

## Comparative Literature of Ambivalence in Junichiro Tanizaki's *Naomi* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Postcolonial Study

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi ambivalensi pada tokoh perempuan dalam novel *Naomi* karya Junichiro Tanizaki dan *Wide Sargasso Sea* karya Jean Rhys. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan postkolonial dengan kerangka teori ambivalensi yang dikemukakan oleh Homi K. Bhabha. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif dengan teknik analisis tekstual terhadap kutipan-kutipan yang menunjukkan bentuk-bentuk ambivalensi dalam kedua novel. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ambivalensi dalam kedua tokoh perempuan muncul melalui tiga bentuk utama, yaitu mimicry, dinamika desire dan anxiety, serta instabilitas otoritas kolonial. Dalam *Naomi*, tokoh Naomi merepresentasikan ambivalensi melalui upayanya meniru gaya hidup Barat yang pada akhirnya justru membalikkan relasi kekuasaan dengan Jōji. Sementara itu, dalam *Wide Sargasso Sea*, tokoh Antoinette menunjukkan ambivalensi melalui ketegangan antara keinginan untuk diterima dan kecemasan yang muncul dari relasi kolonial dan identitas budaya yang terpecah. Meskipun kedua tokoh mengalami ambivalensi dalam proses pembentukan identitas mereka, konteks historis dan sosial yang berbeda menghasilkan konsekuensi yang berbeda pula. Naomi memperoleh posisi yang lebih kuat dalam relasi personalnya, sedangkan Antoinette mengalami marginalisasi dan disintegrasi psikologis. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tokoh perempuan dalam kedua novel menjadi ruang negosiasi identitas yang mencerminkan ketegangan antara modernitas Barat, kekuasaan kolonial, dan identitas budaya.

**Kata Kunci:** ambivalensi, hasrat dan kecemasan, ketidakstabilan otoritas, mimikri, postkolonial

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the representation of ambivalence in the female protagonists of *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. The study applies a postcolonial approach using the concept of ambivalence proposed by Homi K. Bhabha as the theoretical framework. The research employs a qualitative method with textual analysis of selected passages that reveal forms of ambivalence in both novels. The findings show that ambivalence in the female characters emerges through three main forms: mimicry, the dynamics of desire and anxiety, and the instability of colonial authority. In *Naomi*, the character Naomi represents ambivalence through her attempt to imitate Western lifestyles, which eventually reverses the power relationship with Jōji. Meanwhile, in *Wide Sargasso*

*Sea*, Antoinette expresses ambivalence through the tension between the desire for acceptance and the anxiety produced by colonial relations and fragmented cultural identity. Although both characters experience ambivalence in the process of identity formation, the different historical and social contexts lead to different consequences. Naomi ultimately gains a stronger position within her personal relationship, whereas Antoinette experiences marginalization and psychological fragmentation. This study demonstrates that female characters in both novels function as sites where identity negotiation reflects the tensions between Western modernity, colonial power, and cultural identity.

**Keywords:** *ambivalence, desire and anxiety, instability of authority, mimicry, postcolonialism*

### A. Introduction

The statement literary works are the reflection of the society have been known well since the time of Abrams' book *the Mirror and The Lamp* was published (Devi, 2018) in which it can be underlined that literary works can appear as the form of social artefact. This social artefact in form of literary work is presented as the consequence of the dialectic process of thoughts that can happen as the contacts of ideas for example the natives; contacts with the western people, for example with the British, the American, and the French. Related to this statement, the contacts with the western world make, the non-western writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century care how this contact changes their society, therefore, they care certain ways of outlook including the problems of women in Japan and Dominica. suggests that complicity and

resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject". By understanding the definition, it can be studied that the concept of Bhabha's ambivalence is closely aimed at the non-white people that try to cope with the issue of contacting the Western people which is related also to resistance in cultural issue as it is stated in an article entitled *Resistensi Tokoh Utama dalam Novel Hanauzumi Karya Junichi Watanabe*. (Agustina, Aibonotika, Suri, 2025) Further, the studies on *Naomi* novel by Junichiro Tanizaki (which was a translation version of *Chijin No Ai*, 1924 and this article uses the English version) have predominantly examined the issue of Westernization and mimicry. For instance, a study by Yulis Setyowati, *Homi Bhabha's Mimicry as Reflected in Tanizaki's Naomi* (Setyowati, 2018) reveals that the protagonist imitates Western

culture through appearance, behavior, and lifestyle, positioning her as a representation of cultural mimicry. Similarly, another research, *Becoming Western: A Postcolonial Reading of Tanizaki's Naomi* (Iqbal, 2016) emphasizes how Naomi embodies an “in-between” identity shaped by ambivalence, particularly through consumerism and Western lifestyle adoption. Both studies, however, tend to focus on mimicry as a one-directional process of imitation without deeply exploring the unstable negotiation between resistance and complicity. In contrast, studies on *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys for instance, a study titled *Identity of the Feminine Creole in Wide Sargasso Sea* (Almkhelif, 2024) argues that Antoinette's identity is shaped and suppressed by patriarchal and colonial forces, leading to her psychological breakdown on identity crisis and postcolonial marginalization. For example, Spivak's influential reading highlights the silencing of the Creole woman, while other studies frequently discuss Antoinette's fragmented identity and racial

displacement within colonial discourse. These studies underline oppression and resistance but often treat them as oppositional rather than interconnected processes.

Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in its comparative approach that bridges these two distinct literary traditions by applying Homi K. Bhabha's concept of ambivalence. Unlike previous studies that examine the novels separately or emphasize only mimicry or oppression, this study highlights how both Naomi and Antoinette simultaneously embody resistance and complicity, revealing ambivalence as a dynamic and fluctuating process across different colonial contexts. Related to this statement, the contacts with the western world make, the non-western writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century care how this contact changes their society, therefore, they care certain ways of outlook including the problems of women in Japan and Dominica. suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject”. However, despite the growing body

of studies discussing colonial encounters and their impact on literary representation, there remains a research gap in examining how female characters from different cultural backgrounds are comparatively constructed within the framework of ambivalence.

In this regard, Homi K. Bhabha concept of ambivalence becomes crucial, as it suggests that “complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject.” By applying this framework, this study aims to explore how non-white female characters negotiate their identities when encountering Western influence. Specifically, this research compares female characters from Japan and Dominica by examining their character dimensions, including their attitudes toward Western values, their forms of resistance, and their internal conflicts. While both characters experience ambivalence as a result of colonial contact, they differ in the way they express agency: one tends to internalize Western norms while subtly resisting them, whereas the other demonstrates more explicit resistance while still being influenced

by colonial structures. At the same time, both characters share similarities in their struggle to reconcile traditional cultural values with modern, Western-influenced identities.

Thus, literary representations of women often reveal deeper cultural anxieties surrounding modernity, identity, and power (Verma, 2024). In the early twentieth century, literary texts from different cultural contexts began to portray female protagonists not only as characters within a narrative but also as symbolic sites where social tensions and ideological conflicts are negotiated. This study emerges from the observation that the female protagonists in *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys embody complex cultural contradictions that reflect broader historical encounters with Western modernity and colonial discourse. Although these works emerge from different geographical and historical contexts, modernizing Japan and the postcolonial Caribbean in which both novels construct female protagonists whose identities become contested spaces shaped by desire,

control, and cultural imitation. Existing studies often analyze *Naomi* in terms of modern Japanese gender dynamics and Westernization, while *Wide Sargasso Sea* is frequently discussed within postcolonial and feminist frameworks. However, few studies place these two texts in direct comparative dialogue, particularly through the lens of female protagonists as sites of ambivalent cultural identity. This gap indicates the need for a comparative investigation that examines how similar patterns of cultural tension emerge across different literary traditions. Both *Naomi* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* dramatize Bhabha's concept of ambivalence through female figures who become sites of colonial and modern anxieties. In *Naomi*, mimicry operates as a project of voluntary westernization, where Joji attempts to produce a modern, "Western" woman who is "almost the same, but not quite." However, this resemblance turns into menace, destabilizing his masculine authority and reversing the power hierarchy. *Naomi* thus embodies ambivalence as eroticized modernity that exceeds

male control. In contrast, *Wide Sargasso Sea* situates ambivalence within a direct colonial framework: Antoinette's attempt to inhabit English identity exposes the impossibility of full assimilation. Her mimicry does not produce empowerment but erasure, culminating in renaming and confinement. While *Naomi* transforms ambivalence into a form of dominance within Japan's semi-peripheral modernity, Antoinette reveals how colonial ambivalence in the Caribbean results in fragmentation and silencing. In both texts, the female body becomes the contested terrain upon which desire, anxiety, and unstable authority are negotiated.

This article therefore adopts the concept of ambivalence developed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) in *The Location of Culture* as the primary theoretical framework. Bhabha argues that colonial discourse is characterized by ambivalence, a condition in which attraction and anxiety coexist within relations of cultural power. Mimicry, which Bhabha famously describes as being

“almost the same, but not quite,” produces identities that simultaneously resemble and threaten dominant cultural authority. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the representation of the female protagonists in both novels. Naomi, the central female figure in *Naomi*, is constructed through a process of Westernization that transforms her into a symbol of modern femininity while simultaneously destabilizing male authority. In contrast, Antoinette Cosway, the protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, occupies an unstable cultural position between European colonial identity and Caribbean Creole heritage. Through these characters, the novels reveal how female identity becomes entangled in broader cultural tensions involving imitation, difference, and power.

This study employs a comparative literature approach to identify patterns of similarity and difference between the two works. Comparative literature, as scholars such as Susan Bassnett argue, seeks to explore relationships between texts across cultural and national

boundaries in order to understand shared literary concerns and distinctive contextual meanings. Bassnett in her book *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993) explains that comparative literature “involves the study of texts across cultures, drawing attention to patterns of similarity and difference that illuminate the literary and cultural processes shaping them”. By examining Naomi and Antoinette as central figures within their respective narratives, this study focuses on how female protagonists become key sites through which ambivalent cultural identities are articulated. While both characters appear within male-dominated narrative structures, their presence ultimately exposes tensions in the systems that attempt to define and control them.

There are three points that are related to ambivalence according to Homi Bhabka 1) Mimicry. The word means almost the same, but not quite. This can be defined as ambivalence emerges when the colonial subject is encouraged to imitate (mimic) the dominant culture but is never allowed to become fully identical to it. 2)

Desire and Anxiety: ambivalence is a double structure in which colonial discourse simultaneously desires and fears the subject it produces 3) Instability of Colonial Authority This can be defined as ambivalence renders colonial authority inherently unstable; power is fractured by its own internal contradictions.

Based on these considerations, this article investigates how ambivalence operates in the characterization of Naomi and Antoinette and how these two female protagonists reflect different manifestations of cultural negotiation within modern Japanese and Caribbean literary contexts. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research question: how do the female protagonists in *Naomi* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* embody postcolonial ambivalence, and discusses similarities and differences emerge when their identities are examined through a comparative literary framework. Through this approach, the study aims to contribute to comparative literary scholarship by demonstrating how female characters

in distinct cultural traditions reveal shared structures of cultural tension shaped by modernity, colonial discourse, and gendered power relations.

## **B. Research Method**

This study employs a qualitative research design using a comparative literary approach. Qualitative literary research focuses on interpreting meanings embedded in literary texts through close reading and contextual analysis. According to Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, qualitative research emphasizes interpretive understanding of cultural texts and social meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In literary studies, such an approach allows researchers to explore narrative structures, character representations, and thematic patterns within literary works. Therefore, this research analyzes the representation of ambivalence through the female protagonists in *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. The theoretical framework applied in this study is the concept of

ambivalence proposed by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*.

The primary data sources of this study are two novels, *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. The data consist of narrative passages, dialogues, and textual descriptions that portray the characterization of the female protagonists and reveal aspects related to ambivalent identity. Secondary data are obtained from scholarly books and journal articles discussing postcolonial theory and comparative literature. This study applies a comparative literature approach to examine similarities and differences between the two literary works. Comparative literature, as explained by Susan Bassnett, involves the study of literary texts across cultures in order to identify patterns of

similarity and difference in literary representation (Bassnett, 1993). The data were collected through a close reading technique in which relevant passages related to the female protagonists were identified and documented. According to Lois Tyson, close reading enables researchers to interpret deeper meanings and ideological implications embedded in literary texts (Tyson, 2023). The collected data were then analyzed using an interpretive textual analysis based on the concept of ambivalence proposed by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, particularly focusing on how mimicry, desire, and instability of identity are reflected in the female protagonists of the two novels.

### C. Results and Discussion

**Table 1**

Aspects of Analysis	Naomi	Antoinette	Similarities	Differences
Male Domination	Shaped by Joji who attempts to turn her into a modern Westernized woman	Shaped by her English husband, who controls and redefines her identity	female identity is influenced by male authority	-
Western Standards	Encouraged to imitate Western lifestyle (fashion, behavior, urban modernity)	Evaluated according to English colonial cultural standards	identity is measured against Western norms	-
Cultural Mimicry	Actively imitates Western culture as a symbol of modernity	Less active imitation; rather positioned within imposed colonial standards	pressure toward Westernization	Naomi imitates, Antoinette is imposed upon

Power Relations	Initially controlled by Jōji, but later gains dominance over him	Remains under the dominance of her husband	-	Naomi experiences reversal of power, Antoinette does not
Ambivalence (Desire vs Anxiety)	Encouragee to imitate Western lifestyle (fashion, behavior, urban modernity)	Evaluated according to English colonial cultural standards	identity is measured against Western norms	-
Identity Formation	Develops independence and confidence	Experiences identity crisis and alienation	-	Naomi moves toward empowerment, Antoinette toward fragmentation
Language Cultural Context	English as a foreign language; awkward and artificial usage	English as a colonial language; marked by accent and cultural hierarchy	-	Naomi's linguistic issue is technical, Antoinette's is political/colonial
Impact of Ambivalence	Leads to freedom and reversal of roles	Leads to marginalization and psychological pressure	-	contrasting outcomes

One similarity between the female protagonists in *Naomi* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is that both women are shaped by male influence connected to Western cultural ideals. Both of them try to mimic the idealized western way of life. In the novel *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki, the male protagonist Jōji deliberately educates Naomi so that she can imitate Western culture, which he considers modern and sophisticated. Jōji explains his fascination with Western appearance and lifestyle when he observes Naomi and imagines transforming her into a Westernized woman. At one point he

notes that Naomi's face reminds him of Western actresses, suggesting his desire to remake her according to Western standards.

"Her face reminded me somehow of a Western movie actress." (Tanizaki, 1924)

This statement reveals Jōji's admiration for Western culture and his desire to shape Naomi according to those ideals. Naomi becomes a project through which Jōji attempts to reproduce what he perceives as Western modernity. He teaches her manners, fashion, and lifestyle associated with Western culture. This situation reflects a form of cultural

mimicry, in which Western identity is perceived as more modern and desirable.

A similar pattern can be observed in the character Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Although her situation is different, Antoinette is also shaped and controlled by a male figure, her English husband. He attempts to redefine her identity according to his own cultural perspective and even renames her. In one scene he insists on calling her by another name, asserting his authority over her identity.

“Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else.” (Rhys, 1966)

This moment shows how Antoinette resists the identity imposed on her by her husband. However, the renaming also reflects colonial power, in which the English male figure attempts to reshape a Caribbean woman according to his own cultural expectations. Like Naomi, Antoinette becomes an object through which cultural power operates. Both characters illustrate how female identity is influenced by

male authority and by the prestige associated with Western culture.

A significant similarity between the protagonists in *Naomi* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* lies in the way their identities are measured against Western cultural standards. In *Naomi*, written by Junichiro Tanizaki, Joji’s deliberately attempts to transform Naomi into what he considers a modern, Westernized woman. He openly admits that his intention is to educate and refine her according to modern ideals of sophistication and style. As he explains, “I wanted to turn her into a fine woman, a modern girl” (Tanizaki, 1924).

This statement reveals that Naomi becomes a project of Westernization shaped by Joji’s admiration for Western culture. Through cinema, fashion, language, and modern urban lifestyle, Naomi gradually adopts behaviors associated with Western modernity. Her transformation illustrates what Homi K. Bhabha describes as cultural mimicry, a process in which non-Western subjects imitate Western cultural forms in order to appear modern and civilized (Bhabha, 1994).

Thus, Naomi's identity is not formed independently but constructed through Joji's desire to reproduce Western modernity.

A comparable dynamic appears in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Antoinette is evaluated through the cultural perspective of her English husband, who represents the authority of British colonial norms. Although she has European ancestry, he emphasizes that she does not truly belong to English culture. As he reflects, "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys, 1966).

This remark shows how Antoinette is positioned within a colonial hierarchy that privileges English identity. Her husband measures her character and background against English cultural standards, which implicitly places her in an inferior position. Like Naomi, Antoinette becomes a figure whose identity is shaped and judged through Western norms. Consequently, both novels reveal how female identity is constructed through male authority and the prestige associated with

Western culture.

A second form of ambivalence in Naomi and *Wide Sargasso Sea* appears in the tension between desire and anxiety toward Westernized femininity. In *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki, Joji's desire is evident in his ambition to transform Naomi into a modern woman modeled after Western culture. He imagines educating her taste, behavior, and appearance so that she can embody the modern lifestyle he admires. As he admits while describing his plan for Naomi, "I wanted to turn her into a fine woman, a modern girl" (Tanizaki, 1924). This statement clearly expresses Joji's desire to create a Westernized feminine ideal through Naomi.

However, this desire gradually produces anxiety when Naomi begins to develop independence and confidence beyond Joji's expectations. The more successfully Naomi adopts the modern lifestyle he encouraged, the more uneasy Jōji becomes about his loss of control over her behavior. He eventually acknowledges this uncomfortable realization: "Sometimes I felt uneasy

about the way she behaved, but I had brought it upon myself” (Tanizaki, 1924). This moment illustrates the ambivalent dynamic described by Homi K. Bhabha, in which imitation of Western culture is desired but simultaneously feared because it destabilizes existing authority (Bhabha, 1994). Thus, Naomi becomes both the object of Joji’s aspiration and the source of his anxiety.

A similar pattern can be observed in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. At the beginning of their relationship, Antoinette’s English husband expresses desire for her beauty and the exotic atmosphere of the Caribbean world she represents. Her difference initially attracts him because it appears mysterious and alluring compared with English society. However, this attraction gradually turns into anxiety as he begins to feel threatened by the unfamiliar environment and cultural difference surrounding him. His discomfort is expressed when he observes the overwhelming landscape: “Everything is too much... too much blue, too much purple, too

much green” (Rhys, 1966).

This remark reveals how the husband’s initial fascination becomes anxiety toward the colonial environment and the woman associated with it. Antoinette’s identity as a Creole woman makes her both desirable and unsettling within the colonial hierarchy. As a result, she becomes the focus of contradictory emotions: attraction to difference and fear of it. Therefore, both novels illustrate how ambivalence emerges when cultural difference generates simultaneous desire and anxiety.

In *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki, Joji’s desire for Western modernity is closely connected with his fascination for Naomi’s transformation into a fashionable modern girl. He enjoys taking her to modern urban spaces and watching her adopt Western styles that symbolize sophistication. At one point he proudly observes how Naomi attracts attention in public spaces:

“When we walked together in the streets of Ginza, people often turned to look at her.” (Tanizaki, 1924)

This moment reflects Jōji’s desire, because Naomi’s Westernized appearance confirms his success in

creating the modern woman he imagined. However, the same transformation later produces anxiety, as Naomi's popularity and independence begin to exceed his control. Joji gradually realizes that the modern lifestyle he introduced also empowers Naomi to act freely and unpredictably. In this way, Naomi's Westernization becomes both a source of pride and a source of insecurity for him.

A comparable dynamic occurs in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Antoinette's husband initially experiences desire toward the mysterious beauty of the Caribbean and the woman who embodies it. Her difference from English society appears attractive and intriguing at the beginning of their marriage. Yet this attraction gradually turns into anxiety as he begins to distrust the unfamiliar world surrounding him. His uneasiness becomes clear when he reflects on Antoinette and the place she belongs to:

"She is a stranger to me." (Rhys, 1966)

This statement reveals how the husband's earlier attraction

transforms into emotional distance and suspicion. Antoinette becomes associated with a world that he cannot fully understand or control. As described by Homi K. Bhabha, colonial encounters often produce such ambivalence, where fascination with cultural difference coexists with fear and instability (Bhabha, 1994). Therefore, both novels demonstrate how the same object of desire can simultaneously generate anxiety within unequal cultural relationships.

A third aspect of ambivalence in Naomi and *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be seen in the instability of authority exercised by the male figures who attempt to control the female protagonists. In *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki, Jōji initially believes that he can guide and shape Naomi according to his ideals of Western modernity. He assumes the role of a teacher who will educate Naomi and control the direction of her transformation. However, he later admits that the situation has changed and that Naomi now dominates their relationship.

"Before I knew it, she had completely taken control of me." (Tanizaki, 1924)

This confession demonstrates the instability of Joji's authority. Although he originally positioned himself as Naomi's mentor and cultural guide, his power gradually collapses as Naomi gains confidence and independence. The woman he tried to shape according to Western ideals eventually destabilizes his own authority. This reversal illustrates what Homi K. Bhabha describes as the ambivalent nature of cultural power, where the attempt to impose authority can produce unexpected forms of resistance or reversal (Bhabha, 1994).

A similar instability of authority appears in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Antoinette's English husband initially assumes that he possesses control as both a husband and a representative of British colonial culture. However, the unfamiliar Caribbean environment and Antoinette's unpredictable behavior gradually undermine his sense of certainty and authority. His uneasiness becomes evident when he reflects on his inability to understand the world around him.

"I feel very much a stranger

here." (Rhys, 1966)

This remark reveals the fragility of colonial authority within the novel. Although the husband represents English cultural power, he cannot fully dominate or comprehend the Caribbean space in which he lives. The colonial figure who expects to control the situation instead experiences uncertainty and displacement. Therefore, both novels demonstrate how authority whether masculine or colonial can become unstable when confronted with cultural difference and ambivalent relationships.

A key difference between the protagonists in *Naomi* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* lies in the way they experience linguistic ambivalence when encountering Western culture. In *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki, Naomi learns English as a foreign language under the guidance of Joji, who hopes that she will become a sophisticated modern girl. However, Naomi's English remains grammatically awkward and often sounds artificial. At one point she enthusiastically tries to speak English but produces incorrect expressions

such as:

“You very kind, thank you.”  
(Tanizaki, 1924)

This moment shows that Naomi's imitation of Western language is still superficial and incomplete. Her mistakes reveal that English is clearly a foreign language that she struggles to master. Nevertheless, Naomi does not experience a deep cultural anxiety because English is simply an imported cultural skill within a relatively open encounter between Japanese and Western modernity.

A different linguistic situation appears in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Antoinette does not learn English as a foreign language because it is already part of her colonial environment. However, her speech and identity are still marked by the Creole background that distinguishes her from the English colonizers. The cultural gap between someone coming from Far Eastern Asia and someone coming from Caribbean can be related to historical context in which Far East States were never colonized by American nor British (Kobayashi, 2025, Watabane, 2025, Sussaman & Rosenfeld, 1962, Gao

2005, Hashimoto %Glasgow, 2021) , but on the other hand, some Caribbean States were colonized which influenced the legacy of English ability of the natives in the regions that cause cultural gap while within the Caribbean States as the melting pot of racial relations make the diversity of English ability. Her husband notices this difference and reflects on the cultural gap between them:

“She spoke with a soft West Indian accent.” (Rhys, 1966)

This observation suggests that Antoinette's English never fully matches the standard expected by the English colonial authority. Unlike Naomi, whose linguistic errors are simply part of learning a foreign language, Antoinette's accent reflects the racial and colonial hierarchy embedded in Caribbean society. Consequently, the linguistic ambivalence experienced by Antoinette carries a heavier historical burden related to colonial domination and racial difference.

A second important difference lies in the historical and cultural contexts that shape their identities. In

*Naomi*, the encounter between Japan and Western culture occurs in a relatively open environment of modernization during the early twentieth century. Western culture appears attractive and fashionable, and Naomi's imitation of Western style is largely associated with urban modernity. In contrast, the relationship depicted in *Wide Sargasso Sea* reflects a colonial structure marked by exploitation, racial division, and historical trauma. As a result, the ambivalence experienced by Antoinette emerges from a deeply unequal colonial relationship rather than from a relatively voluntary cultural imitation.

Finally, the two characters also differ in the consequences of their ambivalence. Naomi gradually gains power and confidence through the Westernized identity she adopts, eventually reversing the power relationship with Joji. Antoinette, however, becomes increasingly marginalized and isolated within the colonial system surrounding her. Her struggle with identity leads not to empowerment but to psychological

fragmentation. Therefore, while Naomi's ambivalence reflects the playful instability of modern cultural imitation, Antoinette's ambivalence reveals the tragic effects of colonial hierarchy and racial division. In short, while Naomi's ambivalence reflects the playful instability of cultural mimicry in a modernizing society, Antoinette's ambivalence exposes the traumatic psychological consequences of colonial domination.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study has examined the representation of ambivalence in the female protagonists of *Naomi* by Junichiro Tanizaki and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys through the theoretical framework of ambivalence proposed by Homi K. Bhabha. The findings demonstrate that both novels portray female protagonists whose identities become sites where cultural tensions related to Western modernity, colonial power, and gender relations are negotiated. Through the concept of mimicry, both Naomi and Antoinette attempt to approach Western cultural ideals that are perceived as modern and

authoritative. However, this imitation never produces complete assimilation and instead generates ambivalent identities that exist between admiration and difference.

The analysis also reveals that ambivalence emerges through the dynamics of desire and anxiety. In *Naomi*, Joji's desire to transform Naomi into a Westernized modern woman gradually turns into anxiety when her independence threatens his authority. Similarly, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's husband initially expresses attraction toward her exotic difference but later experiences anxiety toward the cultural environment and identity she represents. These dynamics illustrate Bhabha's argument that colonial discourse simultaneously desires and fears the subjects it produces.

Furthermore, both novels demonstrate the instability of, where attempts to control female identity ultimately undermine the power of the controlling figures. Jōji's effort to shape Naomi results in the reversal of their power relationship, while Antoinette's husband struggles to maintain authority within a cultural

environment he cannot fully understand. In this way, the female protagonists expose the fragile nature of masculine and colonial authority when confronted with cultural difference and ambivalent identity.

Despite these similarities, the study also identifies significant differences between the two characters. Naomi's ambivalence emerges within the context of Japan's modernization and its relatively open encounter with Western culture, where imitation of Western lifestyles can lead to empowerment and social mobility. In contrast, Antoinette's ambivalence develops within the rigid structures of colonial domination in the Caribbean, where cultural difference is shaped by racial hierarchy and historical trauma. Consequently, while Naomi's ambivalence ultimately allows her to gain power within her personal relationship, Antoinette's ambivalence results in marginalization and psychological fragmentation.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis demonstrates that although *Naomi* and *Wide*

*Sargasso Sea* originate from different cultural and historical contexts, both novels reveal how female characters become symbolic spaces where modernity, colonial power, and cultural identity intersect. By applying Bhabha's concept of ambivalence, this study highlights how literary representations of women reflect broader social tensions related to cultural imitation, authority, and resistance. Therefore, this research contributes to comparative literary studies by showing that similar structures of ambivalent identity can emerge across different literary traditions, while their consequences are shaped by the specific historical conditions of each cultural context.

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