

Madness in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*: A Feminist Study

Musarrat Shameem*

Abstract: Critics have interpreted *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys from diverse approaches among which postcolonial, feminist, and psycho-analytical explanations are worth mentioning. On the other hand, South Korean novelist Han Kang's Man Booker-winning novel *The Vegetarian*'s (English translation) (2015) interpretation has mostly appeared in the form of book reviews in newspapers around the world. Whereas these two novels originate from two geographically different areas, namely the West Indies and South Korea, and belong to two different centuries, some of their themes overlap in the form of the madness of the protagonists and conflict between societal norms and individual freedom. These two novels also resemble stylistically as both use poetical language, sometimes even to the point of obscurity. The present article comparatively reads these novels in order to argue that stripped to their basic themes, they uphold the proposition that being women, it is not easy to follow one's beliefs and the most likely consequence of defying established norms is to be cast away, to perpetually live on the edge. For the purpose of comprehensive analysis, this article limits its focus on the theme of the protagonists' madness resulting from their defiance of established norms. The final argument of the article is to see madness as empowering rather than aberrational. To that end, firstly, a short literature review is done upon which the basic argument is to be founded. Next, some theories on madness in literature and two French feminist views are incorporated in order to develop the argument. Then, textual analysis is carried out in support of the argument. Finally, all these strands of thought are tied up to conclude that the madness of the two protagonists, Antoinette from *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Yeong-hye from *The Vegetarian*, functions as the key factor in their attaining the ultimate freedom from the norms of behavior imposed on individuals by society.

Keywords: Madness, Empowerment, Ecriture Feminine, Individuality, Agency

Introduction

Apart from being read from many other approaches, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys has also been interpreted as a study in madness. Elizabeth Abel (1979) focuses on Rhys' use of schizophrenic language in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Kathay Mezei (1987) observes that Rochester, husband of Antoinette, the protagonist of the novel, has transformed his wife into a locked-away madwoman. Charles Sarvan (1999) notes that Antoinette is caught in the realm of the symbolic, here "the symbolic realm"

* Associate Professor, Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

stands for language and therefore Sarvan suggests that her language is “unstable, elusive, and ultimately alienating” (n.pag.). Her journey from the Caribbean to England is compared to reaching a destiny of the dangerous, liminal space of madness by Paul Huebener in his essay “Metaphor and Madness as Postcolonial Sites in Novels by Jean Rhys and Tayeb Salih.” Marja-Liisa Helenius (2003) discusses how the different approaches of French and Anglo-American feminisms study the question of madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The author Rhys creates a barrier between her and Antoinette by making the latter lose herself in madness, notes Rajeev S. Patke (2005).

While *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been interpreted by many critics as a study in madness, Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian* has been regarded as “part feminist fable, part transformation story, part grisly fairy tale” by Charles McCrory in his review of the book in *The Daily Mississippian online* (n.pag.). McCrory suggests that it is difficult to pin down the novel to an easy category as it implies a dark and somber disillusionment with life and humanity. In a review published in

The New York Times Alexandra Alter compares the protagonist Yeong-hye with a “cursed madwoman in classical myth” who seems “both eerily prophetic and increasingly unhinged when she begins starving herself, hoping to transform into a tree” (n.pag.). Similar kind of argument comes from Lori Feathers when she notes that Yeong-hye emotionally isolates herself by ignoring the societal norms in an attempt to go back to her primal existence.

Madness has long been associated with the othering process of certain groups in society and this phenomenon has been profusely studied in literature. Madness, in Shoshana Felman’s (2003) words, has played a role in subverting the boundaries among sociology and philosophy, linguistics and literature, history and psychology and so on (12). Felman particularly focuses on the paradoxical relationship between madness and literature by noting that “...the madness silenced by society has been given voice by literature...it is also commonly asserted, ...that literature itself is obsolete” (15). Felman’s conclusion to this paradox is that repression of literature has inverse effect on the liberation of madness. In the context of Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Kang’s *The Vegetarian*, the articulation of the repressed madness becomes all important as it gives vent to the liberating process of the protagonists initiated through their socially as well as culturally unacceptable behavior commonly referred to as insanity.

When analyzed closely, it is possible to view women’s madness from two distinct perspectives. One is empirical, as observed in the works of clinical psychologists and writers dealing with the issue of madness; whereas the other is metaphorical as seen in the works of literary theorists, specifically in the feminist theoreticians’ works. To be more precise, a brand of French feminists’ works can be considered pivotal in the reinscription of madness in women in literature.

In her essay on Phyllis Chesler’s *Women and Madness*, Shoshana Felman draws a line between these two approaches of reinscribing women’s madness by naming Chesler’s approach as “pragmatic” and “empirical” (10). On the other hand, Felman analyzes Luce Irigaray’s addressing of the issue as “theoretical” (ibid). Thus Felman

notes that Chesler mostly focuses on the socio-sexual victimization of women whereas Irigaray takes the issue to its logical ends:

...reminding us that women's oppression exists not only in the material, practical organization...but also in the very foundations of logos, reasoning, and articulation—in the subtle linguistic procedures and in the logical processes through which meaning itself is produced. (ibid)

Marja-Liisa Helenius draws a comparison between Hélène Cixous' écriture feminine and Rhys' language used in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by noting that the poetic style of Rhys upholds the female experience as "emotional and subjective" in the same way as Cixous defines écriture feminine as the "unconscious, the other limitless country..." (9). The proposition that feminist literature can be the vehicle of expressing the unexpressed is in unison with Felman's observation that literature can become the voice of repressed madness. Rhys and Kang's protagonists Antoinette and Yeong-hye find a way to leave a mark on their otherwise nonchalant surroundings by plunging into insanity, a case in point that reaffirms literature's representative approach towards madness. Therefore, both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Vegetarian* can be read as texts that empower their protagonists through their refusal to be treated as normal by the normative rules suggested by society.

Literature Review

This article argues that the madness of the protagonists of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Vegetarian* arises from their being unable to conform to the existing social norms. This inability largely depends on the fact that both Antoinette and Yeong-hye willfully fail to communicate with others in the established and prescribed language of patriarchy by inventing their own language that is promptly branded as delirium by the patriarchal society in which they live. The new language of these two women does not include only verbal words; rather it incorporates their psychological as well as bodily resistance towards the normalizing process of the outside world. This nonconformity to established linguistic system and eventual resort to a new one can be synchronized with the thoughts of French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

Hélène Cixous (1976) invariably defines women's act of writing as a rebellion against conventional men in "The Laugh of the Medusa" because, to her, each woman is an unacknowledged sovereign. Every woman is overflowing, bursting with beautiful expressions that she is afraid to bring out before the world to avoid being marked as insane. However, to Cixous the best thing for women is to write themselves in order to dismantle the barrier of darkness that is built around them to conceal their liberated thoughts. Inscription of femininity through writing is rare in the history of literature irrespective of culture and time. Cixous calls out to women to write so that they can reclaim their immense possibilities which have been kept sealed in the male dominated terrain of writing. Women's writing also gives them the chance to deconstruct history that represses women by all means.

Luce Irigaray (1977) observes that women have no right to speak as they are considered as products "used and exchanged by men" and therefore they have no more right than the commodities that have nothing to say in their transactions (84).

She also points out that the denial of the society in giving women right to language without resorting to masculine “systems of representation” thwarts them from connecting to her as well as to other women (85). Thus, notes Irigaray, the feminine is always defined by and for the masculine.

To steer a change in the present state of things Irigaray calls upon women to speak in a new language. Like Cixous’ *écriture féminine*, Irigaray also suggests that women should create a new language that will rescue them from negations arising from their representation by men. In the present state of affairs, if women keep on speaking the same language as before, words will not define women in their true forms. Irigaray expresses the urgency of creating a separate language for women by noting that without it “...we’ll be spoken machines, speaking machines. Enveloped in proper skins, but not our own. Withdrawn into proper names, violated by them. Not yours, not mine” (205).

As to the nature of this new language Irigaray observes that it will not be pinned down to any simple definition, and which is, according to her, advantageous for women. There is no hierarchy in language to determine what is good and what is not good enough. Irigaray questions all established norms that requires language to conform to a set standard. She expresses her concern about the fact that women might constrict the possibility of a free flowing language by striving to conform to good language. She notes: “If you want to speak “well,” you pull yourself in, ...you pull yourself away from the limitless realm of your body” (213).

The essence of this new kind of feminine language, suggested by Irigaray, is fluidity. This language is “multiple, devoid of causes, meanings, simple qualities” (215). This language is composed of multiple strands, without fixity. It never congeals or solidifies, nor does it follow the ontology of definite beginning and ending. Therefore, the new language women should use is to emerge with its own set of rules and distinctiveness that allows flexibility to be the defining factor. In this language there is no right or wrong, better or worse, as long as it allows all women to use it equally, nevertheless with uniqueness.

A different approach to women’s madness is found in Phyllis Chesler (1972) where she points out the vulnerability of women as opposed to men regarding being labeled as mad. Unlike Cixous and Irigaray, Chesler considers madness as a helpless state devoid of the spirit of rebellion. She argues that all men, especially the privileged ones, “can act out many disturbed (and non-disturbed) drives more easily than women can. Men are generally allowed a greater range of acceptable behaviors than are women” (n.pag.). Chesler believes that women, instead of being treated with kindness at the time of distress, are labeled as insane and are treated cruelly as they are “allowed fewer total behaviors and are more strictly confined to their role-sphere than men are,” and eventually, compared to men, women end up committing “more behaviors that are seen as ill or unacceptable” (n.pag.).

Although Chesler’s sympathy for women who are unjustifiably labeled as insane agrees with the central argument of the present article, the other part of her proposition is not in unison with the idea that Antoinette and Yeong-hye achieve a kind of emancipation through their madness. Chesler does not believe that madness can be an expression of rebellion. She makes it clear that it was never her intention to

“romanticize madness, or to confuse it with political or cultural revolution:...” (n. pag.). Therefore, this article adheres only to the first half of Chesler's analysis of female insanity.

Analysis and Discussion

In the early phase of their fateful marriage, during the honeymoon at Granbois, Antoinette's unnamed husband recalls how the girl refused to marry him after their first acquaintance. Although she changed her mind afterwards, Rochester (the husband, name is taken from *Jane Eyre*) doubts that she did so only because of her stepbrother's pursuance and his (Rochester's) “half-serious blandishments and promises” (Rhys 54). However, instead of trying to understand his wife, Rochester interprets her behavior as a form of cold withdrawal. “In any case she had given way, but coldly, unwillingly, trying to protect herself with silence and a blank face” (ibid). To the husband, Antoinette's withdrawn attitude seems to be a weapon for protecting herself. Ironically, Rochester is correct here as Antoinette does utilize this weapon to create distance in their relationship later in the novel when she becomes certain that her husband hates her. These traits of Antoinette like “silence” and “blank face” make her a mystery to Rochester who uses these against his wife to prove her insanity. It is noticeable that from an early point of the novel Antoinette protects herself by revealing some characteristics which might be interpreted as symptoms of madness.

At the crucial point of their honeymoon when she begins to understand the hatred cumulating between herself and Rochester, Antoinette seeks Christophine's help in winning back her husband. When Christophine, in her usual rebellious tone tells Antoinette to “pack up and go”, she expresses her inability to do so because after all Rochester is her husband and according to English law everything she owns now belongs to her husband (Rhys 67). A rational Antoinette, thinking straight, feels utterly powerless and realizes that her chances of getting free are limited. Instead of trying to rely on her own power, she seeks the help of Christophine's magical power, obeah, to make Rochester love him. But curiously enough, her attitude changes from helplessness to a kind of defiance when later that night Rochester informs her that Daniel, her so called half-brother, suggested that she is mad just like her mother. Antoinette then narrates to her husband their past life at Coulibri, tells him about the helpless condition of her young, widowed mother, and about her own distressed childhood. It is significant that Antoinette feels empowered when Rochester begins to believe that there might be madness in her. She decides to open up and talks about her past as she feels calm and confident, defying the anxiety of being tabooed for the suspected madness running in her family.

From that point on, Rochester starts to frequently refer to Antoinette's behavior as crazy and hysteric. Oblivious to the disloyalty he shows towards his wife, which might cause this bout of emotions, he considers Antoinette's words and actions insane. Ironically this insanity gives her a kind of protection against Rochester's betrayal and coldness. When Antoinette was acting logical, she was vulnerable in the sense that she wanted her husband's love helplessly. Now when she is driven by her passion instead of logic, she is capable of hating and hurting him.

In the third part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette finds herself confined to a cold, uncomfortable room, all alone, in Rochester's inherited mansion in England. Her caretaker Grace Poole describes her as a girl "who lives in her own darkness. I'll say one thing for her, she hasn't lost her spirit. She's still fierce" (original emphasis 115). Actually even in this desolate state, Antoinette introspects of freedom and is overtly self-conscious. She recalls in her prison how Rochester murdered her old self by giving her a new name: "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking glass" (116).

This profound thought came to Antoinette in the darkest time of her life, when she is condemned to lead life as a prisoner, because of her madness. It is as if madness gave her a sort of illumination, taught her to create a new language as suggested by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. It is during this time when her stepbrother Richard comes to visit her and as he refuses to help her, she attacks him with a knife.

The final attempt of Antoinette of dismantling Thornfield hall, her prison, by burning it down, is a premeditated act as she visualizes the whole incident beforehand. This is perhaps the most functional action that she thinks about in her mostly passive life. For almost a lifetime she has been acted upon and this final step of breaking down her prison is perhaps the strongest attempt on her part to overcome the long-standing passivity. This ultimate quest for liberation rejuvenates her inert soul by taking her to a new height of grandeur, almost reminding the readers of Greek tragedies. Thus madness gives Antoinette a new voice for writing her own story, which she has so long been denied by the patriarchal web weaved around her first by her step father and brother, and finally by her husband.

Antoinette's perilous journey, both physical and mental, can be studied through both empirical and theoretical lenses as put forward by Chesler, Cixous and Irigaray. From childhood, she has been living on the periphery because of her Creole origin. Denounced by both Europeans and the native Jamaicans, she could not even turn inward because of her mother's coldness towards her. However, the worst thing that happens to her after marriage is the destruction of the inner world that she created as the last resort to find peace.

Mr. Mason, her stepfather, and stepbrother Richard Mason hurriedly marries her off to Rochester as they think there might not be any other proposal for her. Rochester, with the information collected from Antoinette's so called half-brother Daniel Cosway, comes to the conclusion that his wife inherited madness from her mother. Eventually he takes Antoinette to his personal asylum, that is, his ancestors' mansion in England and locks her up in the attic. Phyllis Chesler's observation is appropriate here as she notes that instead of treating female help-seeking behavior with empathy and kindness, both "husbands and clinicians experience and judge such female behavior as annoying, inconvenient, stubborn, childish, and tyrannical" (n.pag.). Chesler further states that this behavior is in most cases managed with inhumane measures that even involve physical torment. Whereas Chesler's observation about the insensitive attitude of a husband towards his sick wife can be applied to the case of Antoinette, her conclusion that madness cannot be compared to an act of rebellion does not comply with the underlying message of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Chesler's

empirical view of the wretched condition of women's madness is subverted by the theories put forward by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

Cixous encourages women to write and speak to reclaim their stake of history. She tells women to take the risk of being called "monster" by speaking out her mind (876). By speaking her mind and acting her wills Antoinette, after being labeled as mad, returns to her body "which has been more than confiscated from her" (880). By burning down Thornfield Hall, she breaks the seal that confined her body and mind, and condemned her into perpetual guilt. Her rebellion, in Cixous' words, is marked by her "seizing the occasion to speak," thus she triumphantly enters history, "which has always been based on her suppression" (original emphasis 880). Jean Rhys's vivid account of the silenced mad woman in the attic of *Jane Eyre*, as depicted in Antoinette's character, shatters the barrier built around her and marks her rightful position in history as an individual who can think and speak for herself.

Antoinette's protest against Rochester's attempts of changing her identity through the change of her name can be interpreted as speaking her own language as suggested by Irigaray. Irigaray inspires women to represent themselves instead of being represented by men. Irigaray suggests that women should create a new language that will rescue them from negations arising from their representation by men. In the present state of affairs, if women keep on speaking the same language as before, words will not define women in their true forms. Irigaray expresses the urgency of creating a separate language for women by noting that without it "...we'll be spoken machines, speaking machines. Enveloped in proper skins, but not our own. Withdrawn into proper names, violated by them. Not yours, not mine" (205).

This new language for women that Irigaray hints at here is boundless. It is fluid and cannot be pinned down to rigid structures. Antoinette experiences freedom of thought in her bleak prison of madness and dreams of ultimate transcendence. She has learnt the language that will help to create her identity. Now she is capable of speaking for herself and taking her own decisions. She represents herself in the light of her true being, by reclaiming her own self.

Yeong-hye in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, like Antoinette, suffers miserably for going against the norms of South Korean society by refusing to eat meat and ends up in a lunatic asylum. *The Vegetarian* by South Korean writer Han Kang is in many ways comparable with Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* in spite of their temporal, cultural and geographical differences. The novels are divided into three sections, their dominant themes revolve around two unconventional female protagonists, and undercurrent of resistance to patriarchal norms resonates strongly in them. Additionally, their semantic patterns are also similar in the sense that both writers use hauntingly lyrical language in the novels. Dream of the protagonists is another trope that both Rhys and Kang use to explore the interior of the otherwise unfathomable Antoinette and Yeong-hye. Unlike Antoinette, Yeong-hye's introspection is rarely expressed in words, which are distinct from her vividly meaningful dreams; but her actions and the few words she utters have a rock solid determination about them to clearly etch her rebellious voice on the firm ground of the typical patriarchal society. Yeong-hye's revolting acts, like the rebellion of Antoinette, can be seen through the semantic lenses of French feminists like Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous.

It might seem baffling to some extent to argue that madness empowers Yeong-hye because in the last part of *The Vegetarian*, “Flaming Trees”, she is confined to a mental asylum and the novel ends suggesting her imminent death. However, a careful study of her character shows that she creates an agency from the moment she decides to become a vegetarian, a decision that is considered unnatural by her entire family and this resolution also coincides with the inception of a series of behavioral irregularities on her part. The novel is not about a woman’s decision of resorting to a vegetarian diet rather it implies something more sinister. In an article published in the *Slate Book Review* Laura Miller observes that Yeong-hye passes through three stages in the course of the book first by rejecting meat, second by excusing herself from a number of other common human activities and finally by refusing “humanity itself”(n.pag.). Miller rightly says that this book is about “abstention”(n.pag.). The ultimate psychological metamorphosis of Yeong-hye into a tree and her claim that she is no longer an animal poses a disturbing question towards the life style commonly followed by people.

Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye’s husband, defines his wife’s non-descript existence as “passive”, lacking freshness, charm, or anything especially refined (Kang n.pag.). He refers to her reticence and reading habit as unusual, albeit, to him, insignificant. This is why he is understandably shaken to find out that one early morning Yeong-hye is throwing out all non-vegan products from the fridge. When asked repeatedly, the only answer she yields is “I had a dream” but it has the most powerful effect on her husband’s mind (Kang n.pag.). His perplexity is expressed in the following words:

My wife’s unnaturally serene face, her incongruously firm voice, surfaced in my mind. I had a dream—she’d said that twice now. Beyond the window, in the dark tunnel, her face flitted by—her face, but unfamiliar, as though I were seeing it for the first time. (Kang n. page.) The passive, ordinary, and insignificant Yeong-hye marks her agency with such an unwavering resolution that her husband finds it difficult to recognize her, it is as though she is suddenly a new person, reborn with a clearly defined subject position.

Yeong-hye says only a few words in the whole text, but her words are resolute and sturdy, lacking the conciliatory element so conventional in people. There are some rare occasions of introspection that gives the reader an insight into her mind. In one of them she says that the souls of all the dead animals she had eaten so far are tormenting her and only death can release her from this excruciating pain. The dreams that she keeps having are another outlet to her unfathomable psyche. This is an excerpt from one of her dreams:

Intolerable loathing, so long suppressed. Loathing I’ve always tried to mask with affection. But now the mask is coming off. That shuddering, sordid, gruesome, brutal feeling. Nothing else remains. Murderer or murdered, experience too vivid to not be real. Determined, disillusioned. Lukewarm, like slightly cooled blood. (Kang n. page.) This kind of language establishes her voice as unique and helps her create agency. Though it is broken, it perfectly makes sense. The violence laced with the words uncovers the cruelty that has become normalized in the daily life of ordinary people. Here Yeong-hye’s words bring out a person from her mundane self who has attained a kind of illumination. These words establish her as someone able to see the bare truth of things stripped of their comfortable covering.

Yeong-hye's recollection of the death of a dog that was mercilessly killed by her father as it bit her is vivid and troubling. Equally disturbing is her recurrent dream of death and murder.

All these sporadic visions create a tangible meaning as she gradually tries to turn into a tree, being exhausted by the violent acts that have become normalized in the lifestyle of people. In order to free herself from this trauma she imitates the standing position of trees by standing on the palms of her hand. She also refuses to eat anything believing that like trees, water and light are enough nourishment for her.

Thus Yeong-hye writes her story in a language that is strange but defines her identity, a process which is reminiscent of Cixous as she says, "... feminine practice of writing...can never be theorized, enclosed, coded..."(883). Yeong-hye is not afraid to express her feelings in spite of speaking from a vulnerable position. She becomes a social outcast, her marriage breaks and everyone except her sister deserts her, still she holds on to the idea she believes in. Cixous notes that this is a kind of surpassing "the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system;..."(ibid). Yeong-hye's act of rebellion can be considered something "conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatism, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate" (ibid).

In the course of the text Yeong-hye identifies herself more and more with trees and less with fellow humans. The second part of the novel, "Mongolian Mark", unfolds an uncannily beautiful physical union between Yeong-hye and her brother-in-law. It is notable that because of the flowers that her artist brother-in-law painted all over her body, Yeong-hye could identify herself more closely with a tree and felt at ease with her body as she stopped seeing it as made of flesh and blood. As a continuation of this metamorphosis she tries to get lost in the wilderness in the third and last part of the novel.

In the last part Yeong-hye refuses to take food of any kind, thinking that she needs only water and light, just like the trees, for sustenance. This section, "Flaming Trees", is marked by a contrasting picture of two sisters. In-hye, the eldest one, is tied up to duties she has been performing so long as an obedient daughter, dutiful wife, and responsible mother. The newest addition to her job list is taking care of her younger sister Yeong-hye. In-hye feels that her little sister is having the greatest agency by living her chosen life, ironically being confined to the boundaries of the mental asylum. Might it be okay, after all, for Yeong-hye to live like this indefinitely? Here, where she didn't have to speak if she didn't want to, didn't have to eat meat if the thought repulsed her? (Kang n. pag.) These words come to In-hye's mind as she realizes her inability to live on her own terms unlike Yeong-hye. She cannot forgive her sister for having the courage for: "soaring alone over a boundary she herself could never bring herself to cross, unable to forgive that magnificent irresponsibility that had enabled Yeong-hye to shuck off social constraints and leave her behind, still a prisoner" (ibid).

While trying to comprehend her sister's metamorphosis, In-hye realizes the hollowness of her own existence and compares it with a dream. She tries to persuade Yeong-hye by telling her that they cannot live in dreams forever and at some point they need to wake up. It is In-hye's agony of dragging her dutiful life from day to

day that makes her aware of the magnificence of Yeong-hye's transcendental freedom. Seen from her perspective, it is plausible to argue that madness empowers Yeong-hye in the sense that she is not only free to lead life on her own terms, but is also able to create agency. Yeong-hye's gender plays a significant role in the process of her marginalization because her husband considers her decision of becoming a vegetarian utterly selfish since he fails to accept the fact that his wife has made a free choice regardless of him. In a review of *The Vegetarian* John William Walker Zeiser analyzes this patriarchal attitude of the husband thus: The concept of choice in a strictly hierarchical and patriarchal culture ("she selfishly did as she pleased"). Throughout the novel these issues appear over and over as most of those around Yeong-hye find it conceptually impossible to empathize with her. (n. page.)

Not only the husband, but almost all members of Yeong-hye's family find her change as audacious and unacceptable to such an extent that her father does not hesitate to hit her several times in a family dinner for defying him.

In some reviews of *The Vegetarian* critics observe that the book tries to unmask the violently coercive social normativity (Dczook n.pag.). At the same time, they also focus on the author's idea of empowering the protagonist by making her someone who is strong enough to stick to her beliefs. For example, Porochista Khakpour believes that Han Kang gloriously treats agency, personal choice, submission and subversion in the novel. The inability of individuals trying to connect with others is another persistent theme of *The Vegetarian*. The above analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Vegetarian* supports the theoretical discourse on which the basic arguments of the present work are developed. Felman's observation that literature gives voice to repressed madness is manifested in the unfolding of the phases of insanity in the lives of Antoinette and Yeong-hye. These two women are harshly treated by their families mostly because the families are neither tolerant nor understanding towards them basically because they are females and are supposed to maintain customs, instead of deconstructing them. It is noteworthy that Rochester and In-hye's unnamed husband get away more easily with their nontraditional ways of life. After marrying Antoinette Rochester starts living a reckless life of drinking, roaming around in the jungle, and even making love to a native girl. In-hye's artist husband leads an almost similar life but neither of them is cast away for their willfulness. Chesler aptly explicates this discrepancy by noting that women are more strictly confined to their society assigned role than men.

After madness takes them over, both Antoinette and Yeong-hye gradually start breaking their shells to show the world their real selves. Their verbal language, introspection, and the singular way of life they opt for, can be interpreted as the special language both Cixous and Irigaray suggest in their writing. Both these thinkers believe that to be heard, to be counted, and to reclaim their part of history, women must stop using the standard, existing language in favour of one that might be considered irrational and contradictory, although powerful enough to stand apart for representing women who possess distinct identities. This new language empowers women in the sense that it enables them to change things around them and to live life according to their will, without being dictated by others.

Conclusion

This article reads the madness of Antoinette from *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Yeong-hye from *The Vegetarian* as an expression of rebellion against the set rules of society. This madness is analyzed here as a unique feminine language that empowers women to create agency. It enables the otherwise marginalized characters to voice their individuality which ultimately helps them form sovereign identities. Their madness upsets the rigid normative standards of society to such an extent that people can no longer remain negligent of the characters labeled as insane. They become conscious of them and attempt to regularize the rebels' lives. The families of these mad women mightily try to suppress them with a view to keeping things under control. However, it is proved that Antoinette and Yeong-hye, docile as they were in the beginning, attain remarkable strength through madness and establish their voice through it.

This article argues in favour of its basic idea with an analysis of madness and its treatment in literature. Then it discusses how women's madness has been interpreted from both empirical and theoretical perspectives. The textual study reveals how the protagonists of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *The Vegetarian* create agency and subject position by defying the normalizing process of society. Madness empowers them by enabling them to voice their repressed thoughts and by making them act as functional subjects instead of passive objects. French feminist idea of *écriture féminine* works as the theoretical framework of the present article and both Antoinette and Yeong-hye uphold the idea of a distinctive feminine language through their body, mind, and verbal communication.

Works Cited

- Abel, Elizabeth. "Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1979, pp. 155–177. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1207964
- Alter, Alexandra. "The Vegetarian, 'a Surreal South Korean Novel.'" *The New York Times*. 2Feb.2016.<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/.../the-vegetarian-a-surreal-south-korean-novel.htm>. Web. 7 August 2018
- Chesler, Phyllis. *Women and Madness*. Chicago Review Press, 2018. Google Books.https://books.google.co.kr/books?id=XhNODwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=ko&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false Accessed 11 August 2018
- Cixous, Hélène, et al. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, Vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-893. JSTOR. https://artandobjecthood.files.wordpress.com/.../cixous_the_laugh... Accessed 9 August 2018
- Dczoom. "A vegetarian perspective on Han Kang's The Vegetarian." *Medium*. 30 May, 2016 <https://medium.com/.../a-vegetarian-perspective-on-han-kangs-the-vegetarian-341db8...> Web. 1 July, 2018
- Feathers, Lori. "Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*." *Words Without Borders. The Online Magazine for International Literature*. May 2015. <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/book-review/han-kangs-the-vegetarian>. Web. 17 July, 2018
- Felman, Shoshana. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy.(1975)" *Feminisms: An Anthology*

of *Literary Theory and Criticism*, edited by: Robyn R. Warhol, Diane Price Herndl, New Jersey:Rutgers University Press, 1997. pp. 7-20

---. *Writing and Madness*. Translated by Martha Noel Evans. California: Stanford University Press, 2003

Google

Books.<https://books.google.co.kr/books?id=W1RRZhJZjmMC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> Accessed 21 July 2018

Helenius, Marja-Liisa. "Madwoman as the Imprisoned Other: Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea in Light of French Feminist and Anglo-American Feminist Literary Theories." <https://marjaliisa.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/jean-rhys-wide-sargasso-sea.pdf>

Hubener, Paul. "Metaphor and Madness as Postcolonial Sites in Novels by Jean Rhys and Tayeb Salih." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2010, pp. 19-34. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/44030290

Irigaray, Luce. *The Sex Which is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter. New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Kang, Han. *The Vegetarian*. Translated by Deborah Smith. Hogarth, 2015.

<parkour.negaah.ca/wp.../Vegetarian_-A-Novel-The-Han-Kang.pd...>

Khakpour, Porochista. "'The Vegetarian,' by Han Kang." *The New York Times*. 2 February, 2016.<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/books/review/the-vegetarian-by-han-kang.html>. Web. 1 Sep. 2018

McCrary, Charles. Book Review: "'The Vegetarian' subtly explores dark themes." *The Daily Mississippian*. 21 July, 2016. thedmonline.com/draft-book-review-vegetarian-subtly-explores-dark-themes-ri/ Web. 3 Sep. 2018

Mezei, Kathy. "And it Kept its Secret: Narration, Memory, and Madness in Jean Rhy's *Wide Sargasso Sea*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1987. pp. 195-209. K Mezei-Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 1987 - Taylor & Francis, DOI: 10.1080/00111619.1987.9936458. Accessed 11 July 2018

Miller, Laura. "I am not an animal anymore: Han Kang's mystifying, ecstatic *The Vegetarian*."

The Slate Book Review. 5 Feb. 2016

www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2016/.../han_kang_s_the_vegetarian_reviewed.html

Web. 21 Aug. 2018

Patke, Rajeev S. "Method and Madness in 'A Question of Power' and 'Wide Sargasso Sea.'"

Journal of Caribbean Literatures, vol. 4, no. 1, 2005, pp. 185-193. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,

www.jstor.org/stable/40986181

Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. London: Penguin, 2001

Sarvan, Charles. "Flight, Entrapment, and Madness in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*."

International fiction review, vol. 26, no. 1-2, 1999, n.pag. C Sarvan - International Fiction Review, 1999 - journals.lib.unb.ca. Accessed 19 August 2018

Zeiser, John William Walker. "The Unsettling Gaze of Han Kang: Examining Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* and *Human Acts*." *Electric Literature*. 14 April, 2016

<https://electricliterature.com/the-unsettling-gaze-of-han-kang-examining-han-kangs-th>.

Web. 3 Sep. 2018