt Cora is ignored when she attempts to persuade Richard Mason to secure Antoinette’s inheritance, and she despairs to Antoinette, “The Lord has forsaken us.”

Truth

Wide Sargasso Sea is a revisionist novel, written to complicate and push up against the accepted truth of Antoinette or “Bertha” Cosway’s character as it is put forth in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*—the archetypal “madwoman in the attic.” The novel questions the very nature of truth in its premise, form, and content.

Within the novel, truth is shown to be slippery at best, difficult if not impossible to recognize and trust. Every story has at least two competing versions. The narration itself is unstable, switching between the perspectives of Antoinette and Rochester, often giving the reader contradictory perspectives and opinions on the same characters and events. Daniel Cosway, in his letters to Rochester, provides a troubling version of the history of the Cosway-Mason family, at odds with Antoinette’s narration, thereby injecting a third competing narrative. Cosway’s version highlights Alexander Mason’s depravity, and casts Annette, Antoinette, and Christophine as self-serving liars.

Many of the characters' identities are forged in gossip and hearsay. Christophine, in particular, is a character with multiple backstories. When Rochester writes to Mr. Fraser inquiring about her, there are shown to be conflicting accounts of her whereabouts ("my wife insists that she had gone back to Martinique... I happen to know that she has not returned to Martinique") and even her name ("the woman in question was called Josephine or Christophine Dubois.") When Rochester decides to turn her in, he highlights the indeterminacy of her identity in the novel, "So much for you, Josephine or Christophine. So much for you, Pheena." Even Antoinette is not entirely sure of Christophine's abilities, and can only speculate at the scope of her obeah prowess. Rochester's interactions with Antoinette are also riddled with confusion about the truth. He tells her, "So much of what you tell me is strange, different from what I was led to expect," and in his narration remembers, "She was unsure of fact—any facts."

Even the senses are not to be trusted. Vision plays tricks on people, and hallucinations abound. As a child, Antoinette cannot be sure whether she sees or imagines seeing feathers and chicken's blood, remnants of obeah rituals, in Christophine's room. While at Granbois, Rochester becomes lost in the woods and stumbles upon a paved road, where he frightens a child walking by. Later, he is assured that there was never a road there. Of Granbois and the mysterious instability of the senses that he experienced there, Rochester remembers, "it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, 'What I see is nothing—I want what it hides.'"

Denial or madness are shown to be the two alternatives for dealing with the crushing and confounding nature of truth in the novel. Either a character can "turn her face to the wall," and deny the complexity and tragedy before them, as Christophine accuses Aunt Cora of doing, or go mad with grief, as Annette and Antoinette both do. Rochester ultimately takes the path of denial by imprisoning Antoinette, shutting her away forever rather than reconciling the truth of her nature and their marriage with what he'd expected, or been led to believe. Even Christophine finally retreats into denial, or refusal, when Rochester and Antoinette leave for England. Rochester offers, "You can write to her," to which Christophine replies, "Read and write I don't know. Other things I know," and walks away without saying goodbye.

Disease and Decline

In the Caribbean portrayed in the novel, an atmosphere of sickness reflects the perverse and unnatural subjugation of blacks by whites and of women by men. Repression explodes into fevers, fits, and madness, so that the body says what the mouth cannot. Both Antoinette and Rochester suffer near-fatal fevers, as if to mark their feelings of persecution and fear of the outside world.

Images of disease, rot, and illness also suggest the moral and financial decline of Antoinette's family. Disease works as a kind of moral retribution, in that the Cosway family, after generations of abuse, inherits a legacy of alcoholism, madness, and deformity (the young boy Pierre is degenerate). Antoinette naïvely believes her family's cure lies abroad, in England. On the night of the fire, she leans over the crib of her sleeping brother to assure him that, once Mr. Mason takes them to England, he will "be cured, made like other people." However, England offers no cure, as Antoinette herself further deteriorates when she is there.

Death seemingly hovers over Antoinette's every moment. One of the first memories she recounts from her childhood is that of her mother's poisoned horse, lying dead in the heat and swarming with flies. This image creates a mood of sinister anticipation and points to an evil undercurrent haunting Coulibri. The death of the horse also foreshadows the deaths of Pierre, Antoinette's mother, Aunt Cora, and Mr. Mason, all of which leave Antoinette without a family. So attuned to death's presence in her childhood tale, Antoinette foreshadows her own violent end.

At Coulibri, allusions to zombies and ghosts further contribute to the eerie mood. Christophine's supernatural tales, drawn from voodoo legends, share Antoinette's fascination with death. Antoinette incorporates these superstitions, using a stick as a protective talisman and believing that her mother has become a zombie—a body without a soul. It is Antoinette's faith in an invisible world that accounts for her peculiar preoccupation with death.

Magic and Incantation

In his decision to take Antoinette away from Jamaica, Rochester bitterly thinks to himself, "No more false heavens. No more damned magic." The Windward Islands, where Granbois is located, are home to the magical, syncretic religions of their black inhabitants. Christophine's unique powers, which command respect from her peers, derive from her expertise in obeah practices and her knowledge in casting spells. Antoinette incorporates Christophine's superstitious beliefs, leading her to read signs and symbols in the natural world. On the night of the fire, for instance, Antoinette shrinks in horror when she sees her mother's parrot burn alive, believing it is bad luck to kill a parrot or watch one die. This knowledge of magic is Antoinette's one source of power and independence.

Section B

✚ Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Non-detailed Text)

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects (1792), written by the 18th-century British proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy. In it, Wollstonecraft responds to those educational and political theorists of the 18th century who did not believe women should receive a rational education. She argues that women ought to have an education commensurate with their position in society, claiming that women are essential to the nation because they educate its children and because they could be "companions" to their husbands, rather than mere wives. Instead of viewing women as ornaments to society or property to be traded in marriage, Wollstonecraft maintains that they are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men.

Wollstonecraft was prompted to write the *Rights of Woman* after reading Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord's 1791 report to the French National Assembly, which stated that women should only receive a domestic education; she used her commentary on this specific event to launch a broad attack against sexual double standards and to indict men for encouraging women to indulge in excessive emotion. Wollstonecraft wrote the *Rights of Woman* hurriedly to

respond directly to ongoing events; she intended to write a more thoughtful second volume but died before completing it.

While Wollstonecraft does call for equality between the sexes in particular areas of life, such as morality, she does not explicitly state that men and women are equal. Her ambiguous statements regarding the equality of the sexes have since made it difficult to classify Wollstonecraft as a modern feminist, particularly since the word and the concept were unavailable to her. Although it is commonly assumed now that the *Rights of Woman* was unfavourably received, this is a modern misconception based on the belief that Wollstonecraft was as reviled during her lifetime as she became after the publication of William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798). The *Rights of Woman* was actually well received when it was first published in 1792. One biographer has called it "perhaps the most original book of [Wollstonecraft's] century". Wollstonecraft's work had a profound impact on advocates for women's rights in the nineteenth century, in particular on the Declaration of Sentiments, the document written at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 that laid out the aims of the suffragette movement in the United States.

Historical Background:

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was written against the tumultuous background of the French Revolution and the debates that it spawned in Britain. In a lively and sometimes vicious pamphlet war, now referred to as the Revolution controversy, British political commentators addressed topics ranging from representative government to human rights to the separation of church and state, many of these issues having been raised in France first. Wollstonecraft first entered this fray in 1790 with *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, a response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).[2] In his *Reflections*, Burke criticized the view of many British thinkers and writers who had welcomed the early stages of the French revolution. While they saw the revolution as analogous to Britain's own Glorious Revolution in 1688, which had restricted the powers of the monarchy, Burke argued that the appropriate historical analogy was the English Civil War (1642–1651) in which Charles I had been executed in 1649. He viewed the French revolution as the violent overthrow of a legitimate government. In *Reflections* he argues that citizens do not have the right to revolt against their government because civilization is the result of social and political consensus; its traditions cannot be continually challenged—the result would be anarchy. One of the key arguments of Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Men*, published just six weeks after Burke's *Reflections*, is that rights cannot be based on tradition; rights, she argues, should be conferred because they are reasonable and just, regardless of their basis in tradition.

When Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord presented his *Rapport sur l'instruction publique* (1791) to the National Assembly in France, Wollstonecraft was galvanized to respond. In his recommendations for a national system of education, Talleyrand had written:

Let us bring up women, not to aspire to advantages which the Constitution denies them, but to know and appreciate those which it guarantees them . . . Men are destined to live on the stage of the world. A public education suits them: it early places before their eyes all the scenes of life: only the proportions are different. The paternal home is better for the education of women; they have less need to learn to deal with the interests of others, than to accustom themselves to a calm and secluded life.

Portrait of a woman, showing her head, with a grey wig. Two large curls are sitting at the nape of her neck. Her shoulders are covered with a filmy, cream-coloured shawl.

Wollstonecraft dedicated the Rights of Woman to Talleyrand: "Having read with great pleasure a pamphlet which you have lately published, I dedicate this volume to you; to induce you to reconsider the subject, and maturely weigh what I have advanced respecting the rights of woman and national education." At the end of 1791, French feminist Olympe de Gouges had published her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen, and the question of women's rights became central to political debates in both France and Britain.

The Rights of Woman is an extension of Wollstonecraft's arguments in the Rights of Men. In the Rights of Men, as the title suggests, she is concerned with the rights of particular men (18th-century British men) while in the Rights of Woman, she is concerned with the rights afforded to "woman", an abstract category. She does not isolate her argument to 18th-century women or British women. The first chapter of the Rights of Woman addresses the issue of natural rights and asks who has those inalienable rights and on what grounds. She answers that since natural rights are given by God, for one segment of society to deny them to another segment is a sin. *The Rights of Woman* thus engages not only specific events in France and in Britain but also larger questions being raised by political philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Introduction

- Wollstonecraft begins *Vindication* by saying that she's been feeling depressed lately. After looking at the history of humanity, she has decided that men and women are either very different or history has been extremely unfair to women.
- In the end, she decides that the lack of good education for women is the biggest cause of misery in the world.
- For the most part, Wollstonecraft believes that women's poor education teaches them to be superficial and ignorant, which only makes life more miserable for their future husbands and children.
- Wollstonecraft admits that it looks as though men are physically stronger than women. But she insists that in a modern civilization, physical strength shouldn't count for much.
- Women should therefore be treated just as well as men because they have just as much intelligence.
- She already knows that men will criticize her argument by saying that giving women the same education as men will make them too "manly." Wollstonecraft argues that reason and logic don't favor one gender over the other, though.
- Wollstonecraft warns her female readers that she's going to speak to them directly and rationally, which might offend some women who are used to being addressed with all kinds of silly politeness.
- Wollstonecraft admits that women's education has become a more widely discussed topic in her time. But she's disappointed that this education always focuses on making women as pleasing as possible to men instead of developing their rational minds.

- It is clear to Wollstonecraft that women have been unnaturally stunted in their development by a society that tries to keep them as weak and ignorant as possible. In the end, she's confident that rational argument will prove that it's in everyone's interest for women to receive better education.

Themes of writings

The Rights of Woman is a long essay that introduces all of its major topics in the opening chapters and then repeatedly returns to them, each time from a different point of view. It also adopts a hybrid tone that combines rational argument with the fervent rhetoric of sensibility. Wollstonecraft did not employ the formal argumentation or logical prose style common to 18th-century philosophical writing.

In the 18th century, sensibility was a physical phenomenon that came to be attached to a specific set of moral beliefs. Physicians and anatomists believed that the more sensitive people's nerves, the more emotionally affected they would be by their surroundings. Since women were thought to have keener nerves than men, it was also believed that women were more emotional than men. The emotional excess associated with sensibility also theoretically produced an ethic of compassion: those with sensibility could easily sympathise with people in pain. Thus historians have credited the discourse of sensibility and those who promoted it with the increased humanitarian efforts, such as the movement to abolish the slave trade. But sensibility also paralysed those who had too much of it; as scholar G. J. Barker-Benfield explains, "an innate refinement of nerves was also identifiable with greater suffering, with weakness, and a susceptibility to disorder".

By the time Wollstonecraft was writing the Rights of Woman, sensibility had already been under sustained attack for a number of years. Sensibility, which had initially promised to draw individuals together through sympathy, was now viewed as "profoundly separatist"; novels, plays, and poems that employed the language of sensibility asserted individual rights, sexual freedom, and unconventional familial relationships based only upon feeling. Furthermore, as Janet Todd, another scholar of sensibility, argues, "to many in Britain the cult of sensibility seemed to have feminized the nation, given women undue prominence, and emasculated men."

Rational education

One of Wollstonecraft's central arguments in the Rights of Woman is that women should be educated in a rational manner to give them the opportunity to contribute to society. In the 18th century, it was often assumed by both educational philosophers and conduct book writers, who wrote what one might think of as early self-help books, that women were incapable of rational or abstract thought. Women, it was believed, were too susceptible to sensibility and too fragile to be able to think clearly. Wollstonecraft, along with other female reformers such as Catharine Macaulay and Hester Chapone, maintained that women were indeed capable of rational thought and deserved to be educated. She argued this point in her own conduct book, Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787), in her children's book, Original Stories from Real Life (1788), as well as in the Rights of Woman.

Stating in her preface that "my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all", Wollstonecraft contends that society will degenerate without educated women, particularly because mothers are the primary educators of young children.[17] She attributes the problem of uneducated women to men and "a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who [consider] females rather as women than human creatures".[18] Women are capable of rationality; it only appears that they are not, because men have refused to educate them and encouraged them to be frivolous (Wollstonecraft describes silly women as "spaniels" and "toys"[19]).[20] While stressing it is of the same kind, she entertains the notion that women might not be able to attain the same degree of knowledge that men do.[21]

Wollstonecraft attacks conduct book writers such as James Fordyce and John Gregory as well as educational philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau who argue that a woman does not need a rational education. (Rousseau famously argues in *Emile* (1762) that women should be educated for the pleasure of men; Wollstonecraft, infuriated by this argument, attacks not only it but also Rousseau himself.[22]) Intent on illustrating the limitations that contemporary educational theory placed upon women, Wollstonecraft writes, "taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison",[23] implying that without this damaging ideology, which encourages young women to focus their attention on beauty and outward accomplishments, they could achieve much more. Wives could be the rational "companions" of their husbands and even pursue careers should they so choose: "women might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses. And midwifery, decency seems to allot to them . . . they might, also, study politics . . . Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue." [24]

For Wollstonecraft, "the most perfect education" is "an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attach such habits of virtue as will render it independent." [25] In addition to her broad philosophical arguments, Wollstonecraft lays out a specific plan for national education to counter Talleyrand's. In Chapter 12, "On National Education," she proposes that children be sent to day schools as well as given some education at home "to inspire a love of home and domestic pleasures," and that such schools be free for children "five to nine years of age." [26] She also maintains that schooling should be co-educational, contending that men and women, whose marriages are "the cement of society," should be "educated after the same model."

Feminism writings

In the *Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft does not make the claim for gender equality using the same arguments or the same language that late 19th- and 20th century feminists later would. For instance, rather than unequivocally stating that men and women are equal, Wollstonecraft contends that men and women are equal in the eyes of God, which means that they are both subject to the same moral law.[31] For Wollstonecraft, men and women are equal in the most important areas of life. While such an idea may not seem revolutionary to 21st-

century readers, its implications were revolutionary during the 18th century. For example, it implied that both men and women—not just women—should be modest[32] and respect the sanctity of marriage.[33] Wollstonecraft's argument exposed the sexual double standard of the late 18th century and demanded that men adhere to the same virtues demanded of women.

However, Wollstonecraft's arguments for equality stand in contrast to her statements respecting the superiority of masculine strength and valour. Wollstonecraft famously and ambiguously states:

Let it not be concluded, that I wish to invert the order of things; I have already granted, that, from the constitution of their bodies, men seem to be designed by Providence to attain a greater degree of virtue. I speak collectively of the whole sex; but I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude that their virtues should differ in respect to their nature. In fact, how can they, if virtue has only one eternal standard? I must therefore, if I reason consequentially, as strenuously maintain that they have the same simple direction, as that there is a God.

Moreover, Wollstonecraft calls on men, rather than women, to initiate the social and political changes she outlines in the *Rights of Woman*. Because women are uneducated, they cannot alter their own situation—men must come to their aid.[36] Wollstonecraft writes at the end of her chapter "Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society":

I then would fain convince reasonable men of the importance of some of my remarks; and prevail on them to weigh dispassionately the whole tenor of my observations. – I appeal to their understandings; and, as a fellow-creature, claim, in the name of my sex, some interest in their hearts. I entreat them to assist to emancipate their companion, to make her a help meet for them! Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens.

It is Wollstonecraft's last novel, *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), the fictionalized sequel to the *Rights of Woman*, that is usually considered her most radical feminist work.

Sensibility

One of Wollstonecraft's most scathing criticisms in the *Rights of Woman* is against false and excessive sensibility, particularly in women. She argues that women who succumb to sensibility are "blown about by every momentary gust of feeling"; because these women are "the prey of their senses", they cannot think rationally.[39] In fact, not only do they do harm to themselves but they also do harm to all of civilization: these are not women who can refine civilization – these are women who will destroy it. But reason and feeling are not independent for Wollstonecraft; rather, she believes that they should inform each other. For Wollstonecraft, as for the important 18th-century philosopher David Hume, the passions underpin all reason.[40] This was a theme that she would return to throughout her career, but particularly in her novels *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) and *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*.

As part of her argument that women should not be overly influenced by their feelings, Wollstonecraft emphasises that they should not be constrained by or made slaves to their bodies or their sexual feelings.[41] This particular argument has led many modern feminists to suggest that Wollstonecraft intentionally avoids granting women any sexual desire. Cora Kaplan argues that the "negative and prescriptive assault on female sexuality" is a "leitmotif" of the Rights of Woman.[42] For example, Wollstonecraft advises her readers to "calmly let passion subside into friendship" in the ideal companionate marriage (that is, in the ideal of a love-based marriage that was developing at the time).[43] It would be better, she writes, when "two virtuous young people marry . . . if some circumstances checked their passion".[44] According to Wollstonecraft, "love and friendship cannot subsist in the same bosom".[44] As Mary Poovey explains, "Wollstonecraft betrays her fear that female desire might in fact court man's lascivious and degrading attentions, that the subordinate position women have been given might even be deserved. Until women can transcend their fleshly desires and fleshly forms, they will be hostage to the body." [45] If women are not interested in sexuality, they cannot be dominated by men. Wollstonecraft worries that women are consumed with "romantic wavering", that is, they are interested only in satisfying their lusts.[46] Because the Rights of Woman eliminates sexuality from a woman's life, Kaplan contends, it "expresses a violent antagonism to the sexual" while at the same time "exaggerat[ing] the importance of the sensual in the everyday life of women". Wollstonecraft was so determined to wipe sexuality from her picture of the ideal woman that she ended up foregrounding it by insisting upon its absence.[47] But as Kaplan and others have remarked, Wollstonecraft may have been forced to make this sacrifice: "it is important to remember that the notion of woman as politically enabled and independent [was] fatally linked [during the eighteenth century] to the unrestrained and vicious exercise of her sexuality." [48]

Republicanism

Men with guns being led by a half-naked woman who is holding the French flag. She and they are walking over dead bodies. The painting is structured like a triangle, with the woman at the apex. The dead are lying at the base of the triangle.

Liberty Leading the People by Eugène Delacroix (1833)

Claudia Johnson, a prominent Wollstonecraft scholar, has called the Rights of Woman "a republican manifesto".[49] Johnson contends that Wollstonecraft is hearkening back to the Commonwealth tradition of the 17th century and attempting to reestablish a republican ethos. In Wollstonecraft's version, there would be strong, but separate, masculine and feminine roles for citizens.[50] According to Johnson, Wollstonecraft "denounces the collapse of proper sexual distinction as the leading feature of her age, and as the grievous consequence of sentimentality itself. The problem undermining society in her view is feminized men".[51] If men feel free to adopt both the masculine position and the sentimental feminine position, she argues, women have no position open to them in society.[52] Johnson therefore sees Wollstonecraft as a critic, in both the Rights of Men and the Rights of Woman, of the "masculinization of sensitivity" in such works as Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France.[53]

In the Rights of Woman Wollstonecraft adheres to a version of republicanism that includes a belief in the eventual overthrow of all titles, including the monarchy. She also briefly suggests that all men and women should be represented in government. But the bulk of her "political criticism," as Chris Jones, a Wollstonecraft scholar, explains, "is couched predominantly in terms of morality".[54] Her definition of virtue focuses on the individual's happiness rather than, for example, the good of the entire society.[54] This is reflected in her explanation of natural rights. Because rights ultimately proceed from God, Wollstonecraft maintains that there are duties, tied to those rights, incumbent upon each and every person. For Wollstonecraft, the individual is taught republicanism and benevolence within the family; domestic relations and familial ties are crucial to her understanding of social cohesion and patriotism.[55]

Class

In many ways the Rights of Woman is inflected by a bourgeois view of the world, as is its direct predecessor the Rights of Men. Wollstonecraft addresses her text to the middle class, which she calls the "most natural state". She also frequently praises modesty and industry, virtues which, at the time, were associated with the middle class.[56] From her position as a middle-class writer arguing for a middle-class ethos, Wollstonecraft also attacks the wealthy, criticizing them using the same arguments she employs against women. She points out the "false-refinement, immorality, and vanity" of the rich, calling them "weak, artificial beings, raised above the common wants and affections of their race, in a premature unnatural manner [who] undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society".[57]

But Wollstonecraft's criticisms of the wealthy do not necessarily reflect a concomitant sympathy for the poor. For her, the poor are fortunate because they will never be trapped by the snares of wealth: "Happy is it when people have the cares of life to struggle with; for these struggles prevent their becoming a prey to enervating vices, merely from idleness!"[58] Moreover, she contends that charity has only negative consequences because, as Jones puts it, she "sees it as sustaining an unequal society while giving the appearance of virtue to the rich".[59]

In her national plan for education, she retains class distinctions (with an exception for the intelligent), suggesting that: "After the age of nine, girls and boys, intended for domestic employments, or mechanical trades, ought to be removed to other schools, and receive instruction, in some measure appropriated to the destination of each individual . . . The young people of superior abilities, or fortune, might now be taught, in another school, the dead and living languages, the elements of science, and continue the study of history and politics, on a more extensive scale, which would not exclude polite literature."