

Postcolonialism and Theoretical Concepts

in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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Postcolonialism and Theoretical Concepts in

Wide Sargasso Sea



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Preface

The aim of this thesis is to focus on the racial conflicts and culture difference between the white and the black community of Jamaica and the post colonial impact of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The novel is a feminist and anti colonial response to Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*(1847), describing the background to Mr Rochester's marriage from the point of view of his mad wife Antoinette Cosway, a creole heiress.

The introductory part traces the impact of Emancipation Act which was initiated in 1833 and the rising tension which was created during the period of the abolition of slavery. It analyses the oppression and suffering faced by the white creoles over the black people. The dissertation concludes with the acknowledgement of the post colonial realities depicted in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

Chapter One

Introduction

Post colonialism is the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of Western Colonialism. The term can also be used to describe the concurrent project to reclaim and rethink the history and agency of people subordinated under various forms of imperialism. Post colonialism signals a possible future of overcoming colonialism, yet new forms of domination or subordination can come in the wake of such changes, including new forms of global empire. Post colonialism should not be confused with the claim that the world we live in now is actually devoid of colonialism.

Postcolonial theorists and historians have been concerned with investigating the various trajectories of modernity as understood and experienced from a range of philosophical, cultural, and historical perspectives. They have been particularly concerned with the ambiguous legacy of the Enlightenment—as expressed in social, political, economic, scientific, legal, and cultural thought—beyond Europe itself. The legacy is ambiguous, according to postcolonial theorists, because the age of Enlightenment was also an age of empire, and the connection between those two historical epochs is more than incidental.

The term post colonialism is also sometimes used to refer to the struggles of indigenous peoples in many parts of the world in the early 21st century. However, given the interpretation of the principles of self-determination and self-government within the international system, along with the minority status and vulnerability of those peoples even within decolonized states, the term is perhaps less apt. At that time indigenous peoples were denied even the modest gains extended by the United Nations and the international system of states to the various decolonized territories in the 1970s. Moreover, the history of imperialism is complex. European imperialism between the 16th

and 18th centuries in the Americas, the West Indies, Australasia, and Southeast Asia was substantially different from that of the 19th and 20th centuries. Still, one of the central themes of postcolonial scholarship is the persistence of empire—and resistance to it—in human history.

Jean Rhys is a West Indian novelist who earned acclaim for her early works set in the bohemian world of Europe in the 1920s and 30s who stopped writing for nearly three decades, until she wrote a successful novel set in the West Indies. Her first book, a collection of short stories, *'The Left Bank'* (1927), was followed by such novels as *Postures* (1928), *After Living Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). Jean Rhys had a different writing style when compared to her contemporaries. In her writing, Rhys would explore the tension between the ordered world of colonial life and the seductive world of island sensuality. But in her life, her sense of abandonment remains acute. Her style is elliptical, fragmented, discontinuous and very poetic. It uses a lot of repetition. But also, of course, her most famous novel inherits its raw materials from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). The kind of people that Rhys writes about are not the kind of people that are deemed to be the stuff of literary fiction. They are usually female protagonists on the margins of society who are displaced and dispossessed characters at emotional and psychological extremes. Her works are often thought of as autobiographical as she does use events from her own life. Jean Rhys is still seen as an important writer from a feminist perspective and from a post-colonial perspective.

Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is one of the most important post-colonial works that examines the effect of colonialism on Jamaica. It also explores how the aftermath of slavery affects the central characters' relations with the Afro-Caribbean people in general with two prominent Afro-Caribbean characters. Rhys examines how slavery as both beneficial and destructive affects on the central characters

relation with the Afro-Caribbean community. The story tries to demonstrate how the exploitation, suppression of Afro-Caribbean people and their lack of compensation and lack of improved living standards have generated racial tension and fostered the development of mutual hate. Rhys illustrates how this atmosphere of mutual hatred caused by slavery impacts the relationship between the whites and the Afro-Caribbean population of post-colonial Jamaica.

I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white Cockroaches. Let sleeping dogs lie. One day a little girl followed me singing, ‘go away white cockroach, go away, go away’. I walked fast but she walked faster. White cockroach go away go away. Nobody want you. Go away (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 9)

The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes place after the Emancipation Act of 1833 was initiated. Slavery has ended and there is a lot of tension going around the city. This event precipitated immense racial conflicts and social and economic turmoil. The framers of this act brought in magistrates to replace the slave owners. Former slaves would work under this magistrate and were supposed to be treated better. “No more slavery! She had to laugh! These new ones have letter of the law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jailhouse and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up people’s feet. New ones worse than old ones more cunning, that’s all.” (26)

The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* deals with colonial issues such as identity and social ranking due to colonial hierarchal structures and for that reason, postcolonial criticism is a suitable approach of analysis towards the novel. Post colonialism is a theory which includes several aspects. Postcolonial critics reject the idea that great literature does not change over time and has a universal significance based on Western literature. Instead, they focus on cultural differences in literary texts and draw attention to cultural diversity and explore how they are presented in literature. Peter Barry presents four characteristics

of postcolonial criticism in his book *Beginning Theory*. Firstly, the awareness of the non-Europeans, or “the others” and how they are depicted is crucial, which is how European writers identify the colonized people. A more thorough presentation of this concept will be given further in this paper. Secondly, attention to the language used is an important characteristic in postcolonial criticism, since using colonizers’ language also acknowledges the colonial structures. Thirdly, postcolonial critics focus on hybridity or double identities, which is a position when people belong to two or more cultures and for that reason express contradictions and double loyalties. Finally, the fourth characteristic is the cross-cultural interplay, which deals with postcolonial writers’ relationship to both European tradition and their own non-European cultural tradition.

This novel is written as a prequel to *Jane Eyre* and narrates the backstory of the character Bertha from it. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a hypertext of *Jane Eyre*. It is written in a different era and is a kind of response to Bronte’s novel. With the response, Rhys emphasises the omission and corrects the exploitative context. She writes the story of Bertha’s life as she is not satisfied with the ending of *Jane Eyre*. Rhys enhances the common elements in both the novels such as dreams, the gothic style and irony through the characters Bertha and Antoinette.

I am not an angel, I asserted and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me- for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate (Bronte, 327)

In her revolutionary novel, Jean Rhys revisits the lunatic Mrs. Rochester of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, who lives in the attic. Coming from a white Caribbean background herself, Rhys notes in her foreword that what she intended to do is “to give her a life” and thus situates the former Mrs. Rochester as the creole Antoinette, at the

centre of her novel, giving Antoinette an individual voice and a different perspective. This novel is very innovative for its critical treatment of colonial and patriarchal order as well as for its status as a loose adaptation.

Rhys's novel challenges the conventional techniques of narration and offers a new discourse. The juxtaposition of alternative narrative voices and different perspectives as well as the non linear progression of narration point out a noteworthy distance from the 19th century English context. The letters from Cosway which block the validity of narrations or Antoinette and Edward's stories refuting one another contribute to the relative presentation of truth, and structurally enables *Wide Sargasso Sea* to offer a social critique on the conventional structures of power namely colonialism.

Justice. I have heard the word. It's a cold word. I tried it out... wrote it down. I wrote it down several times and always it looked like a damn cold lie to me. There is no justice my mother whom you all talk about, what justice did she have? My mother sitting in the rocking-chair speaking about dead horses and dead grooms and a black devil kissing her sad mouth (78)

This novel depicts the lack of justice and freedom experienced by the white creoles over the Afro-Caribbean. As a result of the rejection as a creole by both the white colonizers and the colonized blacks they are presented with conflicting aspect of their identity which threatens to crush the developing sense of self. Despite society's attempts to eradicate the identity of the creole woman, Antoinette finally forms a sense of self at the end of the novel. Thus freeing herself from the restrictive labels and cruel rejection she has been forced to enter. Rhys uses a variety of recurring images in her writing to indicate Antoinette's internal struggles and transformations that ultimately allow her to define herself, independent of cultural and gender stereotypes.

Chapter Two

Postcolonialism and Theoretical Concepts in

Wide Sargasso Sea

The character of Antoinette derives from Charlotte Brontë's poignant and powerful depiction of a deranged Creole outcast in her gothic novel *Jane Eyre*. Rhys creates a prehistory for Brontë's character, tracing her development from a young solitary girl in Jamaica to a love-deprived lunatic in an English garret. By fleshing out Brontë's one-dimensional madwoman, Rhys enables us to sympathize with the mental and emotional decline of a human being. Antoinette is a far cry from the conventional female heroines of nineteenth- and even twentieth-century novels, who are often more rational and self-restrained (as is Jane Eyre herself). In Antoinette, by contrast, we see the potential dangers of a wild imagination and an acute sensitivity. Her restlessness and instability seem to stem, in some part, from her inability to belong to any particular community. As a white Creole, she straddles the European world of her ancestors and the Caribbean culture into which she is born.

Antoinette Cosway is a young girl living with her mother and brother at Coulibri, her family's estate near Spanish Town, Jamaica. With the passage of the Emancipation Act and the death of her father, the family is financially ruined. Moreover, they are ostracized by both the black and white communities on the island. The black community despises them for being former slaveholders, and the white community looks down on them because they are poor, Creole, and, in her mother's case, French. Among the only servants who remain is Christophine, a Martinique woman who is rumoured to practice obeah.

Motivated in part by her family's desperate situation, Annette, Antoinette's mother, marries Mr. Mason, a wealthy planter. This marriage, however, only seems to aggravate racial tensions in their neighbourhood. One night, rioters burn the house down.

The entire family narrowly escapes, all except Antoinette's brother Pierre, who, due to his exposure to the smoke, either dies very soon after. Pierre's death devastates Annette, who goes mad with grief. Mr. Mason sends Annette off to an isolated house to be cared for by a couple of color. Antoinette is sent to live with her aunt Cora in Spanish Town. For a year and a half, Antoinette attends a convent school there. The first part ends with Mr. Mason back in Antoinette's life, insinuating that plans for arranging her marriage are already under way.

The novel shifts into another phase with a newly wedded Antoinette and Rochester on their honeymoon in Granbois, the Cosway estate outside Massacre, Dominica. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn that their marriage was arranged by Rochester's father, Mr. Mason, and Richard Mason, Antoinette's stepbrother. After only a month of courtship, Rochester married Antoinette. While at first wary of each other, Antoinette and Rochester grow to trust each other and consummate their marriage.

But the honeymoon is short-lived, as Rochester receives a malicious letter from a man who claims to be Daniel Cosway, Antoinette's stepbrother. The letter alleges that there is a history of sexual degeneracy and mental illness in Antoinette's family, and it also alleges that Antoinette had previously been engaged to a relative of color, Sandi Cosway. After receiving the letter, Rochester spurns Antoinette. Using an obeah potion obtained from Christophine, Antoinette drugs and seduces Rochester. On waking, Rochester realizes that he has been drugged, and sleeps with Antoinette's maid in revenge. Betrayed, Antoinette seems to go mad herself. This phase ends with their departure from Granbois to Spanish Town, where Rochester plans to have Antoinette declared insane and confined.

The final part opens with Antoinette already confined in Thornfield Hall in England, guarded by Grace Poole. Antoinette seems to have little sense of who or where she is at this point. Her stepbrother Richard Mason visits her, and she attacks him

after he refuses to help her out of her marriage. Finally, she dreams that she escapes from her room and sets fire to the entire house. At the end of the dream, she flees to the top of the battlements, then jumps off. Antoinette wakes up, and the novel ends as she escapes from her room, with a candle lighting her way down a dark hallway.

Wide Sargasso Sea depicts the Caribbean life in the post colonial world. Anti-colonialism in the Caribbean dates back to the earliest colonial presence at the end of the 15th century. It has involved slave resistance, revolution and intellectual challenges to colonial rule articulated by journalists, scholars, activists, democratic politicians and armed rebels. It has included different manifestations of nationalism, constitutionally based Creole nationalism and more radical Black Nationalism as well as the decision to abolish colonial rule by incorporating the colony into the metropole in the territories of the American, Dutch and French Caribbean, there continue to be active anti colonial expressions into the 21st century.

Unlike slaves in other parts of the world, the slaves of Jamaica were particularly passionate about fighting for their freedom. With rebellions becoming more and more common, tensions were running high. As the rebellions become increasingly violent, the white residents of Jamaica begin to fear for their lives, eventually leading to them fearing for their safety. With their safety becoming such a concern, and the slave population of Jamaica turning more hostile, emancipation shortly follows but even that isn't enough to appease the Jamaican slaves.

The slaves of Jamaica had not been concerned with murdering their masters, instead their primary tactic of rebellion was to target what kept them in their vicious cycle of hard, manual labour. They targeted property. In Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* the severity of racial tensions was very apparent when the Coulibri estate had been

burned down. With a large crowd growing outside of the estate, Mr. Mason rushes to calm them down and is met with a barrage of rocks being thrown at him, and after that smoke from one of the estate's rooms is visible. The house is being burned down by the angry slaves. Even the servants of the estate had been plotting against the estate. This really goes to show just how discontented the slaves had become with how they were being treated in Jamaica.

However, it wasn't just the slaves who were angry. Even some of the children from Jamaica were lashing out against the white population. Antoinette, who serves as the protagonist for the novel is often bullied by other children. Especially Tia, who is one of the local kids. Not only does she steal Antoinette's clothes, steal from her and insult her, but shortly after the Coulibri estate is burned down she throws a jagged rock directly at Antoinette which results in her face being covered in blood. It isn't just Tia either, early on in the novel another random local girl follows Antoinette around referring to her as a "white cockroach" and telling her to go away. Even after their estate is burned down and Antoinette and her family relocate, she is still constantly bullied by the children in her new school who go so far as to threaten to hurt her. Being white in Jamaica was definitely not safe at the time with how tense race relations had become.

After all the opposition and rebellion, in 1834 slavery was finally abolished in Jamaica by the British government. However, some slaves were still not very content, because despite the fact that they had received freedom, a new law was put in place to turn former slaves into "apprentices" so they could learn and become productive members of society. So, they still had the freedom they had desired but were put back to work and, in many ways, the new apprenticeship system harkened back to how things were during slavery. Realizing this, the apprentices would still often rebel and commit

acts of violence. With tensions once again becoming a problem, in 1835 resolutions were passed to establish schools to educate the Jamaican people.

The novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes place right after the Emancipation act of 1833 was initiated. Slavery has ended and there is a lot of tension going around the city. Former slaves are still considered to be lower than the Europeans. Magistrates are brought in in order to replace the former slave owners and to help fix the terrible conditions. However many feels that their magistrates are as bad, if not worse than their former slave owners. “No more slavery! She had to laugh! These news once have letter of the law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jailhouse and clean gang.”(26)

It is regarded as a striking Caribbean novel, lying between the world of capitalism and post Emancipation West Indies. The epistemic violence denotes that colonizers try to reject or reshape the local culture of colonies through the imperial discourse of science, universal truth and religious redemption. This novel focuses on the exploration of how the aftermath of slavery affects the French Caribbean fraction with the Afro-Caribbean people in general. It examines how slavery as both beneficial and destructive effects on the relationship between these two communities. This analysis demonstrates how the exploitation, suppression of the Afro-Caribbean people and their lack of compensation and lack of improved living standards has generated racial tensions and fostered the development of mutual hate. *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not only explore the impact of literal slavery as a result of colonialism but also the concept of figurative slavery in the form of women’s child like dependence on her husband.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an example of this 'tradition', a novel that was clearly written as a corrective text to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Writing, and printed media in general, has long been viewed as one of the strongest forms of cultural control. Prior to any form of rewriting the master culture, we have seen a 'take-over' of oral and suppressed cultures by literature. With this in mind, it becomes evident that these writings of colonial narratives is an act of liberation for those who belong to the former colonies. While the clear postcolonial textual liberation occurs when the black slave appropriates the media of the master culture to express a counter-history, Rhys's novel takes on the more complex task of 'coming to terms with European perceptions of the Caribbean Creole community.' That is, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is Rhys's own personal exploration of what it means to be of Caribbean descent, and how the European master culture views you, culturally and socially, as a result.

This thesis will explore the way in which Rhys deploys the black Caribbean women in her novels, taking into account a study of Rhys's own background, her social and cultural position as a white Creole woman, and what impact this would have had on her writing. Writing as a white Creole woman, Jean Rhys represents black women as necessarily 'free', liberated, and even occasionally tyrannical, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Legally, black Caribbean people were freed from colonial rule with the introduction of the Emancipation Act of 1833, with full liberty being granted in August 1838. Rhys's novel is set just after the emancipation of the slaves, in that uneasy time when racial relations in the Caribbean were at their most strained. The anxieties of the local white and mixed-race population are played out in new modes of representing black islanders. Black women were also typically thought of as having more personal freedom than their white counterparts. This is true to a certain extent, taking into account the strict restraints placed on women in Victorian England, in

matters of what they could wear, who they were allowed to associate with, and the inevitability of their eventually being married off to start families of their own, at which stage they would pass from the control of their father into the dominion of their husbands.

After emancipation, black women were technically free from ownership, in a way that many white women of the time were not. Not suffering under any of the typical constraints placed on women of the time, black women were not usually forced into marriage against their will, and were allowed a degree of sexual freedom that white British women could only dream of. In her autobiography, Rhys muses that ‘marriage didn’t seem a duty for them Dominican women as it was with us,’ and that black women have ‘more freedom, particularly sexual, than the white islanders who must conform to the constraints of the colonist.’

The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set in beautiful Jamaica in the 1830s where a young Creole heiress, Antoinette Cosway, is living in a world that she does not belong in. Defining Antoinette as a creole can suggest both that she is a descendant of European settlers in the West Indies and that she is of mixed ethnical background. Both claims are true in her case; she is the daughter of former slave owners, but is now living with her mother and younger brother after her father passed away. The Cosways used to be a wealthy family, but since the emancipation of the slaves the family has lost its status and wealth and are now laughed at by their former slaves and avoided by the other Europeans on the island. The racial and social conflict between the ethnic groups and their shared history of oppression and slavery seals the Cosways outside all communities and leaves them to live alone on their beautiful, but run-down estate. It is in this environment that Antoinette grows up, with her ill younger brother and unstable mother, who does not seem to have the strength to give her daughter the support she needs.

The colonial land where the novel is set offers the characters a physical space to live in; a place to call home, but many of them do not have their roots on the island. They have had to form an alternative identity based on who they are, where they come from and in which direction they are going in life. It might seem easy for the colonizing Europeans to claim their right to hold on to their European identity, not having to deal with the effects of their imagined superiority. In fact, holding on to an identity, without having to recognize people like Antoinette as a part of one's own community, but keeping people like her at a distance, creates a self-other binary, which secures their own identity and gives power that can be used against the other.

The novel's two main characters are Antoinette and her husband Edward Rochester. Rochester's name is never mentioned in the novel, but having read *Jane Eyre* and knowing the connection between the two novels, it is obvious that the man Antoinette marries is the same character as Edward Rochester from *Jane Eyre*. To simplify and to avoid misunderstandings, Antoinette's husband will be referred to as Edward Rochester in this work. Edward is a son of a rich Englishman and he comes to the West Indies looking for a wife. Not knowing much about Antoinette or her background he agrees to marry her, mostly due to the considerable amount of money Antoinette's father-in-law is willing to pay him for marrying her. The tension between Europe and the New World, master and slave, white and black is a central theme in the novel already before the young couple marries, but it is in their relationship that the conflict becomes most visible and intense. While Antoinette is neither European nor Caribbean, she is ambiguously close to both, something Edward cannot stand and does not know how to react to. To illustrate their differences, one can study the way Antoinette and Edward view Europe and especially England: according to Edward the highest form of culture and civilization can be found in Europe and especially England, while Antoinette is not even sure England even exists.

She becomes a woman he has difficulties understanding and her lack of interest for England and love for the island she lives on all contribute to his view of her as impure and unstable, nothing like an English woman. Antoinette is a threat Edward cannot afford to have; her mere existence can possibly call into question everything he considers valuable, and she clearly does not understand the supremacy of his background and upbringing. Early in their relationship, Edward begins alienating her from the rest of the world, a strategy which culminates at his mansion Thornfield Hall in England, where Antoinette is locked up in the attic, sealed off from the rest of the world. This work reflects the alienation and rejection of Antoinette, both within the Jamaican community where she grew up and later on when she marries an Englishman. Keeping people like Antoinette at a distance makes sure that one's own ideas and values can never be questioned; she is a threat to both sides of the opposing factions and can never live up to the idea of a European woman, neither will she ever be a true Caribbean either. It opens up possible ways of interpreting the character's dilemma, her sense of alienation and her difficulties in shaping an identity. It can be said that a person who does not have a given identity based in a nation or community, but is somewhere between two opposing cultural spheres, is forced to shape a new identity. Antoinette's situation with her physical home in the West Indies, family bonds to Europe and relatives she is not supposed to be in touch with due to the colour of their skin all contribute to her insecurity about her identity and background. Not belonging to any discrete groups makes a person who is in this in-between position not only an outsider, but also a target for discrimination as a possible threat to the pure and original people.

Antoinette's displacement in this novel is expressed in terms of negatives. She is not black, but she is not white either. Similarly, her longing is expressed also in negatives: 'not to live Coulibri, not to go.'(24) With this in mind, it is really only

through her interaction with Tia that Antoinette comes to realize how radically out of place she is among the black people of Jamaica, and how futile her wish to become one of them truly is.

West Indian spirituality and the threat of 'black magic' are also credited with much of the blame for Antoinette's isolation and fear as a child. Right at the start of the novel, Antoinette speaks of Coulibri being changed, ruined for her, by talk of Christophine and her obeah. Antoinette's account of spiritual encounter that took place in Christophine's bedroom encapsulates her early childhood fears of obeah and black magic. 'I was certain that hidden in the room...there was a dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly... slowly. Drop by drop the blood was falling into a red basin...' (15)

Antoinette's fears are crystallized in this one memory, fears of black power, both literally and figuratively. As a white creole, she has reason to fear the ex-slaves who live near the plantation, and it seems no coincidence that this account is closely followed by her memory of the burning of coulibri.

Freedom in the novel is double-edged and troubled. Its ideal is presented in stark contrast, again and again, to its reality. At the start of the novel, we see that the Emancipation Act of 1833 leaves discontent and violence in its wake. Mr. Luttrell, a white former slave owner and neighbor to the Cosways, commits suicide after Emancipation, unable to adjust to the new social and economic landscape. At Coulibri, the local population of black former slaves is deeply angry. As Antoinette remembers at the start of the novel, "They hated us." Even the children threaten and enact violence on white people. A girl follows a young Antoinette singing, "White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody wants you." (8) Antoinette's one-time friend Tia, a black girl, ends up hitting Antoinette in the head with a rock as the mob burns her family's house down.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, freedom can mean abandonment or isolation, the fear of which leads many to enter complacently and sometimes even willingly into their own imprisonment. We see this with various black servants who elect or wish to stay on with their former slave masters, including, notably, one young boy who cries “loud heart breaking sobs” (6) because Rochester refuses to bring him to England to continue in his service. Of this boy, Antoinette tells Rochester, “He doesn’t want any money. Just to be with you.” (65) This holds true for relationships as well. After Annette’s marriage to Alexander Cosway, which was characterized by repeated infidelities, ends in his death, she becomes preoccupied with her isolation, referring to her new status as being “marooned,” and enters into another marriage, to Mr. Mason, with restrictive and then disastrous results. When Antoinette’s marriage to Rochester first begins to deteriorate, she imagines leaving him, and is urged by Christophine to “pack up and go,” (69) but does not. This decision leads to her literal imprisonment by Rochester.

Even if it is violent and ultimately tragic, freedom is shown to be inevitable, the necessary path to redemption in the novel on both a societal and personal level. Oppression and imprisonment are unsustainable. Antoinette ends the novel and her life by setting fire to the house in which she is imprisoned by Rochester. Her narration ends with a sense of purpose and self-knowledge that she lacked in the rest of the novel. In reference to her own emancipating destruction, she says, “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do.” (84) This fire connects her to the angry mob that, in an act of protest against their own oppression, sets fire to her family’s house early on in the novel. Both seek freedom in the flame.

The time period that the novel covers is also of crucial importance. Rhys’s story takes place during the years following the Emancipation Act (1833) in Jamaica, the critical period when the racial problems were very complex and controversial. During

that time, there were three different ethnical communities in the society that would fire up the density of the social tension; the Black, the Creole, and the White community. Now, upon regaining their freedom, the newly emancipated ex-slaves were highly outraged towards their previous owners, who were either White Creoles or White English. Throughout the society, the rebellious nature of the ex-slaves would always haunt the reader each time Black community tried to take revenge on their former owners. The revenge and the hatred of the Blacks is pretty evident as they burn the plantation house of the Cosway family, or as Amelia sleeps with Mr. Rochester, and even when Christophine advises Antoinette on her 'madness'. Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* recounts the story of the silenced 'other' Creole woman, even with her post colonialist perception, she, herself, fails to avoid othering the Black community in the West Indies. Through her depiction of the black characters, she makes the same mistake of treating them as homogeneous masses with no individual differences. Nearly all ex-slaves or the paid servants of the novel are portrayed as revengeful, demonic and infernal characters of corruption with almost no good ambition. Even Christophine, Antoinette's dear black advisor, raises suspicion due to her devotion to obeah and her partial abuse of the emotional stress of Antoinette, within the minds of the readers.

The social status of the Creole society is also another issue, which is a highly central matter for the novel to identify the in-betweenness that Antoinette suffered from the much 'inferior' Black community and the much 'superior' white English society. She does not belong to the authoritative mainstream English Culture in West Indies and is therefore estranged from the 'superior' context culture. Nor does she belong to the alleged inferior black community which is another culture that she and her mother Annette, frequently despise and make fun of in the story. This aspect of Antoinette's hybrid culture pushes her to suffer from all the traumas of in-betweenness.

The double oppression that Antoinette undergoes relatively much evident

within the context of the novel via several relationships that she develops such as her morbid marriage to Mr. Rochester, her pathetic pursuit of relief from Christophine, and her hateful relation to Amelia, who would not obey Antoinette's imperatives. Even the social space in which Annette and her daughter are fated to live in search of rich white English husbands is enough to recognize their restricted in-between status in the society. The patriarchal subjugation that Antoinette experiences as a woman intensifies her repression, causing her to endure double othering of the society both as a woman and as a postcolonial subject. The triple oppression under which Antoinette tries to acknowledge her self-identity leads her to the final place of resolution, which is nothing less than a desirable madness.

As a colonial writer Bronte has achieved the success to uphold the superior traits of English people through her novel *Jane Eyre* which was authentic and justified according to the theory of colonialism. But on the other hand, Rhys demonstrated the English's superiority again even while she belonged to the post colonial writer's group. She actually did the unauthentic thing. She described the self-importance and superiority by having Rochester constantly compare the West Indies and its inhabitants to England. Rhys exhibited that, it was Rochester for whom England was clearly the norm or standard against which everything else should be measured. From the beginning of Rochester's staying in Jamaica, he was comparing between the West Indies and the English practices, at what time dinner was served, how the house was looking, and how his wife Antoinette interacted with the servants. Perhaps he was showing his dominance over the Granbois same as his dominance which remained in Thornfield, his ancestral house in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rochester's innate Englishness was proved through his susceptibility to colonial disease. In *Jane Eyre* Bronte depicted Jane's fears of colonial contamination when she did attempt to present some negative ideas concerning travel to India. This issue could be related simultaneously to the character of Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*,

when he caught a fever immediately upon his arrival in Jamaica. “His healthy English body can not withstand the colonial contagion represented by the West Indies and he feels wretched from the affliction for two weeks” (44).

Again for the digestion of food Rhys expressed the English man’s fear of Creole foods.

Just as Antoinette’s otherness and bodily contamination can be seen by her desire and ability to ingest Creole food, Rochester’s Englishness can be seen through his inability to ingest substances that are coded as belonging to the colonial other. In the scene where Antoinette puts one of Christophine’s patios made of West Indian ingredients, in Rochester’s wine he becomes physically sick to the point of thinking himself poisoned. (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 88)

Here its so clear that, Rochester’s pure English body has been affected by the colonial contagion and his moral and cultural superiority was confirmed in his deep inward feelings about such contamination. Bronte was justified in showing the Englishness of Rochester in her novel *Jane Eyre*, but for Rhys to uphold the concept of the superior Englishness of an English man like Rochester, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* was not pertinent. Rochester refused to accept anything that deviates from his English norms and ideals, justifying his emotional suppression: “It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted. If these mountains challenge me, or Baptiste’s face, or Antoinette’s eyes, they are mistaken, melodramatic, unreal”. (63)

Throughout the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester made the proper relationship of himself to his English self by establishing his moral and physical differences that are accepted as the examples of English national identity. He was terrified by the physical signs of a different race when he did encounter Daniel Cosway: “A tall fine Englishman like you, you don’t want to touch a little tallow rat like meeh?” (79)

Rochester attempted to overcome this threat to English identity with his own marriage when he had decided to remove Antoinette from Granbois and her cousin Sandi. Another reason was to take this decision when Daniel Cosway insinuated an affair between Antoinette and her bi-racial cousin. Antoinette confessed her relationship and remarked that, “we had often kissed before but not like that. That was the life and death kiss and you only know a long time afterwards what it is, the life and death kiss”. (123)

After bringing Antoinette to England, Rochester felt that, he got the ultimate success as he did restrict Antoinette from sexual activity to the domain of the patriarchal family. Therefore, Rochester thought he did prevent the possible birth and infiltration of Antoinette and Sandi’s bi- racial bastard into the patriarchal home and established the codes of Englishness. Here it can be said that, Antoinette was imprisoned with the hands of colonialism, since she has listened to what Rochester ordered her to do.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys describes the social hierarchy and racial groupings in the Caribbean society. She portrays white people who are the elite of society, but also the former black slaves and moreover the mixed raced people, whom she calls “The coloured”. There is a wide spectrum within and between these groupings which are due to the European colonial norms. Consequently, Postcolonialism can efficiently be used in several ways as a critical concept on describing the effects of the colonial ruling, and it is a suitable approach towards the novel.

As a work of postcolonial fiction, *Wide Sargasso Sea* captures the pathos of a society undergoing deep and bitter change. Jean Rhys chooses to relate the essence of this conflict through the relationship of the white Creole heiress Antoinette Cosway, and her English suitor Edward Rochester.

Chapter Three

Conclusion

In the impact of post colonialism, the postcolonial writers in literature started to write for a specific purpose, using the language of the mainstream power and aiming at the same target. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is such an attempt to exert a previously situated voice using the mainstream methods and language with the basic purpose of constituting a cultural self for the formerly suppressed voice of the Creole people. In her post colonial reply, Rhys rejects the imposing imperialist ways and methods of fiction writing to identify the repressed ones.

After analysing *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a post colonial novel it brings out the oppression and domination of a colonial and patriarchal society under which Antoinette lived; it shows how Antoinette, under the pressure of her race and gender, is found to abject her own identity. People are to some extent unaware of the fact that the 'Whites' whom they think of as superior colonizers may also have their flaws. They are not always as controlled and dignified as people seem to think they are, and they may also have a moment of weakness when they face a situation that drains them of their confidence.

This thesis explores how Rhys demonstrate the complexity of colonialism in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and how colonialism affected the colonized people and the colonizing people in the Caribbean. She portrays white people, who are the elite of society, but also the former black slaves and moreover, the mixed-race people. There is wide spectrum within and between these groupings which are due to the European colonial norm.

The work portrays the white Creole, Antoinette's dramatic yet tragic life and 'interculturalisation' between white and black Creoles, as well as her

relationships with her husband which displays the other side of Bronte's Bertha and Rochester. *Wide Sargasso Sea* shows the shifting of viewing feminist criticism of post-colonial literature, which focuses on the 'silenced women' in the third world. This thesis also examines the effect of colonisation in Jamaica. The main part of this examination is the exploration of how the aftermath of slavery affects Antoinette's relation with the Afro-Caribbean people in general and in particular with two prominent Afro-Caribbean characters in the novel Tia and Christophine.

Rhys examines how slavery has both beneficial and destructive effects on her relation with the Afro-Caribbean community. Rhys demonstrates how the exploitation, suppression of the Afro-Caribbean people and their lack of compensation and lack of improved living standard has generated racial tensions and fostered the development of mutual hate.

Rhys illustrates how this atmosphere of mutual hatred caused by slavery impacts Antoinette's relationship with the Afro-Caribbean population of post colonial Jamaica. Rhys explores the after effects of slavery on Jamaica by looking at the relationship between Antoinette and the island native Afro-Caribbean population. Writing as a white Creole woman, Jean Rhys represents black women as necessarily 'free', liberated, and even occasionally tyrannical, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Legally, black Caribbean people were freed from colonial rule with the introduction of the Emancipation Act of 1833, with full liberty being granted in August 1838. Rhys's novel is set just after the emancipation of the slaves, in that uneasy time when racial relations in the Caribbean were at their most strained. The anxieties of the local white and mixed race population are played out in new modes of representing black islanders.

Antoinette loses her precious vitality that comes from nature as now she and nature are exploited and dominated by patriarchy and agent of culture. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a sympathetic account of the life of Rochester's mad wife ranging from her childhood on the West Indies, her creole and Catholic background, and her courtship and married year with deceitful Rochester, to her final descent into madness and captivity in England. Clearly, the predicament of the West Indian wife resembles that of Rhys herself in many ways.

The Emancipation Act has just been passed and the blacks on the island are passing through a period of so-called apprenticeship which should lead to their complete freedom in 1837. The novel also suggests that truth is often differed, arriving too late to be of use. Knowledge is post experience, and may not be of real use since certain opportunities and situations do not repeat themselves. And so life to Antoinette becomes recollection and narration, voyage within entrapment.

The novel is about a number of significant areas of discussion like feminism, race, gender and post-colonialism. "The fate of a woman belonging to a group, which no longer has a place" (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 66). The sufferings of Antoinette in the novel are great and are the reason why she lost her identity in the two worlds. She is a Creole, a person of European descent born in the Caribbean. In the whole novel, Antoinette's relationships with other people are marked by exclusion, alienation and brutality. As a result, she undergoes an inconsistent search for peace in the surrounding circumstances.

Moreover, the novel is an excellent reflection of a hybrid person, "Antoinette" who is of European descent but born in the Caribbean. In her community, she is considered neither black nor white, she is a stranger, who has no right to live in the black society and is not even recognized as a white European.

In fact, she is in between two worlds and two cultures which culminated in the struggle of all her life.

Rhys demonstrates the complexity of colonialism in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and how colonialism affected the colonized people and the colonizing people in the Caribbean. Rhys manages to describe not only the social hierarchy and the racial groupings, but also the wide spectrum which exists within and between these classes. The main character Antoinette is caught between the English society and the colonized culture. In her childhood, she is excluded from the white upper-class since her mother is a French creole and they live in poor conditions. Being considered “real white people” is not only due to the colour of their skin but also to financial conditions. Rhys describes the wide range of whiteness in which English people are the superior followed by the English creoles and, further down the scale, French creoles and the poor. She also narrates how white people maintain the unequal power relationship in the colony by dominating the colonized people and silence them. The way the husband treats Antoinette, when he finds out about the love story between Antoinette and Sandi, shows how the Englishmen treated the colonized people. He projects his racial prejudice on her, abuses her and finally re-names her, which is exactly what the Englishmen did to the colonized people in Jamaica.

Rhys also pictures the struggle of the black people who try to fight back but do not succeed, since they are easily silenced by their former white masters. The former slaves are at a disadvantage and are disempowered even though they try to stand up for their rights. But the colonial norms set the rules and the former slaves cannot break those. Racial prejudices fix them to be considered as the Other, with no rights at all in society. Even though slavery has been forbidden, the black people are still

treated as slaves. This creates a hostile atmosphere and Antoinette is afraid of the black people's anger, yet, she enjoys their easiness and gaiety.

She has a close relation to Christophine, who has taken care of her as a child, and Antoinette is very fond of her, but at the same time she considers her as an ignorant slave. Rhys points out this ambiguous and complex relationship that existed between masters and their slaves in the colonies. Furthermore, Rhys describes a diverse and divided black community which is not unified. Some of them are depicted as an angry but depersonalized group of former slaves, and some of them are still loyal to their former white masters and for that reason imitate their traditions. That makes the community divided into smaller groups which can also be a reason why they do not succeed in bringing together their community and maintaining their African culture in the Caribbean.

Rhys describes the colonial society in all its levels and nuances, and also how the colonial social structures and ideas determine how people define themselves and others. However, she challenges the norms by implicitly telling the love story about the white creole and the coloured man, which is overruled by the Englishmen who came to the colony to further their careers. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not only a re-writing of *Jane Eyre*, which fills in the gaps about Mr. Rochester's first wife, it is also an independent novel which describes the complexity of colonialism in the Caribbean colonies.

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