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THE FIRST MRS. ROCHESTER

An Interpretation of Jean Rhys'

"Wide Sargasso Sea"

By

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It is as though

The black breathing that billows her sleep, her name

Drugged under judgement, waned and - bearing daggers

And balances - down the lampless darkness they came.

Moving like women: Justice, Truth, such figures.

From *Another September* by Thomas Kinsella

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INTRODUCTION

'Truth is the daughter of time'

> A laugh struck my ears. It was a curious laugh - distinct, formal, mirthless. I (Jane Eyre) stopped. The sound ceased only for an instant. It began again louder- for at first, though very distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to echo in every chamber, though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued.
>
> (Bronte, 1847, p.138)

This passage announces the ominous entrance of the first Mrs. Rochester into the wings in "Jane Eyre." The role created for her by Charlotte Bronte is that of the infamous mad woman in the attic, Bertha Mason. In the novel she is a shadowy figure, whose presence is marked by her laughter, moanings and groans and by her several attempts to kill her husband, Edward Rochester and her brother, Richard Mason. We never see her on stage, so we judge her from the wild animal noises she makes and from the effects of her violent actions. The story is told by Jane Eyre, the governess at Thornfield Hall; it is her autobiography, tracing her life from her unloved childhood and education at Lowood to her subsequent employment at Thornfield Hall and her marriage to Rochester in the final chapter. Because we see the events and characters in the novel through her eyes, we, like Jane, are ignorant of the true identity of this shadowy figure for much of the story. When Rochester is forced to admit the truth of their relationship, he justifies his action in locking his wife away on the grounds of her insanity:

> Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations.
>
> (Bronte, 1847, p. 320)

Jane rightly condemns a deception which, but for the timely arrival of Richard Mason, would have lead her into forming a bigamous marriage with Rochester; but, although highly intelligent, she never questions for a moment his version of events or his explanation for locking his wife away. No blame is attached to his conduct in this matter.

Insanity is accepted as the cause of her incarceration and never posited as a consequence; and as the horrible scenes Jane witnesses occur after Bertha has been locked away for so many years, the first Mrs. Rochester is perceived to be a monster, an animal, a murderess and a madwoman, who obviously deserved her awful fate in the fire which she started at Thornfield Hall.

Jean Rhys wrote "Wide Sargasso Sea" in 1966, one hundred and nineteen years after "Jane Eyre" and this time she moved Bertha Mason out of the wings and into the spotlight. Jane Eyre is banished to the wings and Rochester maintains his role as supporting actor. Rhys was fascinated by Bertha Mason, because, like her, she was a Creole and from the West Indies. She also knew about these

> mad Creole heiresses in the early nineteenth century, whose dowries were only an additional burden to them
>
> (Francis Wyndham, 1966, p.10)

She sympathised with the plight of Bertha Mason and decided to rescue her from the narrative of "Jane Eyre" and construct a frame, within which she could build up her defence and tell Bertha's side of the story. She sought to make Bertha more human and this she knew how to do by drawing on her own experiences of growing up in the West Indies. Jean Rhys wrote to a friend about her novel:

> Eventually I got back to being a Creole lunatic in the 1840's. Quite an effort. Sometimes am almost there, sometimes I think I'll stay there. .... the Creole in Charlotte Bronte's novel .. attacks all and sundry off-stage. For me (and for you, I hope) she must be right on stage. She must be at least plausible, with a past.
>
> (Rhys, "Letters", 1985, p.151).

When Rhys was writing "Wide Sargasso Sea", it was at the time when the British Empire was disintegrating and becoming a thing of the past. The

days of imperialsim were over. Coming from a post-colonial society, she saw the idea of colonialism as a metaphor for the repression and subjection of women to male ideology and power. Rhys' novels reflect this decline of the Empire and the patriarchal values it represents because her heroines

> learn to break the specularity of colonial control
> as they come to inhabit a more fluid psychic identity.
> (Humm, 1991, p.11)

These heroines rewrite the colonial script, i.e. male influenced or designed literature, and express themselves in the female voice. Women speaking for women. Women writing about their personal experiences for other women. Rhys is a feminist writer because, as Maggie Humm points out in her book 'Border Traffic', women writers are feminist when they

> ask different questions about female socialisation;
> or because they begin to take hold of their
> autobiographies in women's terms; or because
> they subvert literary boundaries to represent
> women in positive ways!
> (1991, p.26)

Rhys represents Bertha Mason in a positive way, by removing her from the negative void created for her in Bronte's novel.

Firstly, she gives the first Mrs. Rochester the name Antoinette Cosway. The purpose for the change of name is to differentiate between the "two" women (Bertha Mason/Antoinette Cosway) in order to be able to start from scratch and to create a character not coloured by preconceptions of the Bronte novel. In "Wide Sargasso Sea", Bertha Mason is the name imposed by Rochester on Antoinette Cosway as part of his attempts to change her. The naming reflects the rituals of colonialism - the desire to assert control by marking territories. By naming her Bertha Mason, Rochester is moulding her into the woman he wants: a woman over whom he can have full control:

'My name is not Bertha, why do you call me Bertha'?
'Because it is a name I'm particularly fond of.
I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha'.
(Rhys, p.11, 1968)

This "naming" of his wife reflects the power of language as a form of propaganda, manipulating the response of the reader. In "Jane Eyre", Rochester describes Bertha Mason as:

.. wholly alien to me, her tastes obnoxious to me..
her vices sprang up fast and rank: they were so strong
only cruelty could check them, and I would not use
cruelty. What a pigmy intellect she had and what
giant propensities!
(Bronte, 1847, p.334)

By using his own mode of speech, he contructs his own defence against his wife. He uses language to define her in the way in which he sees her. By denying his wife a voice, he asserts full control over her as he tells others how repulsive and wicked she is. In "Jane Eyre", it is Rochester, and not Jane, who presents us with the idea that Bertha is a monster. Because Jane has been conditioned by Rochester's version of events, she begins to see what she believes. She sees Bertha Mason, for the very first time, as some wild animal.

In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room,
a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was,
whether beast or human being, one could not at
first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly on all fours;
it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal:
but it was covered with clothing and a quantity of dark,
grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.
(Bronte, 1847, p.321)

Bertha Mason is 'framed' by Rochester as a mad woman or monster. Rhys deconstructs the frame by constructing a new one: Bertha Mason is not what she seems to be. The process of the unravelling of Rochester's story, as told to Jane Eyre, begins with the changing of Bertha's name to Antoinette Cosway and is completed by the structure of the novel "Wide

Sargasso Sea" itself. "Wide Sargasso Sea" is divided into three parts: part one is Antoinette's narrative, telling about her tragic isolated childhood, living at the family estate, Coulibri, her mother's gradual descent into madness and her education in her convent refuge; part two is Rochester's narrative, expressing his sense of alienation and discomfort living in the exotic West Indies and his growing mistrust of his new wife (part two is interrupted by Antoinette's voice which offsets any growing sympathy we might entertain for him); and part three begins with Grace Poole's voice introducing Antoinette's second and final narration. The structural framing of the novel works well for the "deframing" of Antoinette Cosway: Rochester's story is discredited because it is flanked on each side by Antoinette's narrative. Because we learn about Antoinette's childhood, we understand her personality and the cause of her behaviour. We understand her affinities with the island, we experience the pain she endures with her mother's rejection of her, the death of her brother, Pierre, in the fire at Coulibri and the consequent descent of her mother into madness. Rochester, on marrying Antoinette in part two, is ignorant of his wife's history, while his insecurity and fears only make him less sympathetic to the reader. As his cruelty grows, the more crude he becomes (Part three shows the consequences of Rochester's treatment of his wife). Antoinette's past is the secret which he longs to find out. As he says

> The island was a beautiful place, wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien disturbing secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, 'What I see is nothing - for I want what it hides - that is not nothing'
>
> (Rhys, "Wide Sargasso Sea" 1968, p.73).

Rochester identifies this island with his wife and her sexuality and he fears what he cannot understand.

As Charlotte Bronte traces the story of the second Mrs. Rochester from childhood to adulthood and marriage, Rhys does the same for the first Mrs. Rochester, tracing Antoinette's childhood and the tragic events which shaped her life; her marriage to Rochester, who came to hate and fear her because he could not comprehend her; and ending with her subsequent fate at Thornfield Hall. "Wide Sargasso Sea" also charts the destruction of a marriage and the disintegration of a society. Furthermore, it traces the lost past of Bertha Mason, making her more real and giving her an identity of her own.

Throughout this thesis, I shall refer to Bertha as Antoinette because I am writing about "Wide Sargasso Sea" and Antoinette is the name given to her heroine by Rhys; but also because it illustrates the politics involved in naming and unnaming - that is rescue and liberation from constricting narratives. The act of unnaming Bertha is in itself indicative of what Rhys and I attempt to do.

In this thesis, I want to explore how Antoinette Cosway became a victim of Rochester's insecurity; the relationship between Antoinette and her island; her gradual descent into madness; and the progression towards the final outcome of her insanity - the fire at Thornfield Hall. So many aspects of how women were treated or perceived crop up in this novel - the repression and fear of female sexuality being of particular significance to me. Chapter One will deal with the creation of "Wide Sargasso Sea": its semi-autobiographical element and its relationship to "Jane Eyre". Chapter Two will examine how Rhys, a product of an expatriate society, uses first-hand experience to explore colonialism and colonization of women and the question of female identity in her novel.

Chapter Three explores Rochester's fear of "the other" - the culture of the black people of the West Indies - and of his wife's sexuality. In the final chapter I shall explore the importance of dreams in anticipating and foreshadowing the tragedy in "Jane Eyre", of which "Wide Sargasso Sea" is the prologue.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER ONE

The Creation of "Wide Sargasso Sea"

'It is in myself'.
What is?
'All good, evil, love, hate, life,
death, beauty, ugliness.'
And in everyone?
'I do not know everyone. I only know myself.'
(From 'The Trial of Jean Rhys', Rhys, 1979, p.161)

Jean Rhys never wrote about anyone except herself. She based all her novels on her own experiences, as Diana Athill points out in her introduction to "Smile Please",

> When (Rhys) wrote a novel it was because she had no choice and she did it - or it happened to her - for herself not for others in that it was partly therapeutic.
> (Athill, 1979, p.5)

Bronte's novel, "Jane Eyre", with its famous mad woman in the attic, provided Rhys with a sounding board from which she could write about her own childhood and growing-up in the West Indies. Just as Bronte had expressed all her frustrations and anger in "Jane Eyre", Rhys does the same in "Wide Sargasso Sea". When she was faced with the task of liberating Antoinette Cosway from the frame of "Jane Eyre", Rhys resolved the problem by giving Antoinette her own past in the West Indies. So, in a sense, "Wide Sargasso Sea" is Rhys' life story concealed behind the facade of the story of the first Mrs. Rochester.

THE SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENT

Jean Rhys was born in Dominica, West Indies, in the heyday of the British Empire in 1890 and left the island forever in 1907. Thereafter she spent most of her life in England, although between 1919 and 1927 she lived in various European countries, having married a Dutchman, Jean Lenglet. She had two children before divorcing Lenglet and marrying Leslie Tilden Smith in 1932. The marriage lasted until his death in 1945. She then married a cousin of Tilden Smith - and outlived him too. Rhys'

marriages were unhappy affairs and she took refuge in drink, which led to many arrests for causing public disorder and finished in psychiatric hospitals. It is interesting to note that, although her marriage to Lenglet ended in divorce, Tilden Smith and Hamer stayed married to her, despite the fact that they found her incomprehensible. She could not understand the passivity with which they responded to her drunken attacks on them, their patience and reserve.

Rhys found England and Englishmen cold and alien. They could not understand her behaviour, her personality or her mentality which had been shaped by her upbringing in the West Indies. She was a white Creole, brought up in a society and climate entirely different from that of England. She criticised English people in her novels, including "Voyage in the Dark".

> 'Scorn and loathing of the female - a very common expression in (England)', Germaine says: 'and the women there are awful, that beaten, cringing look - or as cruel and dried up as they're made! Mechantes, that's what they are and everybody knows why they are like that. They're like that because English men don't give a damn about women'.
>
> (Rhys, 1934, p.60)

This resentment of English men she embodies in Rochester.

Rhys's behaviour reveals a history of great anger, emotional frustration, insecurity, anxiety and a terrible sense of loss. She grew up in Dominica in a very hostile atmosphere. The black slaves had been freed by the Emancipation Act of 1833 and their new-found freedom threatened the ascendancy of their former white masters. The wealth which had provided the slave-owners with superiority and strength was stripped from them bit by bit and was accelerated by the economic crisis of 1846, when the British government withdrew its protection of Jamaica's sugar market. The days of White supremacy were drawing to a close.

> Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now and black nigger better than white nigger.
> (Rhys, 'Wide Sargasso Sea', 1968, p.21)

Out of a population of 30,000 people only 300 were white and these latter clung to the mother country (which by then was losing interest in them), read English newspapers, listened to English radio broadcasts, followed English fashions in dress and opinions and lived in a rarified world of their own making - "Little England". Despite all their efforts they were not considered by English to be English but colonials. This differentiation was born of fear of racial mix, which in turn was a legacy of Spanish rule in the West Indies. After their discovery by the Spanish, the West Indies came under the rule of the viceroys of Mexico and Lima as sister Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. J.M. Roberts points out in "The Penguin History of the World" that

> The presence of a large pre-colonial native population to provide labour did as much as the nature of the occupying power to differentiate the colonial experience of central and south America from that of the north. Centuries of Moorish occupation had accustomed the Spanish and Portuguese to the idea of living in a multi-racial society. They did not show the concern for the purity of their blood such as was shown by the English and French and there soon emerged in Latin America a large population of mixed blood.
> (Roberts, 1988, p.599)

When the English took over some of the Islands, they tried to impose their culture and values on the natives. They distrusted the Creoles, suspecting mixed blood and were determined that their own blood would not become contaminated. But the English settlers in the West Indies soon came under the suspicion that they were not racially pure either. Rhys experienced this prejudice as a child, as Carole Angier points out:

> The English children (Rhys) met said
> that Colonials couldn't be ladies and
> gentlemen. They weren't English either
> - only British, which was different.
> (Angier, 1992, p.19)

Rhys was a Creole, a word which comes from the Spanish 'criar' (to imagine) and 'colon' (a colonist), attributed to the Eurpean settlers or people of mixed blood living in the colonies. Creole means "imaginary history", which means that those living in the colonies have no real roots in the land there. Their origins are fictional or non-existent. The only identity the white Creoles had was their wealth which linked them to England, but once they lost that wealth they had no status or identity. They became members of a disinherited race, belonging to neither world - England nor the West Indies. Having no social status to lose by doing so, the black population made the West Indies the centre of their universe, identifying themselves as West Indians rather than as colonists. Whereas the white Creoles spoke English and were Protestant, the black Creoles spoke patois and remained devout Catholics - perhaps a legacy of the multi-racial Spanish Empire. Rhys was well aware of the cultural divide which existed - fuelled by the hatred felt by the black population for the former slave-owners.

> They hate us. We are hated
> Not possible.
> Yet it is possible and it is so.
> (Rhys, "Smile Please", 1981, p.49)

Rhys particularly envied their freedom of expression (i.e. their carnivals) and noticed that black girls enjoyed a freedom denied to white girls, because marriages were rare although children swarmed around the place. "Marriage was not a duty for them", she remarked in "Smile Please" (1979, p.79). As a child she longed to be black and free from the obligations and constraints of the English world in which her family lived. "I used to long

so fiercely to be black and to dance too, in the sun, to that music" (Rhys, "Smile Please", 1979, p.53)

The distrust which the English had for the white Creoles was indicated by the fact that marriages between Creoles and white Europeans were frowned on for fear of miscegenation. This is highlighted by Rochester's marriage to Antoinette Cosway, a white Creole. In Part Two of "Wide Sargasso Sea" his doubts about his wife's pure descent are there from the beginning of his relationship with her:

> She never blinks at all it seems to me.
> Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of
> pure English descent she may be, but
> they are not English or European either.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.56)

This suspicion is nourished by the remarks "I am very sorry for you" with which he is greeted throughout his stay in the West Indies.

Rhys based the character of Annette (Antoinette's mother) on her own great-grandmother, who was a white Creole from Martinique. Her great-grandfather was James Potter Lockhart, a slave owner, who had many mistresses and illegitimate children among his slaves. She modelled Old Cosway (Antoinette's father) on him. Jean Maxwell, his wife, was Spanish or had some Spanish connection. She had such dark hair that it was rumoured that she was "coloured" and her darkness disturbed the Lockharts, who were very proud of their "pure English descent" (Angier, 1992. p.7). James Potter Lockhart managed a sugar plantation, called 'Geneva', which he had bought in 1824. He died in 1837, leaving his wife to run his estate, which was burnt down during a riot in 1844. The estate then became derelict in the 1840's as a result of the economic crisis and the lowering of the sugar prices. The estate was inherited by Rhys' mother, Minna, an heiress who married William

Rhees, a penniless Welshman. (Jean Rhys changed the surname Rhees to Rhys)

All this is echoed in "Wide Sargasso Sea". Coulibri, the Cosway's estate is really Geneva. Minna, an heiress, is Antoinette and William Rhees is the basis for the Rochester character, a penniless Englishman. Rhys, not only bases "Wide Sargasso Sea" on her family slave-owning history, of which she was ashamed, but also on the history of a society and her own emotions and experiences living in a culturally divided community. Her childhood was isolated and lonely. Her older sister, Brenda Gwenith Rhees had died at birth and Rhys was given her name, Gwenith, by her inconsolable mother, who, preoccupied with her grief, neglected her second daughter. Rhys felt like a ghost: she had a sense of loss and emptiness; of not belonging anywhere. This sense of loss was strengthened by the rejection and exclusion of her society by the black inhabitants and by the mother country - England. She felt that she had no origin:

> I often wonder who I am and where
> is my country and where I do belong
> and why was I ever born at all.
> (Rhys, "Wide Sargasso Sea", 1968, p.85)

The story of Antoinette mirrors that of Jean Rhys. Both endure lonely childhoods in the West Indies. Just as Rhys' mother rejected her, Annette, Antoinette's recently widowed mother, rejects her because she is preoccupied with her own grief, her disabled son, Pierre, and with the humiliation at losing her wealth. The recently emancipated slaves hate them, seeing them as "white trash". The wealth that had given the Cosways status and strength is stripped away, leaving them marooned, socially and economically, ostracised by both the white and black community. Antoinette feels the isolation and the rejection:

"My father, visitors, horses, feeling safe in bed - all belonged to the past" (Rhys, 1968, p.15). The lonely little girl finds a substitute mother in the housekeeper, Christophine, who is black. Annette remarries, this time to a wealthy Englishman, Mr. Mason, who saves the family from poverty. Yet he also destroys them by refusing to listen to his wife and Antoinette's Aunt Cora about the dangers of living at Coulibri, created by the mounting resentment among the ex-slaves. He inevitably leads the family to destruction - the ex-slaves riot and burn down Coulibri, killing Pierre in the process. Annette goes mad with grief and impotent rage against Mason.

> 'I told you,' she said, 'I told you what would happen again and again. Her voice broke, but still she screamed, 'You would not listen, you sneered at me, you grinning hypocrite, you ought not to live either you know so much, don't you? Why don't you go out and ask them to let you go? Say how innocent you are, say you have always trusted them.'
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.34)

Annette is locked away, guarded by keepers who abuse her, while Antoinette is dispatched to a convent school. After the death of her mother, Antoinette becomes an heiress and is married to Rochester, a penniless Englishman, who is attracted by her wealth and beauty. Rochester becomes distrustful of Antoinette. He is both seduced and repelled by his wife's simple and uninhibited sexuality, which he identifies with the lush tropical paradise which she inhabits so easily. Fear leads him to initiate the succession of cruelties which lead her to England, madness and the attic in Thornfield Hall.

"WIDE SARGASSO SEA" AND "JANE EYRE"

By linking the semi-autobiographical element of "Wide Sargasso Sea to the narrative of "Jane Eyre", Rhys had on her hands an exquisite

masterpiece. The relationship between the two novels is cemented by the way they over-lap, inform and complete each other. "Wide Sargasso Sea" is deliberately left open-ended and incomplete, leaving (and depending upon) Bronte's "Jane Eyre" to complete the story - what happens to Antoinette after she wakes up from her nightmare and decides to burn down Thornfield Hall. Despite the fact that "Wide Sargasso Sea" was written 119 years after "Jane Eyre", it serves a prologue to the earlier novel, informing the reader of the events which precede and precipitate those in Bronte's narrative. "Wide Sargasso Sea" fills in the gaps in "Jane Eyre and informs us of the events which occurred during Jane's absence from Thornfield Hall after the disclosure of the existence of the first Mrs. Rochester. The novels complement each other, allowing the reader to range freely between the two texts.

Where the first Mrs. Rochester is concerned, each novel presents a different side of the same coin: Rhys' Antoinette being the good side, Bronte's Bertha the dark side. Bronte's mad woman is a murderess whereas Rhys' mad woman is not. Rhys deliberately leaves out the elements of self pity, revenge and the responsibility for action which surface in the Bronte novel. Rhys intended her character to be free from the burden of revenge enacted at Thornfield Hall; free from Rochester's framing. By leaving out these undesirable elements she allows Antoinette to become a sympathetic figure, her hands cleared of any responsibility or blood.

> "Wide Sargasso Sea" leaves out not only things which are psychologically repellent to Jean Rhys - the instant revenge, the responsibility for action - but the things which are artistically repellent to us - the threat of suicide, the plea to our pity - hands them all over, so to speak, to Charlotte Bronte.
>
> (Angiers, 1992, p. 533)

The relationship between the two novels proves to be a very vital ingredient in the overall plot and atmosphere of "Wide Sargasso Sea". The beauty of the novel is the air of tragedy which pervades it, courtesy of Bronte's "Jane Eyre". Having read "Jane Eyre", we are conscious of the fate that hangs over Antoinette Cosway. The impending fate is predicted in her mother's madness, her island and her dreams.

> Antoinette's fate is already sealed - it must happen and she knows it as it happened to her mother and, in another book, as it happened to herself. As we know the fate that awaits her it overpowers (the novel).
> (Angier, 1992, p.534).

Throughout our reading of "Wide Sargasso Sea" we see many references to the fate that awaits her. For instance, there is no mention of Thornfield Hall in the novel but because of "Jane Eyre" we know that Antoinette will end up there. In "Wide Sargasso Sea", Rochester draws a house with three floors. On the top floor he draws a woman:

> I drew a house surrounded by trees. A large house. I divided the third floor into rooms and in one room I drew a standing woman - a child's scribble, a dot for a head, a larger one for the body, a triangle for the skirt, slanting lines for the arms and feet. But it was an English house.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.135)

We do not need to guess hard that it is Thornfield Hall he is drawing because we already know of its significance from "Jane Eyre". We immediately recognize the figure as Antoinette because the other novel, "Jane Eyre", informs us of the existence of the mad woman in the attic.

The events which occur in each book are either similar or contrasting. However, I feel that the contrasts between the two novels are more impressive than the similarities. What impresses me is the difference between the two Mrs. Rochesters - Antoinette Cosway and Jane

Eyre. From reading the two texts, we observe that Antoinette falls victim to Rochester, whereas Jane does not. This is due to their contrasting social backgrounds, their origins and circumstances. The triumph of Jane Eyre highlights the plight of Antoinette Cosway. Antoinette dies because of the hypocrisy of Victorian society and its repression of women, whereas Jane survives it, because, unlike Antoinette, she was born and educated in England. She learns to control passion and anger as she grows from childhood to adulthood in the comfortless Lowood which reflects the narrowness and coldness of nineteenth century morality. Antoinette came from a different culture and a different clime which ill prepared her for transplantation to England.

Jane Eyre learns to conform at an early age. This is seen in the "Red Room" incident in the novel. She strikes her cousin Master Reed because he hits her and as a result she is locked up in her dead uncle's room. To fly at Master Reed in anger is shocking and a fit of passion is unacceptable. This action causes her to be branded mad: "Hold her Miss Abbott, she's like a mad cat". (Bronte, 1847, p.44). The only punishment deemed fit for her was to be locked up, incarcerated. Antoinette suffers the exact same fate when she loses control and attacks Rochester:

> I managed to hold her wrist with one hand and the arm with the other, but when I felt her teeth in my arm, I dropped the bottle the smell filled the room. But I was angry now and she saw it. She smashed another bottle against the wall and stood with the broken glass in her hand and murder in her eyes.....
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.122)

Antoinette ends up in the attic in Thornfield Hall. The difference between Jane and Antoinette is that as a child, Jane is locked away until she learns to exercise self-control or face the consequences. Antoinette, on

the other hand, learns no such lesson because she has no experience of surviving in such a repressive society. She suffers the consequences of failure to conform.

Bronte presents Jane as a passionate, strong-willed woman but she keeps her emotions under wraps. Bertha is her altergo - the angry side of Jane emerging. While Bertha screams, laughs, sets fire to beds, Jane struggles to keep her self-control. In the England of "Jane Eyre" female sanity is equated with passivity and lack of passion and sexual desire. Helen Moglen points out in her biography of Bronte that:

> sexual relationships followed a pattern of dominance and submission. Male power was affirmed through an egoistic, aggressive, even violent sexuality. Female sexuality was passive, self-denying. The woman, by wilfully defining herself as 'the exploited', as 'victim', by seeing herself as she was reflected in the male's perception of her, achieved the only kind of control available to her. Mutuality was extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible to achieve.
>
> (Molgen, 1976, p.30)

In "Jane Eyre", Jane is torn between her respectability and her passion for Rochester. Every time Jane is about to make an emotional commitment to Rochester, Bertha appears. This suggests that Bertha is warning Jane, that if she were to surrender to Rochester, she would lose her identity, sanity and independence.

> In locating the mad Bertha in "Jane Eyre", Charlotte Bronte is making a very important link between the imagination and the passion: after all, however physical its manifestations, madness is a state in which the mind has gone out of control.
>
> (Williams, 1988, p.31)

Antoinette's story in "Wide Sargasso Sea" is a warning to Jane that she must keep her sexual desires under control or face the consequences of being labelled mad.

The differences between the two women, Antoinette and Jane, are their conflicting social backgrounds and the cultures in which they were brought up. More importantly, the conflict is between a cold, hostile climate (Victorian England) and a hot climate (the warm free West Indies). Rhys associates Antoinette with the latter and Rochester with the former. By exploring her own past in the West Indies, Rhys conveys to us the passion vitality and strength of female sexuality symbolised by the lush environment. The Carribean moulded her as it moulded Antoinette Cosway.

THE TITLE

The title "Wide Sargasso Sea" is a metaphor for Antoinette and also for the cultural divide between the European experience and that of the Carribean. "Sargasso" is the Portuguese for "of unknown origin". Antoinette, like Jean Rhys, is of unknown origin: they are adrift in a sea, unable to anchor themselves to a fixed identity. They are castaways.

The Sargasso Sea lies in the Carribean, between the West Indies and the Azores, where there is an abundance of seaweed of the genus Sargassum. It is a serene beautiful sea, underneath which lies suffocating, entangled, and entrapping seaweed. This sea is renowned for a number of wrecks that lie beneath its still surface: it is a place that offers false security. Things are not what seem to be. The sea mirrors Antoinette's nature: tranquil, calm and beautiful on the surface. Rochester is seduced by her beauty but he finds himself engulfed by the tangled web of her sexuality, from which struggles to free himself.

The Sargasso Sea is also a metaphor for the West Indies - the hate, fear, and the reality of the poverty that lie beneath the beauty and promise

of its surroundings. The lush tropical atmosphere is deceptive and stiffles Rochester. In his desperation to breathe, he must disentangle himself from the grip which both Antoinette and her islands have on him and reach the surface: return to England.

> A wind fresh from Europe blew over the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, steamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew purer...
>
> (Bronte, "Jane Eyre", 1847, p.335).

He takes Antoinette to England but as she crosses that Atlantic, the sea becomes rougher and rougher and her moods become blacker and more turbulent at Thornfield Hall.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER TWO

Colonialism and the Colonisation of Women

> Our garden was large and beautiful as that
> garden in the Bible - the tree of life grew
> there. But it had gone wild. The paths
> were overgrown and a smell of dead
> flowers mixed with the fresh living smell.
> Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree
> ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished
> out of reach or for some reason not to be
> touched. One was snaky looking, another
> like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles..
> (Rhys, "Wide Sargasso Sea", 1968, p.17)

"Wide Sargasso Sea" is rich in images of colonialism and its ideology, particularly in its reference to women and their lives. Rhys depicts the continuum between sexuality and geography. She paints the West Indies in the form of the three important women of "Wide Sargasso Sea" - Annette, Antoinette and Christophine. They represent the colonised subjects or islands, whereas Rochester and Mason are the colonists, who seek to impose their order on them. The excesses and abuses of the value system which colonialism represents are here examined by Rhys.

The garden at Coulibri is one of the first allusions Rhys makes to colonialism in the novel. It was once cultivated and beautiful in an ordered way and now it has returned to its natural wildness. The garden is thus a metaphor for the collapse of the old order of slave-owning days and above all, it juxtaposes the "unatural orderliness of the British community (colonists) with the natural, more primitive community of Jamaica". (Spaull, 1989, p.97) The garden is also a metaphor for the relationship between Annette and Mason and for that between Antoinette and Rochester. The wildness evoked by the passage, stands for female sexuality. Rochester and Mason and have been taken out of the 'symbolic' civilized world of England and face the wild zone of femininity. Their masculinity is threatened and they need to assert their control over their wives in order to reassure themselves.

Just as territories were colonized by rapacious nations, women were colonized by men. Women are identified with nature which in turn was feminised and therefore powerless. Men were associated with culutre and the power to impose their will and order on nature. Susan Griffin in her book "Women and Nature : The Roaring Inside Her", stresses this hypocrisy that women have to be dominated because of their nature

> And the demon that resides in the earth, it is decided, in hell, under our feet. It is observed that women are closer to nature. That women lead to man's corruption. Women are 'The Devil's Gateway' -- it is said.
> (Griffin, 1984, p.30)

This linking of women and nature is a very common theme in colonial writing in

> its tendency to abstract relationships as mappable/geometric space. The map is the colonial signifier of a dominant race, its economy and topography. It is also a scope for that other colonial geography- the body of a woman.
> (Humm, 1991, p.74)

The female body is often identified with the land, something to be purveyed, viewed, conquered as a collective property for "man" to enjoy. Both Annette and Antoinette are metaphors for the wealth of the West Indies - both are heiresses whose marriages to Englishmen are made for materialistic considerations. Antoinette points out to Christophine that, by her marriage, "everything (she) had belongs to (Rochester) ... that is English law". (Rhys, 1968, p.91) Once plundered of their wealth and beauty and identity, they are discarded - Annette to a mad house and Antoinette to the attic.

DOMINANCE AND SUBJECTION

Although slavery was abolished in with the Emancipation Act of 1833, women continued to be repressed and denied rights (autonomy or the vote). Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser in their book, "Women, A History of their Own", state that

> Slavery, the divine rights of monarchs, the distinction between aristocratic, bourgeois men's literal views of religion all came under attack during this period (the nineteenth century). But traditional views of women endured and were even strengthened in the new developments of the age: in law codes and representative governments; in medical and scientific thoughts, in images of women and even in the clothing of the period.
>
> (Anderson and Zinsser, 1988, p.143)

Christophine herself is sceptical of new laws (especially the Emancipation Act) freeing the slaves and giving them more rights. She is aware of the fact that, in spite of these new laws, women are still caught in the tangled web of dominance and subjection.

> 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 jail-house
> and chain gang. They got tread machine
> to mash up pepple's feet. New ones worse
> than old ones - more cunning, that's all.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.23)

At the beginning of "Wide Sargasso Sea", Rhys signals the

> possibility of a self-expressive woman(Christophine) and the simultaneous dominance of all women caught in a colonial nexus of decaying plantations and a history which places women's past of feeling safe in parenthesis.
>
> (Humm, 1991, p.51)

Mr. Mason rescues the Cosway family from the poverty of their existence and imposes his customs and values on them.

> We ate English food now, beef and mutton, pies and puddings. I was glad to be like an English girl, but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.30)

Maggie Humm points out in her book, "Border Traffic", that

> To pose English customs and language is a normalising act, whose work is to codify difference, to fix the other (women) outside the boundary of the civilised.....
> (Humm, 1991, p.73)

Annette, a woman left to manage her dead husband's plantation, is a victim of her society's attitudes to women: "The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self', Christophine said". (Rhys, 1968. p15); and a victim of the Emancipation Act of 1833 - 'Now we are marooned,' my mother said, 'now what will become of us'. (Rhys 1968, p.15). She being a victim, socially and racially, lives on the outside of the "boundary of the civilised" (Humm) and the only way she can re-enter the society, that cast her out on the death of her husband, is by marrying Mr. Mason. By this means she acquires a new identity at the expense of her independence and sanity.

> Women's sexuality was controlled, men's uncontrolled and unbounded. To live beyond boundaries gave man power, it destroyed woman. Outside family boundaries women had no legitimate sphere.
> (De Lauretis, 1986, p.43)

Mason by colonising Annette, exercising full control over her, destroys her. His treatment accords with the ideology of his society, Victorian society, that women need to be controlled because they are deemed to be weak, unstable, emotional, passive and gentle.

> Control was continually stressed because
> a girl had to learn to control the
> 'unwomanly side of her nature - the sulky
> useful and independent side'
> (Anderson and Zinsser, 1989, p.157)

As a contemporary voice, Florence Nightingale, in her pamphlet, "Cassandra" (1852) dealt with the virtual imprisonment of privileged women. According to the Greek myth, Cassandra was a Trojan princess who was cursed by Apollo (whose love she rejected) to be able to see the future but not be believed. She goes mad. She is a symbol for Victorian women who rejected contemporary ideas of women's roles only to be deemed mad. Cassandra suffers from insomnia:

> The night walk of one prematurely awake. Cassandra
> cannot sleep, both because of her personal wretchedness
> and because she is conscious of the desires that other
> women in their "sleeping ignorance" refuse to acknowledge.
> Mothers pretend they have no passion, and teach their
> daughters that women feel no sexual desire because in the
> conventional society, which men have made for women,
> and women have accepted they must have none, they
> must act the farce of hyprocrisy.
> (Showalter, 1988, p.64)

Annette Cosway is the most Cassandra-like figure in "Wide Sargasso Sea". She anticipates the riot of the black slaves and the destruction of Coulibri and begs Mr. Mason to take her and her family away. But due to his arrogant assumption that he knows more than she does, that she is being merely hysterical and for no reason, he dismisses her fears. To him she was some empty vessel, incapable of rational thought or deduction.

> '..... You imagine enmity which does not exist.
> Always one extreme or the other. Didn't you
> fly at me like a wild cat when I said nigger. Not
> even nigger or even Negro. Black people I must
> say'.
> 'You don't like or even recognise the good in them',
> she said, 'and you won't believe in the other side'
> (Rhys, 1968, p.27/28)

In the event she is proven right; Coulibri is set on fire and her son, Pierre, dies as a result. Annette vents her anger and rage on the complacent Mason:

> 'Don't touch me, I'll kill you if you touch me! Coward. Hypocrite. I'll kill you'.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.39)

Because of her emotional outburst, precipitated by her grief, Mason perceives her mad, locks her up. He, the colonist, goes unscathed, she disintegrates emotionally and physically under her distress. Christophine, the black servant, sums it all up:

> "They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husband he go off, he leave her. They won't let me see her. I try, but no. They won't let Antoinette see her. In the end - mad I don't know - she give up, she care for nothing. That man who is in charge of her he take her whenever he want and his woman talk. That man, and others. Then they have her...'
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.129/130)

Annette is stripped of her dignity and self-worth. She becomes an empty shell, devoid of emotion or sexuality.

The same process of colonisation is repeated with Antoinette. She inevitably goes the same way as her mother. Like her mother she becomes a Cassandra figure in the final part of "Wide Sargasso Sea". Just as Cassandra suffers from insomnia, Antoinette is unable to sleep and goes on frequent trips around Thornfield Hall. Like Cassandra she has prophetical dreams of what will happen: the fire at Thornfield Hall and her suicidal jump from the battlements. Cassandra commits suicide to free herself from her "mad" state. The "madness" imposed on Antoinette by Rochester comes from his identification of his wife's sexuality and body

with her island, which is wild, uncontrollable and dangerous. His view has been influenced by the nineteenth century belief that female sexuality (especially the body) was in itself considered to be a sign of deviance, madness and criminality. Out of his fear of her sexuality he locks her away.

FEMALE SEXUALITY/BODY AND THE ISLAND

Rochester is both repelled and uneasily attracted by the lush sensuous beauty of the island where nature is more powerful than man, who is dwarfed by its exhuberant overgrowth. Nature seems to defy the white man's attempts to tame and cultivate it - it obeys a code of its own. Carole Angier, in her biography "Jean Rhys", describes the West Indies as a place where

> the sun shines hotter and the moon brighter here than anywhere in Europe. Rain falls more suddenly and night comes quickly, colours are brighter, smells stronger, trees and flowers and insects grow bigger. So much grows so quickly that almost everything has a parasite even people. Species overflow, individuals don't count ... Nothing lasts, everything decays as fast as it grows. The guava blossom, the orchids, the night flowering lillies smell so sweet and strong; it is like the smell of death.
>
> (Angier, 1992, p.3).

Rochester feels oppressed and claustrophobic in this environment. Everything threatens him - the people, the flowers, the insects:

> Everything is too much, I felt as I rode after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.59)

He has been conditioned by a society which equates loss of power with loss of masculinity. This rich, sweltering steamy tropical world seem to emit a

fear of the environment with his fear of Antoinette's sexuality. Making her powerless is a way of making him more in control of his masculinity.

What unsettles him is her ease and identification with this loveliness - it frightens him to think that she has some hold over him. He says:

> I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.141)

Antoinette's lonely childhood on a deserted estate has conditioned her to identify with her environment and to accept eagerly the solace and comforts it offers:

> I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think 'It's better than people.' Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin - once I saw a snake. All better than people. Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.24)

She confides to Rochester her love for the family estate at Granbois:

> I love it more than anywhere in the world as if it were a person. More than a person.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.74)

Her island provides her with security and self worth.

Rochester, despite his fear of her, is attracted to Antoinette because of the secret she hides from him - the secret being her rapport with the island. He wants to dominate and cultivate her:

> It was a beautiful place - wild untouched, above all, untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking 'What I see is nothing.' I want what it hides - that is not nothing.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.73).

Rochester identifies this torrid excess of overgrowth with his wife. In "Jane Eyre" he likesn his first wife's sexuality to her paradise and its stormy, everchanging weather:

> The air was like sulphur-streams. I could find no refreshment anywhere .... the sea, which I could hear from hence, rumbled like an earthquake - black clouds were casting up over it, the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red like a hot cannon-ball - she threw her last bloody glance over a world, quivering with the ferment of tempest.
> (Bronte, 1847, p.335)

In this description, Rochester makes his wife sound as if she were part of the island, part of its stormy hot climate. In it he also makes allusions to the dangers of female sexuality - the image of the sea, which is perhaps the Sargasso Sea and the tempest gathering over it. In a previous chapter, I refer to the Sargasso Sea as a metaphor for Antoinette's sexuality drowning him.

> I woke in the dark dreaming that I was buried alive and when I was awake the feeling of suffocation persisted. Something was lying across my mouth, hair with a sweet heavy smell. I threw it off but still I could not breathe.
> (Rhys, "Wide Sargasso Sea", 1968, p.113)

Her hair is like the seaweed in the Sargasso Sea, pulling him down, entangling him, drowning him with the strength of female sexuality. He struggles to free himself of her power over him. He needs to control her instead.

Just like the stubborn nature of the island, Antoinette refuses to be colonised - she obeys her own code. Rochester feels frustrated by his inability to make her change:

> I was certain that nothing I said made much difference, her mind was already made up... her ideas were fixed .. I could not change them and probably nothing would. Reality might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her, but it would not be reality. It would be only a mistake, a misfortune, a wrong path taken, her fixed ideas would never change.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.78)

Although Rochester takes her away from the island, taking her identity from her, in effect he never tames her, never civilizes her. He succeeds in breaking her but he does not succeed in making her conform. He drives her to madness, but madness is a way of refusing colonisation; of refusing to be tamed although she is locked away.

As Rochester systematically dismantles all the ties which Antoinette has with her island, she becomes his island, his territory, his land. But it is an usurpation in which she does not acquiesce.

COCO AND THE 'CLIPPED WINGS' METAPHOR.

In the final moments of the novel, "Wide Sargasso Sea", when Antoinette in her dream is standing on the battlements of Thornfield Hall, she cries out in the wind all her anger and rage. She thinks that, if she were to jump, the wind will bear her up.

There are striking parallels between this scene and the one in which Coco the parrot dies in the fire in Coulibri. Coco is the Cosway's parrot, whose wings have been clipped by Mr. Mason to prevent him from flying away. Once more we have an example of male arrogation of power over

nature and again the consequences of Mr. Mason's presumption will be horrifying. When the ex-slaves burn down Coulibri, they are about to massacre the family, the sight of Coco, wings clipped, dying in the blaze stops them. In Black culture it is considered very unlucky to see a parrot die.

> I opened my eyes, everybody was looking up and pointing at Coco on the glacis railings with his features alight. He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.36)

Parrots are associated in many cults, including Obeah, with the soul. Coco is the image of the imprisoned soul which is first Annette's and then Antoinette's. The parrot's cry 'Qui est la?' 'Qui est la?' when he sees a stranger is heard again by Antoinette in her dream at the end of the novel.

> ... heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, 'Qui est la?' 'Qui est la?' and the man who hated me was calling too 'Bertha! 'Bertha! Bertha!'
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.155)

On hearing the parrot, Antoinette hears Rochester calling her name. He is now a complete stranger and she jumps to escape him, the room she has been locked up in, the nightmare of her existence and the fire. The imagery of the clipped wings evoke Rochester's depriving Antoinette of her freedom and life and the damaging consequences of the complacent exercise of power.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER THREE

Madness, Magic and Death

SEXUALITY AND MAGIC

> 'Night has a thousand eyes', yes everything has eyes. Spiders have eyes, a good many eyes it seems, if you look at a spider through a microscope. Moths have eyes, beetles have eyes, so have centipedes I suppose. Detestable flying cockroaches have eyes. The window was wide open. It so hot, so hot. So a cockroach might fly in. The cold stars look, at men. 'Night has a thousand eyes', more like a million I should think.
>
> (Rhys, "Smile Please", 1979, p.65/66)

Rochester identifies sexuality with power and feels threatened by Antoinette's sexuality. This fear is intensified by his association of female sexuality with death, darkness and in the lush tropical West Indies with black culture and Obeah - the other. Obeah is the magic or sorcery practised among the black natives (especially black women, who seem to know its powers best). Christophine, Antoinette's black servant, is feared by both white and black people because she has some knowledge of the subject. She embodies the strength and individuality of female sexuality and that, together with her association with the occult, frightens and repels Rochester. What Rochester particularly notices about her is her "dirty language" - Christophine speaks in a mixture of patois and English, striding the cultural gap between the black people and white people. Powerful women are those who speak across the linguistic boundaries.

> Christophine is a visible role model of the other self - made into self, in the full density of otherness, with her powerful language and magical power of Obeah. Christophine links Antoinette to more complex knowledge, made up of magic, earth gods and Arawak history" *
>
> (Humm, 1992, p.91)

* **Footnote:** The Arawaks were the inhabitants of the West Indies before the Spanish arrived.

At first, Rochester is merely unsettled by Antoinette's relationship with Christophine.

> "Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?" I'd say.
> "Why not?"
> "I wouldn't hug and kiss them," I'd say, "I couldn't."
> At this she'd laugh for a long time and never tell me why she laughed.
> (Rhys, "Wide Sargasso Sea", 1968, p.76)

Soon he tries to destroy the relationship between the two women, as Christophine seems to provide Antoinette with the secret of the island. Jean Rhys makes Christophine the only charachter who frees or disassociates Antoinette from the stereotypes of the white settler's discourse.

Obeah belongs to darkness. It is the magic and devil worship of the black people. It is black culture and has its roots in the civilisation of Africa. It was brought to the colonies by the black slaves but it was the Europeans who introduced the devil to the culture of the Indians and Black people of the Americas.

> The devil was introduced to the New World by European imperalism, where it blended with pagan deities and the metaphysical system represented by those deites.
> (Taussig, 1990, p. xi).

The strength of black culture was fuelled by the anxieties and the frustrations of the slaves. Magic was a means of relieving pain, of explaining the world around them; it also gave them a power which the white colonists could not share or take away. The Europeans were convinced that the religions of the Indians and the Black people were the work of the devil. As Michael Taussig points out:

> .. the Christians believed that the devil had spawned the heathen African, that slaves were his ministry.
> (Taussig, 1990, p. xii).

In defiance of the European slave-owners, the slaves continued to devil worship. It gave them an identity, which in turn gave them strength. They relished the sense of power and integrated. This fear of the devil - the Prince of Darkness - into their own culture.

To the white people, darkness represents evil, death and above all, sexuality. It stands for the darkness of the human heart and female sexuality. The night of the West Indies harboured many fears. The stars shine brighter - "The starlight was so bright that the shadows of the Veranda posts and the trees outside lay on the floor" (Rhys, "Wide Sargasso Sea", 1968, p.68) - and the vegetation seems more threatenting and powerful. Rochester feels that the night has a life of its own:

> "But this is not the place or the time, I
> thought, not in this long, dark veranda
> and the watching listening night outside".
> (Rhys, 1968, p.106)

Candles are man's illumination of the darkness; however feeble their light, they provide him with a sense of security in his immediate surroundings. But in the West Indies, the night overpowers the artificial light:

> "Amelie brought out the candles with
> glass shades, but the night swallowed
> up the feeble light. There was a very
> strong scent of flowers."
> (Rhys, 1968, p.68)

The strength and beauty of nature and of the night are suggested in this passage and, by analogy, female sexuality. The flowers open at night, suggesting the equation of female sexuality with darkness.

Antoinette loves the dark, she feels part of it: "I wish to stay here in the dark where I belong", (Rhys, 1968, p.112). She embraces it as she embraces sexual union with Rochester. The night for Rochester

represents desire and passion, but he feels vulnerable in the dark, the more so as it seems to be her natural element. He calls her "Queen of the Silent Night" (p.68). The darkness represents "the primitive and passion, with all their attraction but also all their fears," according to Barbara Hill Rigney, "Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel", (1978, p.561) and fear of female sexuality predominates and is embodied in Rochester's distaste for the scent of the night flowers. Rochester sings to Antoinette: "Shine bright Robin as you die" (p.70) and as "die" was a Victoran euphemism for orgasm, the association of passion and death informs his fear. He says:

> I wonder if she ever guessed how near she came to dying. In her way, not in mine. It was not a safe game to play - in that place. Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.79)

Not only is darkness a metaphor for female sexuality and death, in the West Indies it is associated with Zombiism.

INSANITY AND ZOMBIES

Rochester is superstitious and his irrational beliefs are increased by his preoccupation with Obeah as he reads "The Glittering Coronets of Isles", a book about zombies and Obeah.

> A zombie is a dead person, who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead. A zombie can also be the spirit of a place, usually malignant, but sometimes to be propitiated with sacrifice or offerings of flowers and fruit. The cry out in the wind that is their voice, they rage on the sea that is their anger ...
>
> (Rhys, "Wide Sargasso Sea", 1968, p.88)

Here Rochester finds a readily accepted explanation for Antoinette's sexual drive, her indifference and what he comes to term her "insanity".

The idea that Antoinette might be insane is suggested to him by the lies of Daniel Cosway, Antoinette's half-brother; lies that Rochester is only too willing to believe. Antoinette's father had fathered many children on his own plantation. Some he acknowledged as his own, but he rejected Daniel, who is consequently full of self-pitying resentment and jealousy of his white half-sister. This motivates his revenge and eagerness to let Rochester know the "secrets" of the Cosway family. Daniel's role is crucial because it destroys any chance of future happiness which Antoinette might have with Rochester:

> It is my christian duty to warn the gentleman that she is no girl to marry with, with the bad blood she have from both sides.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.81)

Daniel shares and exploits Rochester's jaundiced attitudes towards women. He cleverly juxtaposes Rochester, pure, good and uncorrupted, "the gentleman", with Antoinette, a vessel of corruption. Antoinette has contaminated Creole blood and inherited madness.

> You have been shamefully deceived by the Mason family... They don't tell you what sort of people were these Cosways. Wicked and detestable slave-owners since generations - yes everybody hate them in Jamaica and also in this beautiful island, where I hope your stay will be long and pleasant in spite of all, for some not worth sorrow. Wickedness is not the worst. There is madness in that family. Old Cosway die raving like his father before him.... This young Mrs. Cosway is worthless and spoilt, she can't lift a hand for herself and soon the madness that is in her and in all these white Creoles come out ... Your wife going the same way as her mother and all knowing it.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.80).

As Rochester only married Antoinette because she was an heiress and because he was penniless, he now feels that he has been duped and betrayed by his family and Richard Mason into marrying a girl who is both mad and racially impure.

> As I walked, I remembered my father's
> face and his thin lips, my brother's
> rounded conceited eyes. They knew.
> And Richard, the fool, he knew too.
> And the girl with her blank smiling
> face. They all knew.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.86).

The tragic aspect of the revelations of Daniel Cosway is that they come just as Rochester is beginning to love Antoinette and she to believe in the possibility of happiness and love. In rage and bitterness he turn love to lust, and sexual desire into destruction. When the bewildered Antoinette lashes out at Rocester for his ill treatment of her, her violent and emotional outbursts are not understood by Rochester as important responses to a perceived grievance but as symptoms of emotional instability:

> Then she cursed me comprehensively, my eyes, my
> mouth, every member of my body and it was like a
> dream in the large unfurnished room, with candles
> flickering and this red-eyed, wild-haired strnager
> who was shouting obscenities at me.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.122)

Rochester likens her in this state to a zombie, whose behaviour has been described in "The Glittering Coronets of Isles" - "they cry out in the wind that is their voice, they rage in the sea that is their anger". (Rhys, 1968, p.88). Again, in "Jane Eyre", he mades allusive references to the relationship between his wife and the unnatural - the devil, vampires and the living dead, zombies:

> She momentarily mingled my name with such
> a tone of demon-hate, with such language!
> No professed harlot ever had a fouler
> vocabulary than she; through two rooms off,
> I hear every word - the thin partition
> of the West Indian house opposing but slight
> obstruction to her wolfish crises.
> (Bronte, 1847, p.335)

"Wolfish cries" link Antoinette to soucriants - werewolves.

MADNESS AND DEATH

Love for Antoinette is a matter of life and death; her game of love is death, her passivity. Rhys focuses on two deaths - the physical and the real one, which is the spiritual death. By the time of her marriage to Rochester, Antoinette is already half-dead. She appears lifeless and apathetic - the other characteristics of a zombie. She has suffered so much rejection in the past that each rejection causes something to die inside her - "After Coulibri it was too late" (Rhys, 1968, p.76) - and moves her closer each time to numbness and the passive state, but hate is still there to animate her. Carol Angier points out in her biography of Jean Rhys that when Antoinette as a child begins to notice that

> when though it is hot and blue and there are no clouds, the sky can have a very black look
> (Rhys, 1968, p.24),

this is

> the moment when she begins to hate and is, also the moment she begins to split.
> (Angier, 1992, p.548)

This moment marks the first stage on the road to the physical death and hate keeps her going.

Antoinette, because of her fear of rejection, is willing to sacrifice everything for Rochester, once he has shown the first tentative signs of affection. She needs his love to revive and arouse what life she has left inside her. She fears that her new found happiness may be taken away:

'Suppose you took this happiness away when I was not looking.' (p.77)

'I am not used to happiness.... it makes me afraid.' (p.77)

'If I could die now when I am happy.' (p.77)

She even fears that, because of what happened to her mother, Rochester's love will be a "mask under which cruel fangs lie." (Angier, 1992, p.542). To make him love her she will do anything for him, even die at his command: "Say die and I'll die". (Rhys 1968, p.77).

Antoinette's embracement of death reflects the cult of death in the West Indies, with its connection, of course with obeah, black culture and the prince of darkness. Rochester is mystified with this pre-occupation with life and death.

> Always this talk of death (Is she trying to tell me
> that is the secret of this place? There is no other
> way? She knows. She knows.)
> (Rhys, 1968, p.77)

Life and death is the normal cycle at an accelerated level in the climate of the West Indies; everything grows decays, dies, grows, decays, dies ..... This acceptance of the death factor terrifies Rochester. Whereas the Europeans abhor the idea of death and associate it with pain, suffering and loss, the people of the Carribean accept it as the norm. According to Michael T. Taussig in his book, "The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America" the Indians

> believe that after death you continue to work on your
> land/farm. They didn't believe in punishment for the
> wicked, nor glory for the good.
> (Taussig, 1980, p. 169)

As a European Rochester's idea of death is suffering, so he turns it into orgasm:

> Die then! Die! I watched her die many times. In my
> way, not hers. In sunlight, in shadows, by moonlight,
> by candlelight. In the afternoons when the house was
> empty. Only the sun was there to keep us company.
> We shut him out and why not? Very soon she
> was as eager for what's called loving as I was -
> more lost and drowned afterwards."
> (Rhys, 1968, p.77)

Antoinette's insecurity leads her to indulge all Rochester's desires, hoping win his love, but she only earns his contempt and disgust, as the poison of Daniel Cosways words work on his mind. She takes drastic steps to win him back, even resorting to Obeah. This is a mistake in more than one way. As Christophine says

> 'If a man don't love you, I can't make love you..... Even if I can make him come to your bed, I cannot make him love you: afterward he hate you.'
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.93)

Christophine is proven right; Rochester, upon finding out that Antoinette has resorted to charms and Obeah to win him over, rejects her. His worst fears are realised; she is a witch. His rejection and betrayal of Antoinette's love is all the more horrible for its calculated cruelty. To hurt her he sleeps with her enemy, the maid Amelie, thereby indicating quiet explicitly to Antoinette that he values their relationship no higher than he would the casual services of a maidservant. Earlier, when Antoinette says "I am afraid of what may happen" (p.6). She can hardly have anticipated such heartless infliction of pain.

It is this betrayal that allows Rochester to kill her in the spiritual sense. He causes the death of the soul and her inert condition is complete. She is reduced to a zombie-like state, his language becomes more triumphal in tone:

> I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with her hate, her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight. Nothing left but her hopelessness. 'Say die and I will die, say die and watch me die'.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.140)

He was finally conquered her - turned her into the doll, the empty vessel he want her to be:

> (Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta.)
> That word mean doll, eh?, Because she don't speak
> You force her to cry and to speak.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.127)

She is a ghost, invisible, no longer real. She has died in spirit.

As he is about to depart with her for England he says

> she said she loved this place. This the
> last she'll see of it. I'll watch for one
> human tear. Not that blank hating, magic,
> witchcraft, moonstruck face. I'll listen ....
> If she says goodbye perhaps adieu .....
> if she says it, or weeps, I'll take her in my
> arms, my lunatic. She's mad but she's
> mine.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.136)

He speaks of Antoinette as if she were a conquered territory and he the triumphant conqueror. We note the repetition of possesive adjectives and pronouns and of the personal pronoun 'I'. We also note that "blank" is set beside "hating" and here we have the identification of spiritual death and madness, of love and madness. Madness is death after all, the torment of the soul. "Wide Sargasso Sea is about the genesis and nature of madness.

> Its genesis (madness) lies in the repeated
> unmasking of the world's secret cruelty
> and hate; and especially its last unmsasking
> in the person of a man whom the heroine
> loves, but who hates her.
> (Angier, 1992, p.542)

Antoinette's madness is conveyed to us through continual references to zombies - Obeah superstition. Rhy's idea of madness is a dead soul in a live body and to Europeans it is a ghost. Antoinette is haunted by her mother's madness and the fear of ending up like her mother is reinforced by the taunts of the black children as she makes her

way to school: "Look the crazy girl. You crazy like your mother. She have eyes like zombie and you have eyes like zombie too." (Rhys, 1968, p.42) And the day on which Antoinette goes to Christophine in despair at losing Rochestrer, Christophine draws on the same image, "Your face is like a dead woman and your eyes like a soucriant (zombie)." (Rhys, 1968, p.96). Rochester refers to her ".. blank, lovely eyes. Mad eyes. A mad girl." (Rhys, 1968, p.140). It is possible that, like her mother, Antoinette is made to believe or act like a mad woman because she is constantly told that she is one.

DEATH AND RELIGION

Antoinette's education at the convent before her marriage to Rochester, protected her from the hostility of the world beyond its walls, but it did not prepare her to face its cruelty. Although she is safe, she is aware of the ugliness that lies just beneath the surface of the tropical beauty of the islands. She says to Rochester:

> Haven't you noticed that there are no
> cockroaches in the house and no centipedes?
> If you knew how horrible these things can be.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.113)

In the convent, she takes refuge in indifference and in being passive - numbness is a way of escaping pain, "The convent was my refuge, a place of sunshine and of death ....," (Rhys, 1968, p.47). Death exists in the sunlight, beneath everything. Fear is bred in the sun - despite things looking gay and colourful and innocent, they conceal a dark side. As a child Antoinette comes into contact with Voodooism:

> 'Yet one day when I was waiting there I was suddenly
> very much afraid. The door was open to the sunlight,
> someone was whistling near the stables, but I was afraid.
> I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old
> black press?) there was a dead man's dried hand, white
> chicken feather, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly,
> slowly. Drop by drop the blood was falling into a red

> basin and I imagined I could hear it. No one had ever spoken to me about Obeah - but I knew what I would find if I dared to look
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.26)

She can even find sunshine "dark" as Obeah is more frightening in sunlight, because sunlight reveals its ugly qualities.

Death for Antoinette is the loss of her thinking self. She learns to say prayers and not mean them, dress without being seen or touched. It is at the convent that death becomes the norm because it is frequently mentioned in prayers.

> After the meal, 'now and at the hour of our death' and at midday and six in the evening, 'now and at the hour of our death' ..... I learnt to gabble without thinking as the others did. About changing 'now and at the hour or our death', for that is all we have.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p48)

Antoinette's spiritual death is brought about by a series of numbing experiences: her stay in the convent is one of them; 'the hour of her death' is merely her physical death, when she is released from her zombie-like state. She longs for death but when the nuns tell her that this is a sin, she questions the validity of religion.

> So many sins, why? Another sin, to think that. However, happily, Sister Marie Augustine says thoughts die not sins, if they are driven away at once. You say Lord save me, I perish. I find it very comforting to know exactly what must be done. All the same, I did not pray so often after that and soon, hardly at all. I felt bolder, happier, more free. But not so safe.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.48)

Antoinette rejects the religiion of the Europeans, seeing it as merely the blueprint of Victorian social and moral values, with its emphasis on hell, sin and suffering and its repression of the free expression of human emotion and desire, and its failure to offer spiritual transcendence. She

can identify with Obeah rather than with the meaningless words of the white religion (Christianity). She mocks Rochester's beliefs:

> '"You are always calling on God', she said.
> 'Do you believe in God?'" (p.105)

She criticizes his religious beliefs which repress the expression of his emotions. She asks him why he never kisses or talks to her and his reply is, "'I have a reason.. My God ..... I believe in the power and wisdom of my creator,'" (Rhys, 1968, p.105). When asked by him if she believes in God, she replies:

> 'It does not matter what I believe you believe,
> because we can do nothing about it, we are like
> these.' She flicked a dead moth off the table
> (Rhys, 1968, p.105)

All religious belief is ultimately about trying to come to terms with mortality and death. Rochester's actions and desires are qualified by his need or the comfort of belief in the hereafter. Antoinette believes that there is nothing beyond the darkness of death, death is the end of all. This difference between their religious beliefs shows the gulf between them, a whole wide Sargasso Sea, and brings about the death of their relationship.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER FOUR

The Importance of Dreams

Throughout much of the novel "Wide Sargasso Sea", Antoinette resides in a sort of dream-like trance, induced perhaps by her hynotic surroundings; she seems as undisturbed and as passive as her islands. She is self-surrendering, passionate yet unassertive and only imposes her will on events at the end of the novel, when she finally emerges from the dream-like state in which she seem to have taken refuge. Dreams are important in the novel, as Antoinette uses her unconscious mind to understand the world and her fate through dreams and emotions. The fate that lies before her crops up in her dreams, from her childhood up to the very end. She is aware of the tragedy of her life, a tragedy which is inevitable because it hangs over the island.

The dreams she has right through the novel warn her and prepare her for what is going to happen - her marriage to Rochester, the hatred she will endure and the inevitable suicide. According to Deborah Kelly Kloepfer in her book, "The Unspeakable Mother, Forbidden Discourse in Jean Rhys and her Novels", Rhys' protagonists are "victims who are fully aware of their victimization". (Kloepfer, 1989, p.28). Antoinette is a victim but at the end she casts off this passive role. She decides to act for herself. Although her attempts to kill Rochester fail, she does succeed in destroying her prison and escaping from her gaoler. As Rhys is determined not to make her heroine a murderess, she makes the connection with "Jane Eyre" through the use of dreams: what is anticipated in dreams in "Wide Sargasso Sea", is enacted in the other novel.

On two occasions as a child, Antoinette has the same prophetic dream - that she is walking through the forest at night. She is wearing a long dress and thin slippers which make walking difficult and inhibit her

freedom of movement - emphasising the confinement of women within conventional codes of Victorian society. In the dream, she follows a man (Mr. Rochester himself) and she is afraid to get the dress dirty as

> It is white and beautiful and I do
> not want to get it soiled. I follow
> him, sick with fear, but I make no
> effort to save myself ...
> (Rhys, 1968, p.50)

Later in the novel Rochester is aroused when he sees Antoinette dressed in white:

> She was wearing the white dress I had
> admired, but it had slipped untidily
> over one shoulder and it seemed too
> large for her.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.78)

White is a symbol of innocence and purity, although here the fact that the white dress was "slipping" suggests purity tinged with sexual promise. Rochester wants to believe that Antoinette is without sexual passion, like a child. This gives him comfort and a sense of power.

> If she was a child she was not a stupid
> child but an obstinate one
> (Rhys, 1968, p.78)

In the dream, Antoinette is afraid of getting the dress dirty for fear of making the man she follows angry; it is as if she is trying hard to conform to his beliefs and wishes. She makes no effort to assert or save herself for she senses that it must happen - the forthcoming marriage.

The man turns to look at her, "his face black with hatred" and says "Not here, not yet" (Rhys, 1968, p.50) and continues to walk on. She follows him, her dress getting dirtier and dirtier - a metaphor for Antoinette's increasing unattractiveness to Rochester, who gradually comes to believe that she is contaminated with "bad blood" (p.81) and a monster of sexual depravity: "My lunatic. My mad girl" (Rhys 1968, p.136).

As the dream draws to a close, Antoinette sees that

> There are steps leading upwards. It is too dark to see the wall or the steps, but I know they are there and I think 'It will be when I go up these steps to the top.'
> (Rhys, 1968, p.84)

The steps are the steps to the attic. Antoinette doesn't know exactly what will be when she climbs those steps, but it is there in her unconscious - the steps lead to death. When she awakens from this dream she imagines that she has been to Hell. In her dream, Antoinette has embarked on a preview of her life. She discovers that she will be frightened, submissive and lost. Because she is incapable of independent action, she follows this man, only to find herself at the foot of a staircase to the attic which represents the betrayal of her trust in him.

The dream frightens her, but with each recurrence the events in the dream establish themselves as a reality that cannot be avoided. We can understand why she says to Rochester on her wedding eve -"I am afraid of what may happen" (Rhys, 1968, p.66). With each succeeding dream she comes nearer to actuality.

> I'll be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me ... England mostly pink in the geography book map... I must know more than I know already, for I know that house, where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago. How long ago? In that bed I will dream the end of my dream. But my dream had nothing to do with England and I must not think like this ...
> (Rhys, 1968, p.92)

This time the dream mirrors reality more clearly. The house is Thornfield Hall and it is there that she will dream her final and most beautiful dream, the dream that will wake her from the passive state in which she has so long lived. The dream to end all dreams.

Antoinette's dream, quoted above, is very important because she says: "I wil be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me". This predicts the state of madness she will have deteriorated into; the Antoinette of Thornfield Hall is not the Antoinette of the West Indies. In England she will be stripped of her identity, having been taken away from her island, the people she loves and the culture to which she belongs. In Thornfield Hall she is an alien, whose memories are clouded by amnesia induced by long confinement in the attic. She has lost all sense of time. Just as her feelings were numbed in the convent, her mind becomes numbed in the attic. No longer able to rationalise, she acts on impulse, born of raging despair, as in her attack upon her step-brother, Richard Mason, when he says that he cannot interfere "legally" between herself and Rochester. But,

> even in her worst moments of madness
> and hatred she is not mean or cruel, but
> open, violent and self-forgetful.
> (Angiers, 1992, p.527)

Having taken everything away from her, as he thinks, Rochester can refer to Antoinette as a "zombie" as a "memory to be avoided, locked away, and like all memories a legend or a lie", (Rhys, 1968, p.146). He is wrong, as even Grace Poole recognises: "She is still fierce. I don't turn my back on her when her eyes have that look. I know it" (Rhys, 1968, p.146). But Rochester has forgotten to take away the red dress; he does not realize its significance. The red dress and her dream of what she must do remain and it is here in the final part of the novel that the dress informs the dream to produce the most eloquent and poetical descriptions, which Jean Rhys has ever written.

> Time has no meaning, but something
> you can touch and hold, like my red
> dress, that has a meaning. Where is it?
> (Rhys, 1968, p.151)

Red is Antoinette's colour. It stands for all she has lost, her sexual identity and her people. The significance of the dress is evidenced when she says of her step-brother's visit:

> I remember now that he did not recognize me. I saw him look at me and his eyes went first to one corner and then to another, not finding what they expected. He looked at me and spoke to me as though I were a stranger. What do you do when something happens to you like that? Why are you laughing at me? Have you taken my red dress too? If I'd been wearing that he'd have known me.
>
> (Rhys, "Wide Sargasso Sea", 1968, p.151)

Red stands for emotion and rage. "I saw it hanging, the colour of fire and sunset," (Rhys, 1968, p.151). The colour is her identity. During her childhood in the convent she embroiders her name in red thread:

> I will write my name in the colour red: Antoinette Mason, nee Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839".
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.44)

The red dress is her last link with the West Indies as it has

> the smell of vetivert and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of sun and the smell of rain.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.151)

The dress finally suggests fire:

> I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the floor. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember, I thought. I will remember quite soon.
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.153)

Thus the dress and her dreams come together to show Antoinette the way to escape her confinement.

Antoinette calls Thornfield Hall this "cardboard house" (p. 148) because although English houses are sturdy with thick walls, the cocoon of protection they give their occupants from the world outside is fragile. In her dream, Antoinette realises that she has the power to destroy what has destroyed her in the first place. She will burn down Thornfield Hall, to nothing. Antoinette's dream of destroying Thornfield recalls the burning of Coulibri by the ex-slaves. Coulibri like Thornfield Hall symbolises power and oppression. The destruction of Coulibri marks the end of slavery and oppression. The burning of Thornfield Hall marks the end of Antoinette's slavery and Rochester's power over her.

> 'Slavery was not a matter of liking
> or disliking', said ..... Rochester, trying
> to speak calmly. 'It was a question of
> justice'
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.121)

This "justice" Antoinette destroys by burning down what means most to him, his security behind these walls. She blinds him - blinding being a metaphor for his narrow perception of her and of her island.

In her final dream Antoinette takes the keys from Grace Poole and leaves the room on one of her nightly excursions. She finds herself in the hall and it reminds her of her arrival at Thornfield Hall:

> At last I was in the hall where a lamp was burning.
> I remember that when I came. A lamp and the dark
> staircase and the veil over my face"
>
> (Rhys, 1968, p.153)

The veil is intended to hide her identity, a further stage in the process of dehumanising Antoinette, impairing her judgement and dislocating her. The veil here at the end evokes the image of a shroud anticipating her death. Here in the hall the wheel has come full circle: the beginning and the end of her imprisonment. She next goes into a room which has a red carpet and curtains; everything else is white and she finds it ethereal, cold

sad and empty, almost like a church. when she lights candles to dispel the gloom, the room is suddenly transformed into her Aunt Cora's room with sunlight streaming through the window. The wax candles of Thornfield remain, distorting the scene and impairing her happiness, so she knocks them over setting fire to the carpets and curtains:

> I laughed when I saw the lovely
> colour (red) spreading so fast but
> I did not stay to watch it.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.154).

> The narrative describing the fire itself
> is fast moving and dream-like with its
> ever changing scenario : a confusion of
> impressions of England and Jamaica.
> (Spaull, 1989, p.109).

As the fire spreads, she flees the room and seeing her reflection in a mirror, she thinks that she sees a ghost, the ghost of herself "The woman with the streaming hair" (Rhys, 1968, p.154). "Streaming" suggests the seaweed of the Sargasso Sea; her heart is coming back to her, she is going home.

Antoinette finally goes to the battlements where it is cool. She turns round and sees the sky:

> It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the
> grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork.
> I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a
> stranger 'Qui est la? Qui est la? and the man
> who hated me was calling too, 'Bertha! Bertha!..
> All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second.
> And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I
> thought 'Why did I scream? I called 'Tia' and
> jumped and woke.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.155)

In her dream, Antoinette sees her childhood friend, Tia, beckoning her to jump as she once did before, beckoning the child Antoinette into the pool at Coulibri. She is home at last.

Antoinette wakes up from this final dream and realises what she must do. She gets up, takes the keys and goes out into the passageway:

> There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage.
> (Rhys, 1968, p.156).

The flame symbolises hate; it burns and shows Antoinette the way. It is left to Charlotte Bronte to continue the story. We know that Antoinette fails to kill Rochester but she succeeds in freeing herself from the death-like trance she has lived in for so long. As Antoinette leaves prison she croses over into "Jane Eyre" to act out her dream. She leaves the centre stage and exits into the shadows of the wings.

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CONCLUSION

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In "Wide Sargasso Sea", Jean Rhys succeeds in transforming the mosnter of "Jane Eyre" into a beautiful and tragic woman, who endures much suffering and rejection and whose actions are seen as a response to the injustice of male domination. Antoinette's struggle reflects Rhys' own confrontation with British imperialism: "Women's experience generates the style and context of their writing," (Spaull, 1989, p.86). Like other twentieth century women writers, Rhys was searching for the "lost voices" of women in history, literature and society. More liberated than their female counterparts in previous centuries, these feminist writers decide to take on the mantle of speaking up for the wronged women of earlier generations. Through literature they explore their lost history:

> Moreover, because of the subordinate
> place of women within the ruling classes
> and because sexual difference is constructed
> through the hierarchies of class, and race -
> vice versa - women's writing both articulates
> and challenges the dominant idoelogy from a
> decent position within it. Women's texts often
> move, through the rhetoric of radical individual-
> ism, towards a critique of both partriarchal and
> capitalist relationships.
> (Kaplan, Cora, 1986, p.3)

Rhys rescues Bertha from the narrative of "Jane Eyre" and also from the history of nineteenth century colonialism and dominance. She develops and strengthens her personality by retrieving her lost voice. "In 'Wide Sargasso Sea' that discourse is indeed a positive source of strength and solidarity", (Showalter, 1981, p.84)

Antoinette, according to Lorna Sage, in her book "Women in the House of Fiction," "becomes a voice from the other side, not only from the past, but all sorts of other sides." (Sage, 1992, p.47). She speaks for the

women of colonial society, the women who were dominated and destroyed, the women who were branded mad because of their refusal to conform, women of all races; and most important of all, Antoinette speaks for Bertha Mason. In Antoinette Rhys not only rescues Bertha, she rescues women from the discourse of patriarchy. Antoinette's voice is the lost voice of all women - victims of patriarchal society, history and literature.

"Wide Sargasso Sea" has a triumphant ending because Antoinette subverts the traditional victimisation of heroines and acts. She carries a conviction right to the end: to destroy Rochester and the values he represents. At the beginning of the novel, we see Antoinette as a victim of society: she is trapped into a loveless marriage with Rochester who imprisons her in his hate. But the irony here is that in her act of liberating herself she entraps Rochester. In "Jane Eyre" we learn that Rochester has been maimed and blinded in the fire at Thornfield Hall. Antoinette leads the colonist from superiority to dependency. The positions have been reversed and Jane Eyre reaps the benefit: Reader, *she* married him, courtesy of the first Mrs. Rochester.

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