



AKADEMIN FÖR UTBILDNING OCH EKONOMI  
Avdelningen för humaniora

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# Conflicts in a Marriage Antoinette and Mr. Rochester in Wide Sargasso Sea

Helena Ryan Sabri

February 2011

Essay, 15 P  
C-essay  
English Literature

Supervisor: Gabriella Åhmansson  
Examiner: Alan Shima

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## 1. Introduction

The basic focus of this essay is to study the marriage of Creole Antoinette and English Mr. Rochester in Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Issues regarding colonial power, oppression, subordination, madness and identity are present in this novel. As this novel can be seen as a feminist as well as postcolonial text the essay will make use of postcolonial feminist criticism.

In the marriage of Mr. Rochester and Antoinette, Mr. Rochester can be seen as an oppressor, as a husband who wants to dominate his wife. He treats Antoinette as a colonial object and muddles her identity. The marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester never experiences or even reaches a happy state. Coming from different cultures, both Mr. Rochester and Antoinette fail to understand each other and their relationship becomes dominated by Mr. Rochester. Their marriage shows how men display dominance and power to marginalize and oppress women. In this essay, I will discuss how Mr. Rochester with his patriarchal and colonial values treats Antoinette and becomes the cause of their troubled marriage.

My main question in this essay is how patriarchal power, colonial oppression are expressed in the novel specifically in the marriage of Mr. Rochester and Antoinette's marriage. Furthermore, I will show how postcolonial feminist criticism can be helpful in analyzing their marriage.

Jean Rhys has written many novels, *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, *Good Morning*, *Midnight* (1938), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Thomas Staley states that Rhys, in all of her novels has depicted women as the underdog where her heroines are victims in their relationships with men (Staley, 2-3). Born in the Caribbean islands in 1890 and descending from a slave holder father and a Creole mother, Rhys is marginalized as a woman and as a colonial subject. After reading *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* and gave a

postcolonial response to *Jane Eyre* (Staley, 2-4). Rhys initially called the novel *The First Mrs. Rochester* which she later changed to *Wide Sargasso Sea* (McLeod 166).

Rhys divides *Wide Sargasso Sea* into three parts. The first and second part take place in colonized British West Indies and the third part is set in England. The first part is narrated by Antoinette, who describes her childhood as being filled with racial conflicts in Jamaica. The second part is narrated by Antoinette and Mr. Rochester. It is in this part of the novel that Mr. Rochester and Antoinette's marriage takes place, and it is where both characters describe their feelings for each other. The third part is once again told mostly by Antoinette in England, where she is locked away in Mr. Rochester's attic. The novel ends in a dream where Antoinette jumps to face her death. Although Rhys never gives Mr. Rochester's figure a name, the reader familiar with *Jane Eyre* assumes that he is Bronte's Mr. Rochester. Rhys also changes Bertha's name, the female character in *Jane Eyre*, to Antoinette.

A number of literature studies have been generated by the various themes addressed in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Much of this previous research has been conducted within the field of postcolonialism, as well as some studies in the field of feminism. Both perspectives show how men and women are positioned in literature and society.

In *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial* theory by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iverson, the authors refer to the novel as one that almost always appears alongside *Jane Eyre*, as the postcolonial "vindication" shows the forms of the imperialist canon. Helen Tiffin refers to the text as a novel that maps out dominant discourse. She adds that the novel directly contests British sovereignty of person, place, language, and culture. The novel touches on the hybridity of the colonial subject, as it demonstrates the colonial subject's point of view (Barker, Hulme, Iverson,72).

Thomas Staley points out how the novel is discussed and criticized against the background of *Jane Eyre*'s Gothic mode, while other critics have discussed the novel concentrating on the background of the West Indies. Staley adds that the novel mainly

deals with the marriage of Creole Antoinette and English Mr. Rochester which ends with Antoinette burning down Thornfield. This act of revenge is perhaps what has made *Wide Sargasso Sea* initially so popular. Staley also believes that Antoinette's early life and marriage could lead the reader to see her as a passive victim and at the same see Mr. Rochester as a cruel person.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* deals with aspects of personality and human relationships. The novel examines the behavior of males and females, showing feelings and thoughts, in addition to exploring culture, race and nationality. Staley believes that the novel brings to the surface the relationship between Antoinette and Mr. Rochester by drawing the readers' attention to specific major thematic scenes. As readers, we become aware of the historical forces and events that surround Antoinette and Mr. Rochester. We are conscious of the violence, disruption and tragedy that mark Antoinette's life in colonized British Jamaica. Emancipation did not change the attitudes of the slaves or the English. In fact, it released a hatred among blacks and whites that had long been suppressed in colonialism (Staley, 17).

Sue Thomas comments upon Mr. Rochester's feelings and thoughts on the island. As soon as Mr. Rochester steps on the island, he perceives everyone as primitive, exotic and perverse. As for Antoinette, Mr. Rochester sees her as someone who embodies the wild and the alien which is different from him and it is something he is not used to. Mr. Rochester becomes threatened by everything that is not like him or like anything in England. *Wide Sargasso Sea* implies that there is separation and difference between Antoinette and Mr. Rochester. Both are separated by the Sargasso Sea, a barren sea that is covered with floating, entrapping seaweed, a place Rhys thought to be a coast where the wrecked marriage drifted. Furthermore, a place that becomes conceptualized by Mr. Rochester and Antoinette's troubled relationship where English xenophobia, class, racial, and sexual anxieties are parts of it (Thomas, 22).

Madness, specifically Antoinette's, has also been an area of interest of feminist critic Maria Olausson. Olausson points out that when choosing to write about the madness of

Bertha, “the monster” in *Jane Eyre*, Rhys did not want to describe Bertha’s madness independently. Rhys wanted to put her description of a “madwoman” into the context of literary tradition of a “madwoman” that Charlotte Bronte has created (Olaussen, 59).

Women and madness in literature has also been the study of feminist critics such as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. In their feminist reading of *Jane Eyre*, and in relation to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the authors state that nineteenth century literature presented women as victimized characters. Women are creatures and monsters if they “ [do not] behave like angels” (Gilbert & Gubar, 53). The authors also add that the manner in which women are perceived as mad is a social issue that historians have studied from a patriarchal point of view. Living under patriarchal socialization literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally. In Victorian times, people thought of madness as a “female disease”. Women became mad because of the deformity of their female organs. Gilbert and Gubar conclude that the female disease was not because women were “training in femininity” as it was thought; rather it is the results of such training (Gilbert & Gubar, 54).

Women and madness in the nineteenth century patriarchal society is also a subject that Phyllis Chesler has studied and investigated. In *Women and Madness* Chesler explains that in a patriarchal society, women are labeled “mad” if they deviate from conditioned female behavior. Chesler concludes that defining women as mad is caused by male domination in a patriarchal society (Chesler, 56).

As the purpose of this essay is to examine the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester, the essay will attempt to expose central theoretical concepts of postcolonial feminist theory, as well as indicate patriarchal tendencies and highlight events and scenes where Mr. Rochester exercises power and dominance in his marriage. In order to explain how concepts of postcolonial feminist theory are applied to the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester, the essay will focus mainly on Mr. Rochester’s action and behavior in certain scenes and events.

Using the method of close reading, I will discuss how concepts of postcolonial feminist theory can be applied to the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester. With the use of postcolonial feminist concepts, close reading can enhance the reader's understanding of this literary work and how it relates to specific matters and concepts (Barry, 208).

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Postcolonialism and feminism**

One of the central features of postcolonial theory is that it examines the impact and continuing legacy of the European conquest, colonization and domination of non-European people and cultures. It focuses on the power being used by the colonizers to dominate and control the colonized in occupied territories. Among other critical perspectives, postcolonial-theory is informed by feminist theory. Feminist theory deals with women's gender, rights, identity, oppression and their position in society (Culler, 126). One important aspect that feminist theorists look at when analyzing literature is how characters are presented in literary texts. They study how women and men are positioned in a male dominant patriarchal society. They also focus on the power imbalance between men and women where men are dominant and women are subordinates (McLeod, 25, 173).

Postcolonial and feminism theory is concerned with how women and men are presented in colonized territories and in western locations. Concerned with power, marginalization and women's oppression, McLeod explains that both feminism and postcolonialism "share the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression" (McLeod, 174). The postcolonial feminist perspective makes it possible and show how characters such as Antoinette and Mr. Rochester are positioned as a woman and a man in their marriage.

### **2.2 Concepts of colonization**

A central concept in postcolonial criticism is the concept of power and knowledge. John McLeod explains that the concept is developed from the work of Edward Said in his

critical books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Power and knowledge “explores the ways that *representation* and *modes of perception* are used as fundamental weapons of colonial power to keep colonised people subservient to colonial rule” (McLeod, 17).

Postcolonial feminist theory also categorizes the colonial subject as the colonial “other”. Colonial “other” is defined and characterized as primitive, savage, lazy, and uncultured whereas the colonizer is defined as powerful and refined, cultured and civilized. This categorization creates a separation between the colonized and the colonizer, the self and the other, the cultured and the uncultured (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 169).

One of the major key concepts in postcolonial feminist theory is the term patriarchy. The term refers to “those systems- political, material and imaginative- which invest power in men and marginalise women” (McLeod, 173). While the term can hold many forms, patriarchy is a social system in where the male is an authority in a social organization. In this system, the male in the domestic sphere can dominate women physically or psychologically. The patriarchal system isolates and subjugates women. Feminist critics use the term patriarchy when analyzing the principles underlying women’s oppression. McLeod explains that while patriarchy is connected with feminism and feministic thoughts, it refers to male power over women and how women are made to feel oppressed and subordinated (McLeod, 173). In other words, patriarchy is a structure that seeks to control and subjugate women where they are unable to make their own choices about economy, sexuality, mothering, or childbearing. Therefore it is a system of oppression aiming towards destroying women’s identity, abilities and her potentials. Patriarchal institutions perceive women as different from men and consequently women are worth less than men. In a patriarchal society, women are constantly given roles to serve the man. A woman is first and foremost a daughter, a wife and a mother who should only dedicate her existence to serve the men in her life.

Another concept that is discussed in postcolonial feminist theory is sisterhood. Traced back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, sisterhood is defined as the bond created when women



come together in a supported effort to claim their rights and reject male dominance and oppression. In sisterhood, women support each other to change their social and political weak position in society (Balsler, 7-12).

Women and madness in the nineteenth century is also a subject that is often discussed in postcolonial feminist theory. Women and madness are often related to how a woman should act, behave and fit into her role as an obedient wife. Society in the nineteenth century defined madness as deviating from the woman's typical stereotype role. During this time, many women who were labelled mad were often hospitalized or confined in asylums for various symptoms. These "symptoms" included: being stubborn, talented, wanting to follow dreams, showing anger, showing aggression, and hearing voices. Ostracized by society and their husbands, women with such symptoms often stopped eating, became uninterested in sexual activities and even committed suicide. Phyllis Chesler in *Women & Madness* explains that women shared common thoughts and ideas as to why they showed such symptoms. Women denied themselves what they really wanted to do and have in their lives. Chesler explains that living under the dominance of men, women were not encouraged to do what they were passionate about. Women were supposed to repress their talents and their dreams, "I'm twenty-one years old and I am supposed to be silent and grin like a puppet. I am no puppet. I am a human being with red blood and a woman with quivering heart" (Chesler, 7). Society conditioned women to need and obey their men.

Society in the nineteenth century also defined the healthy male and the healthy female differently. Healthy women were women who were submissive in their relationships with men. They were less adventurous, easily influenced, less aggressive. "It is clear that for a woman to be healthy she must "adjust" to and accept the behavioural norms for her sex even though these kinds of behaviour are generally regarded as less socially desirable" (Chesler, 69). Chesler adds that society encouraged men to show their masculinity and they were seen as rational and wise. At the same time women were not encouraged to be intellectual. Women were told to fit into their sex-stereotyped society. Women were not seen as people who were capable of doing things other than obeying

men, doing chores, and taking care of children. Young women were encouraged to marry strong powerful father figures and do their duties. In general, women should serve and act as daughters, mothers and wives and those who did not adhere to these roles were labelled and considered mad. Chesler argues that women were psychologically conditioned, and that this is a form of oppression that can be found in a patriarchal society (Chesler, 5, 56, 138).

One of the concepts that is much discussed in postcolonial feminist criticism is *double colonization*. The concept refers to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. It refers to the condition of women as being doubly oppressed by patriarchal ideology and imperialistic ideology “Colonialism can *add* other kinds of patriarchal systems to an already unequal situation” (McLeod, 177).

Postcolonial feminist studies have also brought up identity, especially in colonial and postcolonial studies. In analyzing the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester, it is important to find out how this marriage affects Antoinette’s identity. Jonathan Culler states that “what makes the problem of identity crucial and unavoidable are the tensions and conflicts it encapsulates” (Culler, 117). Culler further explains that a person’s identity is “culturally interrelated” (Culler, 116). A person’s identity is formed and comes into shape through what psychoanalysts call the “mirror stage” (Culler, 116). A person acquires his identity by how he or she is treated, by the names they are assigned or which are given to them and also by the way a person is positioned in society. The subject can feel divided and lost if messages that are given to him or her clash and contradict each other (Culler, 116,119). Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin state that in colonialism, the colonized subject is shaped through the system and the ideology that is put down by the ruling colonizing English class. The colonizer’s treatment of the colonized and his words and language become significant, shaping and forming the identity of the colonial subject (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 221).

### **2.3 The English middle class**

Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler explain the power of the English middle class. The middle class men were self-made men. These men became central figures in developing the industrial period of the nineteenth century in England. With their hard work, determination, competitive attitudes and thrift, they created an industrial society and with it, they acquired great fortune and power (Grossberg, Nelson, Treichler, 239-241).

Women, on the other hand, remained poor and they did not have as many rights as men. They did not have the right to own or keep assets or property. All their property and assets became the husband's after marriage. Victorian woman had to rely on their husbands and were not encouraged to work outside the home. Their main role was to be "relative creatures", serving primarily the man and the household (Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, Jane Rendell, 30)

Many of these ideas and beliefs were put in practice in colonized territories. While men ran factories and plantations, women were expected to be at home and obey their husbands. Steve Jackson and Jackie Jones also make note of how men used power in colonial territories. While women were expected to be faithful to their husbands in England and abroad, men used their power to be with other women. Victorian Englishmen acted on their sexual fantasies in a way that was not in accordance with established Victorian morals. Being positioned high on the hierarchal ladder; British men took advantage of their power and of their position to gratify themselves and had sexual relationships with natives of the colonized territories (Jackson & Jones, 100).

### **2.4 The turning point**

Before analyzing and discussing the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester it is important to focus on an incident that takes place early in the marriage. This incident will enlighten the reader to a major factor why Mr. Rochester is sure that his wife Antoinette is unfaithful to him, and why he now strongly believes that she is showing

signs of madness. Shortly after the marriage ceremony the couple decides to spend their honeymoon in the home of Antoinette's mother in Granbois. A few days after their arrival, Mr. Rochester receives letters from Daniel Cosway and at one point, the two meet. Daniel Cosway is Antoinette's half brother and one of Mr. Cosway's illegitimate children. In his letters and confrontation with Mr. Rochester, he explains that Antoinette is likely to inherit madness from her mother who is living in an asylum. Daniel Cosway also provides Mr. Rochester with information on Antoinette's sexual history. Cosway states that Antoinette is promiscuous and may be unfaithful to him. He also explains that Antoinette has an incestuous relationship with Sandy, her cousin, and that it is his moral obligation to relay this information to Mr. Rochester.

According to Thomas F. Staley, this meeting with Daniel Cosway is a turning point in the marriage of Mr. Rochester and Antoinette (Staley, 110). Rochester becomes convinced that all he has heard from Daniel is true, "everything I had imagined to be truth [is] false" (Rhys, 108). Mr. Rochester's relationship with Antoinette changes significantly. He now has good grounds for believing that that she is mad. The couple argues and starts avoiding each other by sleeping in different rooms. Mr. Rochester reflects: "I could not touch her" (Rhys, 107), and Mr. Rochester dismisses anything Antoinette has to say.

### **3. The marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester**

#### **3.1 Economic dominance**

April A. Gordon explains that men of the nineteenth century dominated women economically, and this was based on patriarchal ideology. Economic dominance has meant that men had power over women, and women were “subversive to patriarchy (Gordon, 31). In the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester, we can clearly see a play of economic power and dominance. In one scene, Antoinette runs to her long time friend and nurse Christophine for some advice on how to make Mr. Rochester pay attention to her and make him love her again. Christophine advises Antoinette to leave Mr. Rochester and start all over again, “You ask me a hard thing, I tell you a hard thing, pack up and go”(Rhys, 68). Antoinette understands that she is in a situation where she is economically powerless, “He will not come after me. And you must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him...that is the English law” (Rhys, 69). When Mr. Rochester comes to the island to marry Antoinette he is offered Antoinette’s dowry and her estate. According to English laws at the time, the husband becomes the rightful owner of any wealth or estate the wife might have had prior to their marriage (Savory, 142). Antoinette’s choices are limited. She is dependant on her husband and cannot leave him to make a better life for herself. Antoinette understands her limitations. She is not capable of just leaving a loveless marriage and starting over. She is economically powerless. Other male members in Antoinette life have economical dominance over her. Both Antoinette’s father and brother decide what to do with her dowry and her estate. While Mr. Rochester is powerful and economically stable, Antoinette, as the wife in this marriage, is oppressed because she is unable to make choices for herself or control what really belongs to her.

#### **3.2 Antoinette the mad woman**

Chesler maintains that in a patriarchal society, men assign features of madness to women when they do not act and behave according to “one’s sex-role stereotype” (Chesler, 57). When Mr. Rochester marries Antoinette, he “expects an English

Victorian woman” (Olaussen, 60). Mr. Rochester soon comes to the conclusion that Antoinette is not acting the way a lady should. Mr. Rochester reflects: “She is a Creole with strange behaviour” (Rhys, 42). In one incident when the two are discussing the letters of Daniel Cosway, Antoinette tries to defend her mother and attempts to explain Annette’s hardship, but Mr. Rochester refuses to listen or even believe her. Upset at Daniel Cosway’s accusation and Mr. Rochester not believing her, Antoinette becomes angry. She screams and lashes out and throws a wine bottle at Mr Rochester. “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 the candles flickering and this red-eyed wild-haired stranger who was my wife shouting obscenities at me” (Rhys, 95). Antoinette desperately tries to convince Mr. Rochester that Daniel Cosway’s accusations are lies and that her mother has suffered many years of oppression and exclusion. However, Mr. Rochester thinks that Antoinette is being irrational and interprets her irrationality and rage as madness, a madness that she has inherited from her mother. Chesler argues that in a patriarchal society, men define women’s verbal and physical attacks as a sure sign of madness. Women who show physical and verbal rage are “abandoned by men as “*crazy*”, as well as “*unfeminine*” (Chesler, 45).

One can argue that Antoinette’s rage is her own way of rejecting Mr. Rochester’s dominance and the many years of being colonized. Raging and screaming at Mr. Rochester is her own way of refusing and putting a stop to the many years of exclusion and dominance which she believes drove her mother to asylum. Anja Loomba explains that “within the frameworks of psychoanalytic discourse, anti-colonial resistance is coded as madness” (Loomba, 119). Antoinette knows well that if she does not defend herself she might end up lonely and miserable like her mother Annette. She understands that Mr. Rochester is trying to overpower and dominate her; she realizes that Mr. Rochester is trying to colonize her. Frantz Fanon argues that colonialism altered the psyche of the colonized, creating what she calls “psychic difference”. Antoinette is also aware that Mr. Rochester wants to change her, dominate her, and make her act and behave as a Victorian lady who stays at home and obeys only him. As a colonizer, Mr. Rochester wants to change Antoinette. Loomba makes it clear that this has been one of

the aims of colonization. Colonialism has changed the mentality of the colonized and altered their mind which led to signs of madness, “colonialism ...dislocated and distorted the psyche of the oppressed” (Loomba, 123).

One can also argue that it is the different world that the colonizers meet in colonized territories that can add to misunderstanding between the colonizer and the colonized. When Mr. Rochester comes to the island; he sees that everything is different from his English world. With everything being different, he realizes that he does not understand his new surrounding. Mr. Rochester does not feel that he is in control in Jamaica or has been in control of his marriage. “Everything is too much. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, and the mountain too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger” (Rhys, 42). Savory states that Mr. Rochester hates and despises nature because it represents and signifies his Antoinette and his failure to control her (Savory, 144). In one incident when Antoinette slips Obeah in his drink, it makes him sick for a few days. He realizes that Antoinette, as one who is more familiar with the island, might have more power than him and thus threaten his position in their relationship. “I feel very much a stranger here...I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side”. Mr. Rochester understands that Antoinette’s capability of using Obeah is a power that she has, and it is something that he will never be able to control or even master.

### **3.3 Moral madness**

Olaussen argues that Antoinette’s hunger for sex, showing sexual emotions, and craving sex also becomes a crucial point in labelling Antoinette morally mad (Olaussen 60). According to Mr. Rochester, Antoinette does not act and behave anything like an English lady when it comes to her sexuality “She’ll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would – or could” (Rhys, 106).

Furthermore, Daniel Cosway’s accusation of Antoinette’s promiscuity becomes a reason to label Antoinette morally mad. Mr. Rochester now believes that Antoinette is not faithful to him. “Do you think that I don’t know? She thirsts for *anyone* – not for me

...” (Rhys, 106). Here again Mr. Rochester feels that he is not in control of Antoinette’s behaviour. While he can control his feelings as he learns to suppress them, he feels that he can not control Antoinette’s sexual feelings or Antoinette’s sexual promiscuity. Angry that Antoinette has sexual relations with Sandy and not being able to control her, Mr. Rochester ignores Antoinette and spends a night with Amelie, one of the living in housemaid.

Ironically, while Mr. Rochester is disgusted by Antoinette’s free sexuality and promiscuity “disgust was rising in me like sickness” (Rhys, 80), he gives himself the right to commit adultery by sleeping with someone other than his wife. Mr. Rochester expects Antoinette to uphold Victorian values while he does not. As a man in a patriarchal institution, he gives himself the right to be adulterous and attend to his sexual needs while he refuses the same right for women. One can see that Mr. Rochester exercises his colonial power and native Amelie for his sexual needs, knowing well that his act can hurt Antoinette. Mr. Rochester shows no regrets or remorse for his action, “I had not one moment of remorse. Nor was I anxious to know what was happening behind the thin partition which divided us from my wife’s bedroom” (Rhys, 89). Jackson and Jones argue that having sexual encounters with natives is also a way that colonizers show power and the authority of the patriarchy (Jackson & Jones, 100-106).

### **3.4 Destroying sisterhood**

Feminist critics Carole Ruth McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim state that sisterhood is a challenge against patriarchal oppression. Men do not understand sisterhood. Sisterhood threatens men and their position in a patriarchal society. “Women are not hierarchical but egalitarian...Men want to dominate and separate; women want to communicate and connect” (McCann, Kim, 434).

Sisterhood is present in this novel, especially in Antoinette and Christophine’s relationship. Christophine is one of Antoinette’s house servants that she has had since she was a young girl. Christophine is the only friend that Antoinette can turn to. Attempting to make Mr. Rochester pay attention to her, Antoinette visits Christophine



to get a “love potion”. Antoinette slips the potion into Mr. Rochester’s wine which makes him restless and sleepy. “I woke up in the dark after dreaming that I was buried alive, and when I awoke, the feelings of suffocation persisted” (Rhys, 87). The potion makes Mr. Rochester lose his sense of time and place. Mr. Rochester later realizes that it is the combination of Antoinette and Christophine and the alliance they have that makes him lose control. Castle states that Christophine destabilizes Rochester’s power and empowers herself by using Obeah, which also invalidates his power over Antoinette (Castle, 321). Subsequently, he believes that the sisterhood of Antoinette and Christophine can affect his position as a dominant figure in his marriage. Mr. Rochester tries to break up this sisterhood. In one scene, he tries to convince Antoinette that Christophine is nothing but trouble. “Christophine is an evil woman and you know it as well as I do,...She won’t stay here very much longer” (Rhys, 94). To break up the bond that Antoinette and Christophine have, Mr. Rochester threatens to call the police to remove Christophine from the island.

### **3.5 Antoinette, the colonial “other”**

Benita Parry states that in colonialism there was a process of constructing English cultural identity. This process was where the natives and the colonized were seen as “other” and the English as masters (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 45, 46). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Mr. Rochester defines Antoinette as a colonial other. He sees her as one who is uncultured, narrow-minded, and uneducated. In one scene when the couple discusses his beloved home land England, Mr. Rochester notices that Antoinette is not able to describe England or give any true facts of England. Mr. Rochester reflects: “She was undecided, uncertain about facts – any fact.....hardly able to believe she was the pale silent creature I had married” (Rhys, 54).

Mr. Rochester becomes irritated and angry when Antoinette speaks of England as a land of gloom and coldness. He replies by saying that her island is gloomy and dark. Mr. Rochester becomes irritated by her replies and questions how she can be ignorant of England. Mr. Rochester comes to the conclusion that Antoinette is uncultured and unrefined. English people perceived themselves as powerful, cultured and morally

righteous. At the time and especially during in colonialism, English people believed that those who were not born in England could not possibly be civilized or cultured (Grossberg, Nelson, Treichler, 241). English men took pride in their country. How could Antoinette not know about Mr. Rochester's powerful, civilized country? To Mr. Rochester, Antoinette is a mere Creole. This episode shows that Rochester views Antoinette as one who knows very little about the English culture, or any other culture. Mr. Rochester realizes also that Antoinette does not know much about her own Island. She is unaware if the island's snakes are poisonous or not. Her limited knowledge of the world and even her own world irritates Mr. Rochester, and he understands now that there is a wide gap between them. Mr. Rochester categorizes her as a colonial subject, as "other".

Some critics argue that Mr. Rochester tries to educate Antoinette, but that she refuses to be cultivated. Savory states that refusing to be cultivated meant that one was destined to live in isolation (Savory, 151). Realizing that Antoinette can not be cultivated, Mr. Rochester seeks to keep her isolated. "She is one of them. I too can wait – for the day when she is only a memory to be voided, locked away" (Rhys, 112). In *Jane Eyre*, we see that Mr. Rochester does keep her away by locking her up in his English mansion. While this is not the only reason why he separates her from society, it is what he chooses to do to control her and manage her madness. Olinder comments that many Europeans thought that putting away mad people is a civilized way of controlling and dealing with the Caribbean people who showed signs of madness (Olinder, 156).

Furthermore, Mr. Rochester does not only see Antoinette as an uncultured other, he also views her as an immoral other. In the scene where Antoinette uses Obeah on him, he believes that a moral English person like him would not know anything about Obeah. It is only the other like Antoinette who has such knowledge. Mr. Rochester realizes that Obeah can only belong to those who belong to the island, the other. Antoinette's familiarity with Obeah and her ability of acquiring and using it categorizes her as an immoral other.

### **3.6 Double colonizer, oppressor**

Mr. Rochester plays the part of the double colonizer. As we have seen with the use of postcolonial feminist perspective, Mr. Rochester tries to be in control and oppress Antoinette. It is apparent that Mr. Rochester's dominance and power comes from patriarchal and colonial ideology, thus making him a double colonizer. Mr. Rochester has control of Antoinette's assets, oppresses her by changing her identity, and labels her mad. In terms of her racial background, he perceives her as "part of the island" (Olaussen 110) as a colonial other. Mr. Rochester perceives Antoinette as Creole, not English (Rhys, 40). He sees Antoinette as one who has different values and behavior which are nothing like his morals and principles. Furthermore, Antoinette is not seen as cultured and civilized. Thus we can say that Antoinette, as McLeod implies is living under the negative effects of both patriarchy and colonialism" (McLeod, 175).

### **3.7 Antoinette's sense of identity**

McLeod states that "names are often central to our sense of identity" (McLeod, 167). Throughout the novel, we can see Antoinette becoming more and more muddled about her identity. Lacan in *Post – Colonial Studies* states that identity is formed in relationships. Identity is formed by the way we speak to each other and by the way we treat each other. Lacan adds that it is usually how we use language and the words or statements we say to others that can destroy or affirm one's identity (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 170). Throughout the marriage, Mr. Rochester and Antoinette fail to understand each others' culture and behaviour. Lack of understanding leads the couple to a loveless marriage where both try to hurt each other by attacking the other verbally and at times physically. Mr. Rochester calls Antoinette by other names even though she makes it clear that she wants to be called by her real name, "not Bertha" (Rhys, 119). Olaussen argues that calling and referring to Antoinette as "Vain, silly creature", "marionette, "doll" "Bertha" (Rhys, 107) is a form of patriarchal oppression (Olaussen, 110). Calvo and Weber argue that when Mr. Rochester calls Antoinette by other names, he is really imposing an alien pattern upon her true self (Calvo & Weber, 122). By not calling her

by her real name and not showing love and affection in words, Mr. Rochester muddles Antoinette's identity.

Mr. Rochester often reflects that Antoinette is nothing like him, and he really sees nothing that he loves about her. In one incident when the two argue about Mr. Rochester spending the night with Amelie, Antoinette questions Mr. Rochester's love. "Don't you love me at all?" she asks. Mr. Rochester replies firmly, "No, I do not" (Rhys, 95). Words like these do not allow Antoinette to feel loved or have a sense of belonging in her marriage. Such statements however affect her self-esteem and self-image. By the end of the novel, we can see Antoinette's state of mind. She understands that her marriage has not been a healthy union. The marriage does not affirm her self worth and her self being, nor has it nurtured or strengthened her identity. "Names matter [and]...There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me" (Rhys, 117). It is here in Mr. Rochester's attic that Antoinette reflects on her life and understands how her marriage could have been different if Mr. Rochester loved her or spoke kind words to her. Not being called by her real name or hearing a positive statement affects her identity as well as her mental state. "What am I doing in this place and who am I?" (Rhys, 117).

## Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to analyze Mr. Rochester and Antoinette's marriage in Jane Rhys's postcolonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Approaching the essay from postcolonial feminist theory and using close reading, the main focus has been to show how postcolonial feminist criticism can be useful in analyzing the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester.

Looking at this marriage from a feminist point of view, one can see that there is an economic dominance in their relationship. This economic dominance leaves Antoinette powerless and dependant on her husband; thus limiting her choices in life.

Madness and how it has been defined in a patriarchal society has also been present in the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester. When Antoinette and Mr. Rochester discuss Daniel Cosway's accusations Antoinette becomes very angry. Mr. Rochester interprets rage and anger as a madness that is inherited from Annette, Antoinette's mother. Mr. Rochester also labels Antoinette morally mad. Here again, Daniel Cosway's accusations of Antoinette's promiscuity, her hunger for sex and her sexual behaviour in the bedroom allows Mr. Rochester to think of her as a mad woman.

The marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester also results in a broken sisterhood. Christophine who helps defend Antoinette becomes a threat to Mr. Rochester's position in the marriage. When Mr. Rochester realizes that Christophine and Antoinette's alliance can limit his own power, he breaks the bond by forbidding Antoinette from socializing with Antoinette, and he threatens Christophine to be removed by police from the island.

Mr. Rochester verbally tries to diminish Antoinette's identity by calling her different names. Mr. Rochester also describes her as a just a Creole who belongs to the island and is a part of it. The marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester illustrates claims of postcolonial feminist criticism. For Mr. Rochester, as a European colonizer, everything

related to Antoinette and her Creole culture appears to be connected to the colonial “other”, and she is subordinated to the dominant culture of Mr. Rochester.

Throughout the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester, Mr. Rochester calls Antoinette names and words, showing her that he does not love her as a Victorian lady. Feeling unloved Antoinette ends up in a state where she does not recognize herself. Mr Rochester destroys her image and self-worth.

To conclude, looking at the marriage of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester through postcolonial feminist theory it is easy to explain why the marriage fails. In this marriage Mr. Rochester is a male dominant who tries to preserve his power which leaves Antoinette marginalized, oppressed and diminished.

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