

## **A Postmodernist Reading of Anne Tyler's *Breathing Lessons*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions***

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### **Abstract**

This study offers a postmodernist reading of Tyler's *Breathing Lessons*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*. Using argumentation as a method, it comprises an original work devoted to demonstrating that these novels are postmodern. While Tyler's novel exemplifies postmodernism, a twentieth-century movement in art and literature, in its indirect narrative method, focus on ordinary humans, highlighting family disintegration, and demonstrating that marriage is no longer a safe anchor in life, Rhys's emphasizes Antoinette's struggle for independence, uses irony, and is open-ended. Vonnegut's novel, similarly, makes use of intertextuality, depicts characters lacking free will, employs collage, and selects a content and style that are both skeptical. Obviously, each one of these novels reflects postmodernism in its own way.

**Key Words:** polar opposites, postmodernism, reaction, reference, self-reflexivity

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The term postmodernism is hard to define as it is a concept that appears in a good number of disciplines, and as many authors and critics still disagree on its basic tenets. However, the easiest way to clarify it is to say that it is a reaction to modernism that is a twentieth-century movement in “visual arts, music, literature, and drama which rejected the old Victorian standards of how art should be made, consumed, and what it should mean” (Klages, 2012, p.1). To Mary Klages (2006), postmodernism is the “critique of grand narratives.” She refers to Lyotard’s argument that “all aspects of modern societies, including science as primary form of knowledge, depend on these grand narratives” (169). Like Klages, Mathew Johnson (2010) has characterized it as “disillusionment with Enlightenment ideals.” Similarly, Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) defines it, in *The Postmodern Condition*, as an “incredulity toward metanarratives, which is, somewhat ironically, a product of scientific progress” (xxiv). In view of authors and critics’ disagreement on its basic characteristics, this term has been the subject of heated debates. It was first coined, Nicol contends, in the 1940s to describe a reaction against modernism in architecture. As regards its use, Nicol adds, it began to be widely used in the 1960s by American cultural critics and commentators, especially Susan Sontag and Leslie Fiedler who wanted to describe a new trend in literature that either rejected modernist techniques or adapted or extended them. In the following decades, the term postmodernism began to figure in academic disciplines besides literary criticism and architecture – such as social theory, cultural and media studies, visual arts, philosophy, and history (p.1). As a social movement, postmodernism has originated in aesthetics, architecture, and philosophy (Bishop, 1996). Like Bishop, Callinicos (1990) maintains that postmodernism in art and architecture has originated in the reaction against abstraction in painting and the International Style in architecture (101). Like Bishop and Callinicos, Hassan (1982), an American critic, used this term to specify certain tendencies in literature in the 1960s. To take an example, in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, Hassan argues that “the postmodern spirit... is not really a matter of chronology” (p.139). Regarding the relationship between postmodernism and literary criticism, he claims that the postmodern is not simply a major cultural shift; it also involves a new relationship between humans and the milieu. This relationship seems to be brought about by the postmodern thinking which began in the nineteenth century with Nietzsche’s assertions about language, truth, and society that paved the way for all the succeeding modern and postmodern critiques about the foundations of knowledge (Kuznar, 2008, p.78). According to Geyh (2005), Nietzsche has critiqued the Enlightenment ideals of “absolute truth, universal morality, and trans-historical values, which he [has replaced] with a radically multi-centered or, in his terms, perspectival understanding of human knowledge, morality, and culture” (1). Geyh adds that the “genealogy of postmodernist thinking is connected to post-structuralism, one of the most important conceptual revolutions of postmodernism” (1) through Nietzsche and other related figures, such as Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger. This connection occurs between postmodernists and the advocates of post-structural theory of literature who refuse to accept, Norris (1982) argues, “the natural link that common sense assumes to exist between word and thing” (4). Poststructuralists believe that signifiers have no definite signifieds, and that signifieds are legion, which is conducive to a multiplicity of meanings which cannot

be grasped because there is no fixed intellectual reference in the world where we live. This multiplicity of meanings connected with the myriad signifieds can be equated with indeterminacy which is a marker of any postmodern novel. Preventing a text from being narrowed down to a single interpretation, indeterminacy keeps the text open to these interpretations provided by readers whose experiences and preconceptions determine all that they say about a given text. Writers themselves may “utilize the types of linguistic ambiguity in order to create indeterminacy, but all cases of ambiguity are not indeterminacy proper”(Encyclopedia Britannica, p.1). Indeterminacy is similar to ambiguity “as described by the New Critics, but it is applied by its practitioners not only to literature but also to the interpretation of texts”(Encyclopedia Britannica,p.1). Indeterminacy is a term that has been given its literary meaning by deconstruction theorists headed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida who is regarded to be the foremost proponent of postmodernism on account of his concept of deconstruction that involves, Rosenau (1993) argues, “demystifying a text to reveal internal arbitrary hierarchies and presuppositions.” Deconstruction does not resolve inconsistencies. Rather, it “exposes”, Rosenau adds, “hierarchies involved for the distillation of information.” Holding reason to be dominated by “a metaphysics of presence,” Derrida attacks Western philosophy’s understanding of reason, trying, Norris (1990) claims, “to problematize the grounds of reason, truth, and knowledge,” questioning the highest point by demanding reasoning for reasoning itself”(199). While Derrida agrees to the insight of structuralism that meaning is not inherent in signs, he proposes, Appignanesi (1995) claims, that “it is incorrect to infer that anything reasoned can be used as a stable and timeless model”(77). Not only does deconstruction unmask errors in a given text but also redefines that text by undoing and reversing polar opposites. Deconstruction is not confined to merely unmasking errors. Were it confined to doing that, it would assume that truth exists. Instead of this, it aims, Culler (1982) maintains, to “undo, reverse, displace, and resituate the hierarchies involved in polar opposites, such as object/subject, right/wrong, good/bad, pragmatic/principled” (150). In so doing, it attempts to undermine “logocentrism” which is concerned with “truth, rationality, logic, and “the word” that are the “hallmarks of the Western philosophical tradition” (Jordan,2004). It is worth noting that Derrida’s theory of deconstruction is at the heart of postmodernist thought, and his argument that “[there] is nothing beyond the text” has become an “icon of postmodernism.” (Jordan,2004).

As far as the connection between the text and the world is concerned, the postmodern literary work does not reflect reality. In a post-modernist fiction, everything exists, Lewis (2001) maintains, “in such a radical state of distortion and aberration that there is no way of determining from which conditions in the real world they have been derived or from what standard of sanity they may be said to depart” (123). Commenting on the characteristics of this type of fiction, Lewis adds that the “conventions of verisimilitude and sanity [are nullified] “ and that “characters inhabit a dimension of structureless being in which their behavior becomes inexplicably arbitrary and unjudgeable because the fiction itself stands as a metaphor of a derangement that is seemingly without provocation and beyond measurement” (123). Lewis is saying that the postmodern novel does not hold up a mirror to reality, and that it is not a copy of the external world. Arguing in support of this contention, Waugh (1984) holds that postmodern fiction can “never imitate or ‘represent’ the world but always imitates or ‘represents’ the discourses which in turn construct that

world”(100). Waugh(2006) adds that literary postmodernism is a “quest for fictionality” (10), one that is oriented towards uncertainty. Emphasizing the fictional world of postmodern fiction, Lodge (1992) holds that postmodern novel is “fiction about fiction: novels and stories that call attention to their fictional status and their own compositional procedures” (206). The reason underlying postmodernists’ attitude towards the external world is that they believe that there is no reality to be reflected, no absolute truth, and that the universe itself has no center. For these reasons, meaning and coherence, to them, do not exist in the world or the text. In line with this contention, their literary works do not display much attention to plot, characterization, and reality. To take an example, Anne Tyler’s *Breathing Lessons* is a postmodern novel for several reasons. The first reason is that this novel gives us an extraordinary insight into the lives of ordinary middle-class people who are divided between their quest for identity and their obligations toward their families that are largely in decline. Fiona and Jesse, for instance, lead a sad and partitioned life (190) that is conducive to splitting up, which deeply affects children. Jesse and Fiona split up even before their daughter, Leroy, is a year old (190). Jesse suffers because he has trouble with seeing his own daughter that he has not laid his eyes on since splitting up. The result is that he has to introduce himself to Leroy who is his own flesh and blood. Fiona, his wife, is not much better off. Fed up with living with the Morans, she divorces him and goes back home to her mother accompanied by Leroy. It is worth noting that Fiona’s divorcing Jesse gives rise to the disintegration of her family. Thus, Fiona finds herself obligated to work to support herself, her daughter, and her mother. She works as a beautician to earn her living. She also realizes that she should care for her mother, daughter, and for the household. Moreover, she should shoulder the responsibility of both sending her daughter to school and socializing her. At the same time, she wants to assert her own identity and enjoy her rights as a human by competing with men who may not make it easy for her to achieve her objectives. A quick look at Fiona’s family reveals that it has disintegrated and has also become a single-parent family due to divorce that impacts not only women and husbands but also children and the society where they live. Commenting on divorce, Ian Robertson (1989) claims that the U.S.A. has the highest divorce rate in the world. This high rate of divorce constitutes the primary reason for rise in the percentage of female-headed families. Echoing Robertson, Mary Robertson(1985) comments on the disintegration of families,, arguing that [Tyler’s] assault on the notion of what is a proper family makes her close in spirit to other postmodernists who regularly engage in what might be called category assassination, questioning just about every conventional distinction between one concept and another that we use to order our lives and thought(192).

Family disintegration is an important theme and a second reason for claiming that the novel is postmodern. In these disintegrating families, family members don’t seem to work as a cohesive unit. They stay isolated from one another. In *Breathing Lessons*, Though Ira has no friends (40), he isolates himself from people. “He was a closed-in, isolated man\_\_\_ his most serious flaw” (13). Ira’s sisters are equally isolated. They don’t talk to many people (109). Junie, Ira’s sister, is kept informed of the world’s important developments by the television set (17). Isolated from the external world, Ira’s father and sisters rely on Ira himself for the news of the outer world (166). Ira and Maggie are married, but they are unhappy. Maggie complains of her differing with Ira over the problem of Leroy, their grandchild, arguing: “I feel like we’re just flying apart! All my friends and relatives just flying off from me...we’ll never see that child, do

you realize that!" (11). Responding, Ira says: "We never see her anyhow." Ira and Maggie don't comprise a cohesive unit. Ira loves his wife, Maggie, but wishes she wouldn't intervene in other people's lives. She arranges for Jesse and Fiona to meet together, but she bungles this job by lying to Fiona to convince her that Jesse still loves her. She tells her that Jesse still keeps herb soapbox. Later on, Fiona sees Jesse and inquires of him about the soapbox, but discovers that he has no idea about it. Reckoning with this response, she understands that Maggie has lied to her. Therefore, she decides to be separated from him and goes back home with Leroy to live with her mother. Tyler seems to be exploring the theme of isolation and interweaving it with her characters. Like Fiona, Serena that is responsible for her family, the household, and her daughter Linda lives on her own. Like Fiona and Serena, Otis, a helpless old black man, lives alone because his marriage has failed. Fiona's mother, similarly, used to live on her own. Ira, likewise, immerses himself in card games of solitaire while staying at home. Ira's reason for doing that is that he wants to make himself unseeable. In a sense, he wants to isolate himself from others. By staying at home, others take him to be available there, but, in truth, he is unavailable because he is too preoccupied with the games of solitaire to be conscious of what is happening around him. Suffering from distraction, Ira upon entering Serena's house to attend Max's funeral, spreads his cards "across half the length of the pew\_\_... The form of solitaire he played was so involved it could last for hours, but it started simply and he was rearranging the cards almost without hesitation" (51). Addressing Maggie, he says: "This is the part that's dull" (51). The justification for this behavior is that Ira's preoccupation with the card games blinds him to what is happening near to him. This preoccupation makes him focus only on card games and forget about the other things that he holds to be out of focus.

Just as games bring about distraction so do cars, radio-sets, television sets, phones, movies, and machines that the characters in the novel use, but they seem to be unable to keep them under control. This is the third reason for the contention that Tyler's *Breathing Lessons* is a postmodern novel. Maggie and Ira, for instance, use the car to go from one place to another. Maggie and Ira's car is at the body shop to be repaired. After its repair, Maggie picks it up. While driving, she runs into a truck and doesn't stop. Listening to a radio talk show, she hears, a soft voice claiming: "Well, I'm about to remarry? The first time was purely for love? It was genuine, true love and it didn't work at all. Next Saturday I'm marrying for security" (5). Maggie mistakes the radio caller for Fiona, her son's wife. Distracted by that call on the radio, she takes the gasoline pedal to be the brake pedal. She "meant to brake, but accelerated instead and shot out of the garage and directly into the street" (5). The result is that she runs into the Pepsi truck, which impacts her fender that "was making a very upsetting noise, something like a piece of tin dragging over gravel, so as soon as she'd turned the corner and the two men...had disappeared from rearview mirror, she came to a stop" (5). Upon hearing that, Ira lays the blame on her wondering: "How could you mix up the brake with the gas pedal?" (8). Responding, she says: "I just did it, Ira. All right? I just got startled and I did. So let's drop it" (8). To attend Max's funeral, they drive their car to go to Serena's house. While driving, Maggie mentions the "directions Serena [has given] [her] over the phone" (12). When he heard that, he inquired: "Maggie. Do you honestly believe any directions of Serena's could get us where we'd care to go? Ha! We'd find ourselves in Canada someplace. We'd be off in Arizona!" (12). En route to Serena's house, Ira pulls up at a gas station, Maggie, feeling hungry, argues: "See if they have a snack machine, will you?" (22). Instead

of responding to her, they keep talking about Jesse, Fiona, Leroy, Serena, the old days, the traffic, the odometer, road-signs, the map, cutoffs, Pennsylvania, Deer Lick, and Maggie's girl friends. Commenting on his behavior, Maggie maintains that [he] has always talked like that about her girlfriends. He acted downright jealous of them (27). After commenting on her girl friends, Maggie inquires once more of him about the snack machine, wondering: "Did that service station have a snack machine?" (27). Replying, he claims: "Just candy bars. Stuff you don't like" (27). He adds: "I could have got you a candy bar, but I thought you wouldn't eat it" (27). Afterwards, they get to the church to attend Max's funeral before which Serena shows a movie of her wedding (89). It is interesting to note that Max, before dying, used to earn his living by "[selling] radio ads the same as always" (56). These ads are meant to promote the sales of a certain product, which necessitates brainwashing customers into buying it. This job of brainwashing customers occurs to convince them of buying the product whether it is good or not. To achieve this objective, advertisers use both technology and psychology. While technology serves as a tool, psychology composes the content employed to deceive the consumer. This deception happens by using a psychological strategy referred to as "the mere exposure effect" which means that consumers like a product for just being exposed to it, and that the more a certain advertisement is shown, the more customers like it. Showing the ad. a number of times leads to its being stored in the unconscious, and when customers see the product advertised while shopping, they jump to buying it taking it to be something worth keeping. Without technology, it's hard to fool customers. People who employ technology (media) this way do misuse it. This argument does not mean that technology is evil. It can be either a blessing or a curse. It's all up to humans who use it. If it's used well, it does humans good and vice versa. In Tyler's novel, Maggie, Ira, Serena, and other characters use technology which has become an important part of their lives. Serena, for instance, uses technology well. She uses the phone to communicate with her friends and acquaintances. She also shows a film about her wedding. It should be stated that the other characters' obsession with and addiction to technology does them harm, which is manifest in Maggie's being detracted by the radio talk show caller's argument about remarrying which she has taken to be about Fiona, her son's wife. This distraction has led to her, in Ira's opinion, slamming into the Pepsi truck and damaging the car fender.

The fourth reason for the claim that Tyler's novel is postmodern is that marriage is no longer thought of as a positive anchor in life. To take an example, Jesse, Ira's son, is a dreamer that dreams of becoming a rock star. He also takes himself to be in love with Fiona and marries her. The fruit of this marriage is Leroy that lives miserably due to her mother's divorcing her father, Jesse, that proves to be a poor one. He is not as responsible as his father, Ira, is. He also proves to be an unfaithful husband to Fiona. Instead of caring for Fiona and Leroy, he starts going out with another woman, which negatively impacts his relationship with Fiona. Maggie, his mother, seems to be more worried about Fiona and Leroy than he is. The moment his mother tells him about going to Cartwheel where his wife and daughter both live, he claims: "So?" (17). When his mother adds, "I didn't talk to her, but I could tell she misses you. She was walking all alone with Leroy. Nobody else" (18), he wonders: "Do you think I care about that?" "What do you think I care?" (18). It is clear that Jesse is careless and irresponsible. He is emphasizing his stand that he doesn't care for Fiona as well as Leroy. Jesse's argument shows that marriage is not a positive

anchor. The question that poses itself is : Whose responsibility is it to provide Leroy with life necessities ? Another important question is : Will Leroy be a normal child ? Fathers that are as foolish as Jesse is are to blame for their children's living miserably, being denied the joys of life , being abnormal, lacking socialization , being frustrated ,being denied schooling, etc. Just as Jesse and Fiona's marriage has failed so also has Otis's. Otis is an old black man who accidentally meets Maggie and Ira and tells them that his marriage has failed. Like the two preceding marriages, Maggie herself ,on her way to Serena's house, heard a woman whom she took to be Fiona who was saying that her first marriage was for love , but it failed . The woman added that she was remarrying for security. Tyler's narrator argues : "A soft voice on the radio said , "Well ,I'm about to remarry? The first time was purely for love ? It was genuine, true love and it didn't work at all. Next Saturday I'm remarrying for security"(5). Similar to these marriages that have failed is Ira and Maggie's marriage that may collapse for two main reasons: The first reason is that Ira and Maggie frequently fight and differ over various matters. They are not just different ; they are opposed and don't form a cohesive unit .While driving to Serena's house to attend Max's funeral, Maggie addresses Ira ,saying : "One thing about you that I really cannot stand is how you act so superior. We can't have just a civilized back-and-forth discussion ; oh, no. No, you have to make a point of how illogical I am, ... I cannot bear your company another second "(35). The second reason is that Maggie still harbors love for Gabriel the patient at the nursing home. This love impinges upon her relationship with Ira whom she has already told about Gabriel. Referring to this relationship, Tyler's narrator claims: " Like anyone in love ,[Maggie] constantly found reasons to mention his name. She told Ira everything about [Gabriel] \_\_ his suits and ties , his gallantry ,his stoicism"(43). Missing the point entirely, Ira said: " I don't know why you can't act that keen about my father; he's family"(43). Maggie's mentioning Gabriel's name provides the indication that she is not happy with her life with Ira. This unhappiness comprises a good reason for women to either divorce themselves or ask that they be divorced.

The fifth reason for the claim that Tyler's novel is postmodern is the narrative method. Tyler uses the indirect narrative method in which time sequences are mixed up, which means that there is no linearity, no sequence, and no logical succession. There are digressions and flashbacks. An example of what I am saying is that while Ira and Maggie are on their way to Serena's house to attend Max's funeral, Ira pulls up at a gas station and Maggie wants to know if there is a snack machine there or not(22).It takes Ira a long time to respond because they wander off stream and talk about Jesse, Fiona, Leroy , Serena ,the old days ,traffic ,Pennsylvania , cutoffs, traffic, odometer, road-signs, Deer Lick ,and Maggie's girlfriends(27). Tyler uses the third person omniscient narrator to narrate this novel that is divided into three parts of which the first and second sections are told from Maggie's perspective while the third section is told from Ira's perspective. This means that readers are confined to Maggie's interpretation of events in sections one and two and to Ira's in the third part. Taking the preceding reasons into account, it can be safely argued that Anne Tyler's *Breathing Lessons* is a postmodern novel. Similar to this novel is Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* that is also postmodern for other reasons. The first reason is that this novel focuses on Antoinette's struggle for independence. This woman who is the central character is lacking independence; she is married to a man called Rochester who

dominates her, changes her name into Bertha, and stops her from being equal to him. As a feminist, Rhys empowers Antoinette by giving her a voice to express her mind and to create an independent self, which is something she is denied in a patriarchy in which women face great difficulties in constructing their identities (Ireland, 1993). Ireland also adds that “[f]riendship is one vehicle of adult development in which, through a selective process of identification and complementarity, a woman expands the meaning and texture of her female adult life” (12). Like Ireland, Chen (2014) also emphasizes the theme of identity in the novel and shows how Antoinette, being a white Creole, is marginalized and oppressed by both Blacks and Whites because neither does she belong to the black Jamaicans nor does she belong to the white Europeans. Accordingly, she is neither treated as a member of the black community nor accepted as a European (21). She seems to be between the white people and the black people who describe her and her family as being “white cockroaches” because of their mixed race (Rhys, 9). By the way, Antoinette and her family represent a fading colonial order and they have lost both their wealth and their social status. Following Ireland and Chen steps, Al-Deek (2016) explores the relationship between Antoinette and her husband, Rochester, who is both a colonizer and a representative of the patriarchal society. He finds out that this relationship is one of domination as manifest in Rochester’s changing her name and calling her Bertha. Like Al-Deek, Nurminen (2012) elaborates on the relationship between Antoinette as a colonized weak object and her husband, Rochester, as a colonizer representing the colonial strength. Being a white Creole, Antoinette is oppressed by her husband. Nurminen mentions three types of oppression that are linked together: colonial, patriarchal, and capitalistic. She also clarifies two types of feminism: liberal feminism exemplified by Antoinette’s struggling for rights equal to her husband’s and social feminism represented by the loss of her wealth, which is a marker of their being oppressed by the capitalistic society. Depending on the preceding arguments, it can be said that Antoinette’s identity is fragmented. Arguing in support of this claim, El-Quardi (2013) contends that Antoinette has a fragmentary identity that is constructed by various constituents: her race and ethnicity (Creole), her gender (a woman), being formerly colonized, and shifting class and status (23). This fragmentation bears upon Antoinette and makes her feel alienated in her own society.

The second reason for the claim that Rhys’s novel is postmodern is that there are no heroes in postmodern novels that focus on ordinary people and give us insight into their lives. Antoinette and Rochester are ordinary humans and Antoinette’s struggle for identity is true of women’s struggle for independence in patriarchies. Women married to men that are Rochester-like do suffer because these men deny them their rights and don’t let them assert their identities. These women also suffer because they find themselves divided between the struggle for identity and their own obligations toward their families. As regards Rochester’s behavior, it’s typical of many men who are still opposed to women’s being equal to them. He never cares about his wife’s feelings and marginalizes her by having an affair with one of the servants: “For I had not one moment of remorse. Nor was I anxious to know what was happening behind the thin partition which divided us from my wife’s bedroom” (89). Similar to Antoinette are Christophine, Tia, Aunt Cora, and Sandi that are also ordinary women. Whereas Tia behaves in an offensive manner and throws a rock at Antoinette, Christophine provides Antoinette with support and comfort and enables her to construct her identity. She also tells her about men in general and says: “If

you love them they treat you bad ,if you don't love them they after you night and day bothering your soul case out "(69). When Christophine is absent, Antoinette feels afraid and insecure about everything around her for she needs the maternal care that all girls of her age do: I left a light on the chair by my bed and waited for Christophine, for I liked to see her last thing. But she didn't come, and as the candle burned down, the safe peaceful feeling left me. I wished I had a big Cuban dog to lie by my bed and protect me.(Rhys,19) Concerning men, Rochester, Antoinette's husband , seems to be as bad as Mason, Antoinette's mother's husband. Mason takes advantage of Antoinette and her mother. Neither does he love Antoinette's mother nor does he love Antoinette herself. He controls both of them and never listens to their fears. Rhys's narrator claims that Mason "[hasn't come] to the West Indies to dance- he [has come] to make money as they all do"(13).

The third reason for the claim that Rhys's novel is postmodern is that the notion of place seems to be flexible in postmodern texts. The size of place changes and places themselves can be either rural or urban. Places are also markers of identity and social status , and at the same time containers for memories. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* ,Antoinette is not confined to a fixed place that defines her . Being on a quest for her own identity, she goes to many places and stays at them. At first, Antoinette recalls the house she used to live in before it was burned and compares it to the Garden of Eden. She argues : "our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible- the tree of life grew there"(Rhys,6). Then she goes to parts of Coulibri that she had not seen " where there was no road ,no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut [her] legs and arms [she] would think ' it's better than people'(Rhys, 12).Afterwards, she moves to the convent school where she feels safe. She realizes that this school represents a shelter against corruption , Lacking economic independence, she cannot find a peaceful place for herself. The only place she finds is a dark attic where she is doomed to live supported by her husband, Rochester, who probably wants to eliminate her from existence ; therefore, he keeps her locked up there. As long as the attic is dark, she finds it difficult to recognize herself .For this reason, she starts looking for anything to identify herself and her independent being, such as her home in the West Indies , her friend Tia, and Christophine as a mother. Regarding the issue of identifying herself, Dibelkova(2013) demonstrates that "the question of belonging to a particular place is very important in the novel because Antoinette cannot identify with people and cannot trust them. Hence, she identifies with the estate and other physical things which surround her"(26). Despite the number of places she stays at she is still lacking identity. These places are not advantageous. Antoinette's staying for a short period of time at each one of them makes her more akin to a tourist or wanderer than a resident, and Rochester's locking her up in the dark attic leads to her being separated from others and the land . It is worth noting that Antoinette's separation from the land and others represents a challenge to her identity.

The fourth reason for the contention that Rhys's novel is postmodern is that it is open-ended. At the end of the novel, Antoinette burns down the house. This act is open to interpretations. While some interpreters hold this act to be a withdrawal of her identity, others hold it to be a construction of this identity. Looked at from a feminist perspective, Antoinette's choosing to end her life this way can be considered to be a moment of triumph. The justification for his behavior is that Antoinette's failure to achieve her goal of having an independent identity due to numerous factors

conspiring against her awakens her to the realization that by ending her life this way she can do whatever she wants. By setting Thornfield house on fire, she puts an end to a story of long suffering. El-Quardi(2013) believes that the freedom that she [Antoinette] aimed at took place at the end of the novel ; however, freedom could only be achieved through disappearance , to get rid of all the imprisonments from which she suffered .When she dreams of burning Thornfield house, she is thereby liberating herself.(37) Like El-Quardi ,Pollanen(2012) maintains that Antoinette's burning the house at the end of the novel "defies and destroys the limits that others have tried to set on her"(15). In so doing , she also "decides to free herself "(15). It is ironic that she becomes free by setting the house on fire. It is true that houses provide protection and warmth, and are markers of identity and social status . It is also true that houses can be prison-like. This argument seems to be true of Antoinette's house whose burning has given birth to her freedom. As for Antoinette's death, it can be both a beginning and an end. This death marks the end of Antoinette's life ,but it is the beginning of a new life for other women who will certainly imitate Antoinette and wrest their rights from the men that marginalize them. The fifth reason for the claim that Rhys's novel is postmodern is that Rhys uses irony which is a hallmark of postmodernism. Antoinette argues :

It was a song about white Cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you and I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all.(64). Antoinette is elaborating on her suffering caused by her mixed blood and her own husband that treats her as an alien. The irony lies in her not knowing that she is living with the man who has married her for money ,who does not love her , and who is responsible for her lacking identity.

Like Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* , Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* is also postmodern for the following reasons :

The first reason is that this novel makes use of intertextuality with Vonnegut's other works .Kilgore Trout and other characters, for instance, also appear in Vonnegut's other novels .Kilgore also appears in *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Galapagos*. Similarly, Eliot Rosewater and Rabo karabekian appear in this novel. Rosewater is the main character in *God Bless You , Mr.Rosewater*(1965),and a minor character in *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). Karabekian is also the main character in *Bluebird*(1988). Like these characters, Kazak, the guard dog, is Rumfoord's pet in *The Sirens of Titan* (1959) and Salena Macintosh's pet also in *Galapagos*(1985). It can be seen that intertextuality shows the connection between one text and another, and ,thus, it negates originality. The second reason for this claim is metafiction . This term was first introduced in essays by Scholes(1970)and Gass (1970). Scholes(1970) coined it to designate fiction that incorporates various perspectives of criticism into the fictional process., Succeeding Scholes, Waugh(1988) defines it as a fictional writing which "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality"(2). Currie(1995),similarly, regards metafiction to be a "borderline discourse , a kind of writing which places itself on the border between

fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as that subject”(2). Following Waugh and Currie’s steps, Hutcheon (1980) claims that metafiction is ,literally, fiction about fiction, i.e .fiction that includes within itself reflections on its own fictional identity. In line with these definitions , Vonnegut’s writing uses certain techniques to draw the reader’s attention to itself as a work of art. Vonnegut appears as both a narrator and a creator in this novel. He says : “And I sat there in the cocktail lounge of the new Holiday Inn, watching Dwayne Hoover stare into the bosom of the shirt of Kilgore Trout. I was wearing a bracelet which looked like this “(BOC,253). Then Vonnegut draws a picture showing that the novel with its events has been drawn up in his mind. He adds : “I sat there in the cocktail lounge of my own invention , and stared through my *leaks* at a white cocktail waitress of my own invention. I named her Bonnie MacMahon”(BOC,199). Vonnegut italicizes the word ‘leaks’ to emphasize its significance, and claims that this word is Trout’s for glass. He emphasizes the idea that he is looking through his glasses at a universe of his creation., arguing : “I was on par with the Creator of the Universe there in the cocktail lounge”(205). The third reason for the contention that the novel is postmodern is humans’ lack of free will. Vonnegut’s characters are machines. Hoover, for instance, likens himself to a machine ,especially a car. Francine is also later described as a machine herself. The fourth reason for the afore- mentioned contention is that the content and the style of the novel are both skeptical. Reflecting the postmodern way of thinking , Vonnegut questions all the symbols and stories of his culture. Attacking the foundations of his country, Vonnegut claims : “I ‘m over in the States now, and ,man, there are a lot of flags around. “ The anthem is “gibberish sprinkled with question marks. “He also adds : “T he first Europeans who discovered America are “sea pirates” whose “ chief weapon was their capacity to astonish” with “ how heartless and greedy they were.” The fifth reason for the preceding contention is Vonnegut’s use of collage which is indicative of pastiche that includes the use of genres and various art forms. This novel shows characters who also appear in other works, and includes many silly childish drawings by the author. One of these drawings , for instance, demonstrate Vonnegut’s illustration of “asshole.”

It has been demonstrated that Anne Tyler’s *Breathing Lessons*, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* are postmodern novels. While Tyler’s novel is post-modern for its dealing with the lives of middle-class people, focusing on family disintegration, showing that humans are losing control of technology, providing the evidence that marriage is no longer a positive anchor in life , and employing the indirect narrative method prioritizing nonlinearity, Rhys’s novel is postmodern for its emphasizing Antoinette’s struggle for independence, giving readers an extraordinary insight into ordinary people’s lives, making it clear that the notion of place is flexible, using irony , and its being open to interpretation. As regards Vonnegut’s novel, it’s postmodern for the author’s making use of intertextuality, using collage, showing humans’ lacking free will, writing metafiction, and selecting a content and style that are both skeptical.

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