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“Wide Sargasso Sea: A Postcolonial Rewriting of Jane Eyre”

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Wide Sargasso Sea: A Postcolonial Rewriting of
Jane Eyre

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Resumen
En su novela Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys presenta una re-escritura postcolonial de Jane Eyre, de Charlotte Brontë. Este proyecto pretende esclarecer cómo Wide Sargasso Sea da voz a la “otra” oriental, siempre silenciada, y deconstruye la narrativa europea. Para ello, desde una perspectiva feminista y postcolonial, examinaremos los personajes de Antoinette, la colonizada, y Mr. Rochester, el colonizador. Finalmente, analizaremos la locura de Antoinette, la Otra, como resultado del desencuentro entre colonizada y colonizador.

Palabras clave: Wide Sargasso Sea, Antoinette, Mr. Rochester, locura, feminismo postcolonial, colonizada, colonizador.

Summary
In her novel Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys proffers a postcolonial rewriting of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre. This paper attempts to clarify how Wide Sargasso Sea gives voice to the oriental “Other”, permanently silenced, and deconstructs the European discourse. From a feminist postcolonial perspective, we will try to examine the figures of Antoinette, the colonised, and Mr. Rochester, the coloniser. Ultimately, we will analyse the madness of Antoinette, the Female Other, due to the discord between colonised and coloniser.

Keywords: Wide Sargasso Sea, Antoinette, Mr. Rochester, madness, postcolonial feminism, colonised, coloniser.
1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing production of new texts and the questioning of the literary canon characterise postcolonial literature. Nowadays, reading practices invite us to reread classical texts under the scope of their “true cultural implications” and their Western perspective. Some authors adventured to go beyond and decided to rewrite Western discourse canonical texts, which is a process that tells a story from a different viewpoint and explores the silences and gaps in a narrative (Ashcroft et al., 1999: 2006).

When we reflect on major texts in the history of 19th-century English literature, one of the first authors that come to our mind is Charlotte Brontë and her novel Jane Eyre (1847), where the character of Bertha Mason is described as savage, dark and mad. Indeed, Jane Eyre succeeds in marrying Rochester thanks to Bertha’s immolation in Thornfield Hall. However, it was not until more than a century later that Jean Rhys reconsiders and subverts Brontë’s depiction of the insane Bertha and gives her a better life in Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), Jane Eyre’s literary daughter.

In her text, Rhys focuses on “the other side” and reinvents an identity for Rochester’s insane wife. The author pays attention to a long-time ignored cultural and historical background and raises the issues of racial conflict, colonisation and gender relations. She defends the role of racialised women and links the politics of colonialism and imperialism to the politics of gender to provide Bertha Mason, Antoinette, in her novel, with a voice and a story for the first time. We intend to study those connections through the lens of postcolonial feminism. Therefore, the purpose of our study is to try to reveal how Rhys re-writes a canonical text and distorts the subaltern/ruler relationship in the figures of Antoinette and Rochester.

To achieve our goal, we have consulted diverse bibliographic sources¹, written from a postcolonial perspective, and we have divided our project into two parts. In the

¹ We have used books and numerous subject-specific academic articles. We have organised these sources thanks to the online database Notion, a very useful and innovative tool that has allowed us to classify the relevant information concerning each source and the research topics that have helped us build our analysis.
first one, we will analyse the formation of the “Other” in the Occidental mindset and the colonial desire towards native women through the works of Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Robert Young, Homi Bhabha, Sara Suleri, Anne McClintock and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. We will discuss the implications of the terms “Orientalism”, “colonial desire”, “otherness”, “postcolonialism”, and “postcolonial feminism”, all of these concepts being connected to the perception of sexuality in the 19th century and the colonies.

In the second, we will elaborate on a corpus divided into three subsections to show how Antoinette and Mr. Rochester struggle and oscillate between the colonised/victim and coloniser/villain categories. In a society transitioning from a slavery economy to a plantation economy, we will examine Antoinette’s position as a colonial and Creole subject due to her hybridity, in-betweenness and abjection. Then, we will concentrate on Rhys’ deconstruction of the European discourse and Mr. Rochester’s sexual desire as a coloniser in a patriarchal and imperial system. Being drawn to Antoinette’s sensuality and beauty, we will also see how he exerts his domination over her. Once this idea is established, we will go into depth in the female colonial Other madness, caused by Antoinette’s hybrid identity and her precarious sense of belonging.
2. THE FORMATION OF THE “OTHER”

For an accurate insight into our research project, it is imperative to shed light on the contextual elements that enabled Jean Rhys to write *Wide Sargasso Sea* and opened the door to subsequent criticism. To begin with, in his major work *Orientalism* (1978), critic Edward Said examines the power relationship between the West and the East based on the supposed inferiority ascribed to them by the Western world. This inferiority belongs to a biased discursive construction created by the Occident. The term “Orientalism” dates from the 12th century, when the Christian Occident Vienne Concile (1312) established a set of academic teachings. It is a study field based on the Orient, examined as a geographical, cultural, linguistic and ethnic unit and represented in a stereotypical way (2002: 81). At the same time, Orientalism constitutes an ensemble of repressions and mental limitations, whose essence is the distinction between alleged European superiority and Oriental inferiority (2002: 71).

The popularity of Orientalism coincides with the European colonisation. Europe acquired knowledge about the Orient, reinforced by colonial expansion and interest in the exotic. The most prominent colonisers were France and Great Britain (1815-1914), and the most affected continents were Africa and Asia (Said, 2002: 70). From the European perspective, colonised people are dominated by another race that knows what is convenient for them. This is a token of paternalism because, from the European viewpoint, subdued races did not know what was good for them. Orientalism and imperialism are strongly interrelated. Not only has the powerful Empire “liberated” the colonised from the decline, misery and poverty, but it has also transformed the colonies into a production mechanism (Said, 2002: 62).

In the 19th century, the dichotomy between Occident and Orient is highly defined. The Occident exerts a complete and uninterrupted guardianship over Oriental countries. The former dominates; the latter are dominated and regarded just as a human resource that needs to be governed. Their territory is occupied, their inner matters are strictly controlled, and their blood and wealth depend upon occidental power (Said, 2002: 63). On this matter, Said asserts that Orientalism is a political vision of reality that distinguishes between the familiar and strong (Europe, Occident, “us”) and the strange and weak (Orient, East, “them”) (2002: 73). For this reason, the oriental is represented by dominant structures. He is judged, studied, examined, illustrated and
educated through the “Civilising Mission”. The Christian missionary work is one of the Empire’s justifications (2002: 69).

Occidental Orientalism determines the knowledge about oriental people and their traditions, society, possibilities, history and culture. The European knowledge about Orient creates Orient itself. In many texts, oriental people are described as credulous, savage and prone to animal cruelty and trickery, as opposed to the Europeans, who are noble, civilised, charitable and educated. In this binary opposition, the oriental is irrational, depraved, childish and different, whereas the European is rational, virtuous, mature and normal. The oriental person acts, speaks and thinks contrary to Europeans (Said, 2002: 66).

Said also states that 19th-century Europeans believed that Orient offended sexual decorum, exuded sexual danger and menaced hygiene due to excessive freedom for sexual contact (2002: 230). In this regard, it is essential to examine the perception of sexuality. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality. Vol. I* (1976 [1978]) argues that, in the 18th century, there began a quite large discourse on sexuality: “here emerged a political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex” (1978: 23). This “veritable discursive explosion” in the discussion of sex continued in the 19th century and was often produced as a means to contain and control sexuality. To this end, an apparatus of social, medical, and legal enforcement functioned to create a set of morals. Thus, Foucault confirms The Repressive Hypothesis, whereby it was thought that Victorian society was sexually repressed.

In Foucault’s words, “sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home” (1978: 3). When it comes to sex, silence was the general rule. The family is self-contained and at the centre of laws, given that reproduction is the woman’s primary role in life. It was unusual for women to enjoy sex because sexual appetite was thought to jeopardise women. This repression coincides with the development of capitalism, which sexually suppressed the masses for its purposes and with exploitative goals. According to Foucault, sex is strictly restrained because it is incompatible with a work imperative (1978: 6).

As for the treatment of sexuality in the colonies, Robert Young in *Colonial Desire* (1995 [2005]) claims that many novelists focus on “the crossing and invasion of

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2 For further insight on The Repressive Hypothesis, see *History of Sexuality. Vol. I. An Introduction*, Chapter Two.
identities”. Among them, Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* (1847) examines culture, race, class and gender. Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966 [1982]) responds to this canonical text by exposing the interrelation between English and Caribbean culture. On this point, Young explains:

> Many novels of the past have also projected such uncertainty and difference outwards, and are concerned with meeting and incorporating the culture of the other, whether of class, ethnicity or sexuality; they often fantasise crossing into it [...] This transmigration is the form taken by colonial desire, whose attractions and fantasies were no doubt complicit with colonialism itself. The many colonial novels in English betray themselves as driven by desire for the cultural other, for forsaking their own culture. (2005: 2-3)

Furthermore, capitalism has contributed to a great extent to the disruption of the colonised people and their culture thanks to the globalisation of the imperial capitalist power. Racial tensions and anxiety about racial differences increased as a consequence of colonialism. On this subject, postcolonial criticism examines two antithetic groups: the Self/coloniser and the Other/colonised. The colonial desire stems from the cross-cultural contact, which results in an active sexual desire for the Other that leads to perversion and degeneration (Young, 2005: 4-5).

Theories of race were also theories of desire. They operate in an ambivalent movement of attraction and repulsion because racism and culture were closely linked in the 19th-century West. Colonialism was a machine of administration and war, but, above all, it was a desiring machine characterised by its infinite appetite for territorial expansion and reproduction (Young, 2005: 93). Young also maintains that “the controlling power relation between slave-owner and slave was eroticised”. Thanks to race, colonialism was represented and justified in the 19th century (2005: 142).

In the case of the Caribbean and the Americas, white male colonisers refused to marry white women, being sexually attracted to black women, who were considered just mere sexual objects. Yet, paradoxically, black women also regarded themselves as sexually unattractive owing to their victimisation. The white man’s ambivalent repugnance and desire resulted in mixed-race populations through inter-racial sex (Young, 2005: 142).

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3 We will use the abbreviation WSS to talk about Rhys’ book, according to the edition referenced in the Works Cited List [W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1982].
When discussing the crossing of black and white people, Young uses the word “hybridity”, which in the 19th century referred to a psychological phenomenon. As Young puts it, “the use of the term ‘hybridity’ to describe the offspring of humans of different races implied, by contrast, that the different races were different species” (2005: 9).

“Hybridity” was a term first coined by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* to refer to hybrid people who are “white, but not quite”. Bhabha suggests that hybridity lies in elements that are neither the One, nor the Other, but something else. The articulation of the difference is placed on the Other, which is devoid of its power to reproduce a relation of domination and an oppositional discourse (1994: 31).

Related to the construction of difference, Bhabha raises the issue of “in-betweenness” by examining the following binary oppositions, among others: past/present, public/private, pleasure/unpleasure and absence/presence. Hybridity and miscegenation occur in these “in-between” spaces, provided there is no pure alterity. Racial mixing and miscegenation are signifiers of colonial difference in the West Indian context (1994: 31).

As an example of “in-betweenness”, a significant fact that contributed to the contradictions of identity was the upbringing of white children, raised by black maids and nurses, as shown in the relationship between Antoinette and Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. For critic Anne McClintock, these children “receive the memory of black women’s power as an ambiguous heritage”. Nevertheless, when they grow up, they are forced to detach themselves from the identification with black women who helped construct their identity (1995: 270).

Going further, the ambivalence to which Bhabha refers is the main problem of the cultural difference. It is “the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy, which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation” (1994: 34). For Bhabha, the 19th-century polarity of Occident and Orient gives way to the “exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other”. Cultures do not constitute a single unit, nor are they dualistic in the relationship between the Self and the Other (1994: 19).

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4 *The Location of Culture* (1994) is one of the major works of postcolonial criticism. It examines the Occident from a postcolonial perspective and analyses questions of identity, culture, race and nationalism.

5 *Miscegenation* is a marriage, cohabitation or sexual intercourse between a white person and a member of another race (cf. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).
Ambivalence provides the colonial stereotype with its force, for it is one of the most remarkable strategies of discriminatory power. The otherness is ambivalent because it is the object of desire and mockery and the expression of racial and sexual differences. On the one hand, the colonial body belongs to the domain of desire and pleasure, but, on the other, it is inscribed in the imperialist discourse of power and domination that aims at degenerating the colonised (Bhabha, 1994: 67).

The discourse of “mimicry” is built around this ambivalence. Bhabha uses this term to refer to the desire for the Other “as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite”. Mimicry was a process of “white” imitation through which Creoles emulated the behaviour of Europeans. They wanted to become white and Europeans, although it was not possible, as they were not completely white. Through “mimicry”, the colonised disguises as the planter to dismantle the untruth in the belief that the colonisers are pure and without miscegenation. To this point, Bhabha affirms:

It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilising mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial presence’. (1994: 86)

Similarly, Bhabha locates the question of culture in “the beyond” domain, which pushes the boundaries to mark progress, spatial distance and the future. He raises the issues of postmodernity, postcolonialism and postfeminism to imply that these concepts go beyond and try to revise and critique the past conventions of society (1994: 4). For example, postcolonialism acknowledges the evolution of resistance strategies and the development of histories of exploitation and domination. It also questions colonial supremacy by focusing on the desire for the Other and examining knowledge and power relations to “disrupt, disassemble or deconstruct the kind of logic, ideologies of the West” (Ashcroft, 1995 [2003]: 27)6.

If we focus on postcolonial feminism, this movement draws attention to the dissident voices and stories of the colonised women, the marginalised Other (Bhabha, 1994: 6). Sara Suleri, in her essay “Woman Skin Deep. Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition” (1992), defends that the postcolonial woman embodies the connections between racial oppression and gender. For her, postcolonialism no longer refers to the

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6 We will use the 2003 edition, as referenced in the Works Cited List.
proliferation of discourse produced by foregoing colonisation in distinct parts of the world. Instead, the term is “an abstraction available for figurative deployment in any strategic redefinition of marginality” (1992: 756). Postcolonialism, Suleri suggests, is at the same time a metaphor for cultural reinforcement and an old designation for the historicity of race.

In addition, postcolonial feminism reverts and condemns the colonial desire already examined by Young. Instead, it highlights the desire for the Female Other and denounces the appropriation by the colonial discourse of the sexual excess through which the female aboriginal is constructed. Accordingly, race is an instrument used to rewrite otherness into the mysterious shape of the exotic body (Suleri, 1992: 760).

Suleri believes that, from a contemporary perspective, feminism fails to confer comfortable selfhood to the postcolonial Woman, which represents the postcolonial cultural location and the African-American perspective. In Suleri’s words, the combination of the concepts “woman” and “postcolonial” is used as a means of “elevating the racially female voice into a metaphor for ‘the good’”. This is an obstacle to an interpretation that aims at overreaching the fundamental questions of good and evil (Suleri, 1992: 756).

On a deeper level, postcolonial feminism debates whether the racial body is an object or subject of study. While Western feminists have always been the subjects, as in plenty of criticism concerning Jane Eyre, Third World Women are relegated to the “object” status. Therefore, postcolonial feminism struggles even nowadays to depict the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘race’, both understood as interchangeable metaphors for oppression (Suleri, 1992: 759). As Suleri says:

The claim to authenticity - only a black can speak for a black; only a postcolonial subcontinental feminist can adequately represent the lived experience of that culture - points to the great difficulty posited by the ‘authenticity’ of female racial voices in the great game that claims to be the first narrative of what the ethnically constructed woman is deemed to want. (1992: 758)

Equally, critic Anne McClintock sustains that women are identified with the realm of the “Other”. They represent distance and difference, and the imperial discourse illustrates them as riddles or enigmas. Under the eyes of imperialism, women are an uncharted territory. Through the construction of women as riddles, privileged European male colonisers solve the riddle according to their own interests (1995: 193-194).
The 19th-century fetishism towards women’s bodies marked the difference between “normal” and “dirty” sexuality through the iconography of dirt. Racial and colonised people were assumed to be dangerous and sexual deviants (McClintock, 1995: 154). In other words, colonised women are objectified and restrained. Sexuality and “the order of the body” were organised around the imperial discourse on racial fetishism, which was fundamental in the sexual vigilance in the colonies. Consequently, the Female Other is a psychotic, often granted the condition of the wild-haired madwoman, as it happens with Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (McClintock, 1995: 182).

As for the relationship between women and imperialism, let us ultimately focus on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the staples of imperialist criticism along with Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. For her, the emergent perspective of feminist criticism copies the principles of imperialism. An isolationist admiration for the literature of women in Europe and Anglo-America consolidates the “high feminist norm”, which is enhanced at the same time by a restorative approach to “Third World” literature. Therefore, the hegemonic definition of literature is contained within the history of imperialism (1985: 243).

Spivak announces that the making of human beings, which consists of childbearing and soul-making, is at risk under the eyes of imperialism. She also introduces the idea that 19th-century feminist individualism could be envisioned as the soul-making, “the imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social-mission” that transcends sexual reproduction. According to her, the native female subject is excluded from any participation, regarded as the object of the “terrorism” of the categorical imperative, that is, the universal moral law given by pure reason (1985: 244).

Considering all the preceding elements, within postcolonial literature, *Wide Sargasso Sea* emerges as a response to *Jane Eyre* and “subverts the imperial privilege of the ‘centre’ in order to give voice to that ‘periphery’ which has been silent”, that is, to the Creole and the West Indies. There is always the other side of the story, told from the perspective of the disparaged, ignored and usurped native cultures, embodied in the character of Antoinette (Ashcroft, 2003: 43).
3. COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM

Being a Creole from the former British colony of Dominica who lived as an outcast in England, writer Jean Rhys sees herself in Antoinette, portraying the story where she faces the truth about her own life: sometimes, she was crazy, and the only way to escape madness was death. *Wide Sargasso Sea* tells the story of how Antoinette, a young white girl from the West Indies, is cast away from home, falls in love with a man who hates her and desires her, becomes insane and dies in England. Rhys writes about and from “the other side” and explores how Mr. Rochester, the coloniser, is not just a villain and Antoinette, the colonised, is not a mere victim (Angier, 1985 [1991]: 106-108).7

3.1. The colonised: Antoinette’s hybridity, in-betweenness and abjection

It is undeniable that Bertha Mason is one of the most significant characters in English fiction. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is the Jamaican madwoman locked up in the attic of Thornfield owing to her violent insanity. She catalyses Brontë’s anxieties about oppression, embodies all the dangers in the book and is described as “the heiress to a West Indian fortune and the daughter of a father who is a West Indian planter” (Meyer 1990: 252).

Conversely, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys proffers a postcolonial re-reading and reworking to shed light on the significance of being a female Creole and “to respond critically to the culture of empire in order to subvert it from within” (Hope 2012: 67). Rhys also introduces the questions about sexuality and empire and gives Bertha a story and a voice, renaming her Antoinette (Ho, 2019: 30). Even more, she untangles the mad and alien Creole of *Jane Eyre* from the stereotyped construction to contest and challenge the European hegemonic and colonial literary canon. To do so, she not only adopts Antoinette’s viewpoint, reversing the perspective of the white English in *Jane Eyre*, but she also offers multiple narratives that provide the reader with two versions of the story through the voices of Antoinette, Rochester and Grace Poole, whose words introduce Antoinette’s disintegrating narration (Cappello, 2009: 49).

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7 We will use the 1991 edition, as referenced in the Works Cited List.
Coulibri has an important imperial and postcolonial history because it hosts a mixture of communities of people and languages. Although *Jane Eyre* is set in the early 19th century, Rhys arranges her story in the mid-19th century to underline the interracial discord and relationships that strongly influence the protagonist (Harvey, 2019: 6). The society in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is in a state of financial and social decay stemming from the end of slavery. According to McClintock, the novel portrays the traumatic transition from an imperial slave society to a capitalist society founded on waged labour through creolisation. Due to this, white colonisers and plantation owners were forced to employ former slaves because they were afraid of losing power and property through intermarriage (1995: 112-113).

Likewise, Caribbean critic Edward Kamau Brathwaite outlines that the cultural interaction between white and black individuals is key in the development of Jamaican society. After the Slave Emancipation Act, this cross-cultural process of creolisation and co-habitation occurred within a tropical colonial plantation and referred to both white and black people born in the West Indies, as it is the case of Antoinette, who shoulders the cultural baggage from the creolisation (2005: 296-297):

> Creole describes a situation where the society concerned is caught up ‘in some kind of colonial arrangement’ with a metropolitan European power, on the one hand, and a plantation arrangement on the other; and where the society is multiracial, but organised for the benefit of a minority of European origin. (Brathwaite, 1971: xv)

That being said, critic Laura E. Ciolkowski determines that Rhys examines the construction of the difference based on the following set of oppositions, which contributed to the creation of the British identity: man/woman, English/white Creole/ex-elite, oppressor/oppressed, coloniser/colonised and rational/emotional (1997: 343-344). She explains that being a Creole, Antoinette’s perspective is split into British colonial history and the cultural residues of a decadent West Indian plantation society in which white colonisers were always at risk of being murdered (1997: 340). In fact, Antoinette’s cultural upbringing is essential: she pertains to the creolised white

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8 The Caribbean is populated by different people, who came from two main continents, that is, Europe and Africa. Historically, Africans and Europeans entered into a pattern of forced association that encouraged cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions. Subsequent to such rich interracial, cultural and linguistic encounters is the birth of new forms of identity, like, the hybrid, mongrel identity of the white Creole. (Mzoughi, 2016: 93)

9 The Slave Emancipation Act or Slavery Abolition Act (1833) abolished slavery in most British colonies, freeing more than 800,000 enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and South Africa as well as a small number in Canada.
community, a minority disregarded by the black community and British whites because of their background as slaveowners (Harvey, 2019: 6). On this matter, Harvey argues that

Rhys depicts the white Creole’s positioning as one that situates her as liminal Other in opposition to the British colonial powers that occupy the island at the time of emancipation; yet Rhys also explores the black Creole as a racialised Other who both mirrors and contrasts the white Creole protagonist. (2019: 6)

As a child, Antoinette remembers the racial tensions between black Jamaican Creoles and white Jamaican planters (Halloran, 2006: 60). She and her mother, Annette, were “white niggers”, caught in between Jamaican and English culture (Cappello, 2009: 48-51). Unable to display their whiteness through their wealth as members of the ruling white planter class, they were the target of mockery by their neighbours: “I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us, they called us white cockroaches” (WSS: 13).

Antoinette’s status as a white Creole is ambivalent because she is a “white nigger” to Europeans and a “white cockroach” to black people. As Mzoughi states, “she is both and neither” (2016: 99). The phrase “white cockroach” marks an inversion of the traditional relationship between the colonised and the coloniser and enhances the tension between ‘whiteness’ (niggerness) and ‘blackness’ (Englishness). Owing to her position as slaveowners’ offspring, Antoinette is believed to be superior. Nevertheless, this racial superiority does not ensure integration (Opreanu, 2005: 114):

It was a song about a white cockroach. That’s me. That’s what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I’ve heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where I belong and why was I ever born at all. (WSS: 85)

Antoinette’s personal and human identity is manipulated by the politics of imperialism. The effects of colonialism and the plantation system resonate within her white Creole identity. Her anxiety is linked to her identity, which deeply impacts her spiritual being (Cappello, 2009: 51). As a Creole woman of mixed descent, she hovers between the economic and moral logics of England and the West Indian colonies and constantly questions her place in the world (Ciolkowski, 1997: 342). The Caribbean is real and gorgeous to her: “it is not possible that there can be anywhere else so beautiful as Coulibri” (WSS: 108). However, she believes England is unreal, like a dream:
“England you think there is such a place?” (WSS: 92). To some extent, Antoinette’s black heritage is portrayed by Coulibri’s wild landscape, whereas her white legacy is connected to England (Mzoughi, 2016: 102).

Similarly, being a colonised native and a white Creole child growing up in the period of Post-Emancipation in Jamaica, she is trapped between two opposing worlds: “the English imperialist and the black native” (Spivak, 1985: 250). Pollanen points out that Antoinette is the “Other” to white English and black Jamaicans at the same time. She is neither Western nor European, even if her skin is white. The book’s opening exemplifies this lack of belonging: “They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks” (WSS: 1). As a result, “her ambiguous position in Jamaica as a white Creole becomes her personal tragedy” (Pollanen, 2012: 11).

Antoinette is equally repudiated both by native Jamaican people and her European husband. De Villiers posits that “as a Creole, she belongs to neither the native Jamaicans, nor to the white Europeans” (2008: 55). She “is not quite white, not quite black, not quite a coloniser and not quite a colonised” (Mzoughi, 2016: 98). Consequently, her identity lingers between ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ because she does not integrate into either space. As Christophine explains to Rochester, Antoinette “is not béké like you, but she is béké, and not like us either” (WSS: 128). Antoinette endeavours to endure in a cross-cultural world and to handle both black and white sides of her identity, even if “she does not quite fit in”:

The white Creole is, indeed, a migrant whose identity travels between different identities, races, and spaces freely. So, the white Creole is inducted into an in-between state and composite culture in which the simple dualism of her ‘First’ and ‘Third’ worlds collapses. (Mzoughi, 2016: 95)

Moreover, critic Imen Mzoughi upholds that Antoinette is part of the Caribbean, of the ‘Sargasso Sea’, which denotes the water region full of “floating sargassum weed” between America, Europe and Africa. As Mzoughi defends, “the varied origins of the Sargassum in the Sargasso stand for the origins of the white Creole”, given that the ‘Sargasso Sea’ silently witnessed how many enslaved people were transported to the Caribbean to work in the plantations. Both Antoinette and the Caribbean are in an extended state of ostracism. The Caribbean links Antoinette, the white Creole, to Africa and Europe and allows her to form her personality. Hence, Antoinette is an exiled

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subject uprooted from her place of origin. She can only live in the ‘Sargasso Sea’, the single place where her creolity can exist (Mzoughi, 2016: 95-96).

If we analyse Antoinette’s “in-betweenness” in terms of her linguistic identity, it is creolised through French patois, Creole and “Black” English. This linguistic plurality provides Antoinette with a distinct perspective of her identity (Mzoughi, 2016: 103). According to Mzoughi:

Rhys creolises Antoinette’s language to show that while the English language connects the Creole with whiteness, the French patois and the Creole dialect connect her with blackness. (2016: 104)

As for the “powerful suggestive figure” of Christophine, her story is tangent to the narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She is Antoinette’s black nurse and servant from Martinique who speaks patois and practices Obeah. Owing to her hybridity, Christophine is also an outcast. She is alien to her French colonial inheritance and her African religious methods (Harvey, 2019: 8). She personifies “a great deal of African folk culture, myths, songs, folk tales, and superstitions”, which allows the exploration of the black Creole’s hybridity (Cappello, 2009: 53). Thanks to her, Antoinette understands the meanings of the songs sung in patois and connects with her Afro-Caribbean heritage (Mzoughi, 2016: 105). About Christophine, Spivak affirms:

She cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native. No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self. (1985: 253)

Antoinette’s “in-betweenness” leads to abjection, caused by the disturbance of order, identity and the system, that is, the ambiguous and in-betweenness (Pollanen, 2012: 4). Antoinette gathers these conditions, given that she has always been placed in

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10 *Patois* is a dialect other than the standard or literary dialect of an uneducated or provincial speech. It is also defined as the characteristic special language of an occupational or social group (cf. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).

11 *Obeah* is part of the Caribbean, a creolised practice of African religions. It occurs in the novel with both a positive and a negative meaning. It is negative especially according to the white colonisers, in connection with the evil magic. On the contrary, it is positive if seen as a source of rebellion against slavery. (Cappello, 2009: 52)

12 According to linguist Julia Kristeva, the abject is that which disturbs the self, by provoking disgust, fear, loathing or repulsion. Belonging to the realm of the psychic, the abject is the excessive dimension of either a subject or an object that cannot be assimilated. As such, it is simultaneously outside or beyond the subject and inside and of the subject (cf. *Oxford Reference*).
between subject/object, English/Jamaican and past/future. On the one hand, she depicts a past that wants to be erased: her family connections with slavery and colonialism. However, on the other, to Rochester, she is a dangerous female, owing to the madness that runs through her veins and Christophine’s black magic (Pollanen, 2012: 13). For this, ever since her childhood, she has repressed her identity. She has always been a child of silence, but it is the act of being silenced, first by her mother and then by her husband, that fosters her abjection. Thus, the oppression of her identity and subjectivity provokes the abjection of others and herself (Mezei, 1987: 199).

Antoinette’s abjection stems from her relationship with Annette, the distant mother who repudiates her daughter and becomes mad. It is her mother who first abjects her: “she was so lonely that she grew away from other people” (WSS: 78). Later, her abjection is developed in her relationship with Tia, who takes part in a world she does not completely belong to (Cappello, 2009: 49). An example of this is the night when Antoinette departs from Coulibri and sees Tia:

when I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it […] I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (WSS: 27)

Antoinette and Tia see themselves as an ambiguous reflection of the other. This mirroring effect provides the representation of “two things being the same”. Both girls are similar but different: they are split from reality just like an image in a mirror is an illusion (Cappello, 2009: 49). However, Antoinette and Tia are separated by class and racial differences that weaken their bond (Kamel, 1995: 5). This latter is portrayed by the “blood” and “tears” that create a mirroring effect: black and white, victim and oppressor, friend and enemy (Anderson, 1982: 61). According to Opreanu, the importance of this fragment dwells in “the role of the Other in the understanding of the Self and of the fragility of the boundary that separates them” (2005: 116).

The process of abjection is further developed when, in the text, paragraphs “follow one another without evident connection; dialogue begins and breaks off”, emulating Antoinette’s state of mind (Oates, 1985: 56). Then, it is completed when the subject intends to identify with an outside element through mimicry. For instance, Antoinette tries to emulate Miller’s Daughter portrait, “a lovely English girl with brown curls and blue eyes and a dress slipping off her shoulders” (WSS: 21). Another example takes place when, in her desperation for happiness, Antoinette attempts to identify with
Edward; but he despises her: “Christophine, he does not love me, I think he hates me” (WSS: 65). Hence, she starts loathing herself, envisioning herself as something disgusting, polluted and abject (Pollanen, 2012: 14):

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. Better. Better, 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 someone else, something else. Not myself any longer. (WSS: 16)

Edward wants to conceal Antoinette, the abject. For that, he forces her to go to England and locks her in the attic of Thornfield, separating her from consciousness. There, she will complete the transformation of her “self” into Bertha, the Other. If she is marginalised in Jamaica, she is regarded as a contaminating individual in England. Nevertheless, the abject is never eliminated, and Antoinette continues to threaten Rochester when occasionally she flees the attic (Pollanen, 2012: 15). Even if she is hidden, Antoinette is still present: “When night comes and she has had several drinks and sleeps, it is easy to take the keys […] Then I open the door and walk into the world” (WSS: 107). Being locked in the attic and deprived of all identity and subjectivity, she no longer recognises herself in the mirror. Instead, she sees the abject, the ghost of a woman. To illustrate this, in the last part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette identifies herself as the ghost in Thornfield Hall, seeing herself as her Other:

I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her - the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. (WSS: 111-112)

The book’s last scene, where Antoinette burns the house to the ground and jumps into the void, is a token of her insubordination against the patriarchal and colonial English power. Through madness and suicide, she renders herself visible and becomes the agent of her life. Via the purgation of fire, death frees her from the condition of being abject and rejected. She sets herself free by wrecking the limits others have imposed on her (Pollanen, 2012: 15). Through the act of torching Thornfield Hall, Antoinette identifies with her West Indian legacy and recuperates her identity (Choudhury, 1996: 319).

On the whole, the lack of identity determines Antoinette’s quest in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys emphasises the protagonist’s cultural, religious and linguistic hybridity to reject the subordination of the Creole concerning European whiteness as a
hegemonic ideal of racial purity (De Villiers, 2018: 57). Caught in the middle of two distinct worlds and excluded from both, Antoinette suffers the consequences of her marginalisation in the English and the Creole culture, only capable of asserting her true identity when she ignites Thornfield Hall (Opreanu, 2005: 115).

3.2. The coloniser: Mr. Rochester’s sexual desire

Rochester is a son and a victim of patriarchy and society’s prejudices, unable to accept and understand the bounds between his wife and the Creole culture. His values reflect the European imperial systems that determine his way of thinking and acting (Mardorossian, 1999: 81). In 19th-century England, the firstborn son of a wealthy family inherited all the money. However, the second son, Rochester, inherits nothing. He has no choice but to “buy” an heiress from the colonies (Spivak, 1985: 251). As he says, “I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks” (WSS: 41). Desperate for financial security and in a mercenary act, he seduces Antoinette to get her money and marries her: “The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition” (WSS: 41). By becoming his wife, Antoinette loses her money and is left completely vulnerable and dispossessed of inheritance (Anderson, 1982: 58):

Antoinette’s own marriage is little more than one of the numerous contracts characteristic of patriarchal societies, whereby women, signs and commodities pass from one man to another. In this particular situation, Antoinette, her mother’s plantation and all the wealth provided by her stepfather pass from her closest male relative to her husband, in the classic scenario of the European gentleman dispatched to the colonies to acquire an heiress. (Opreanu, 2005: 119)

Rochester’s narration is a “self-justification, an attempt at a rational, analytic explanation of the breakdown of his marriage and of his wife” (Mezei, 1987: 205). He is anxious regarding his marriage to Antoinette. No sooner had he married Antoinette than he became concerned and regretted his decision. This preoccupation is enhanced by his European culture, which makes him reflect on presumptions and prejudices about Creoles, who are not white nor black (Cappello, 2009: 51). Another defining moment is their honeymoon, where Rochester looks at Antoinette and realises her uncommon beauty and excessive creolity. For instance, her eyes are “too large and can be disconcerting […] long, sad, dark, alien eyes” (WSS: 39).
Antoinette’s mother despises her, and Rochester’s relatives deny him any monetary support. Despite suffering an identity crisis and being affected by the frustrating relationships with their families, both Antoinette and Rochester exemplify the inability to reciprocally understand two cultural worlds, inaccessible to each other (Opreanu, 2005: 115). In these characters, Rhys defines wider race relations typical of the West Indies where Europeans born or living there, educated to conceive of England as home were culturally marked and excluded as inferior colonials. At the same time, they were racially and institutionally privileged in relation to the African people brought there as slaves to work in the plantations. The Creoles occupy a position of liminality which allows them a sense of proprietorship towards the black people. (Cappello, 2009: 51-52)

Speaking of Rochester’s relationship with Antoinette, they perform a sexual and colonial encounter whereby Edward suffocates Antoinette’s identity. Although he appreciates her beauty and desires her, Rochester is not in love with Antoinette. Instead, he merely wants to possess her: “I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love [...] she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did” (WSS: 55).

Rochester perceives Antoinette in two traditional ways: she is childish, needs Edward to support her and love her, and threatens him with her sexuality and dangerous outbursts. The rumours he hears about her past do not help either: she is surrounded by a lunatic mother, a mentally ill brother and a servant who practices black magic. In a desperate attempt to make Rochester love her, Antoinette resorts to Christophine, who gives her a love potion. Unfortunately, the potion does not succeed and “the ambivalent passion he feels for her turns irrevocably to hatred” because Rochester fathoms that the use of black magic is a token of Antoinette’s madness and contamination as the racialised Other (Oates, 1985: 57).

To put it more simply, Antoinette is an object that Edward loathes and needs to possess. She is his “lunatic” and his “mad girl” (WSS: 99). This sense of possession conveys the dichotomy between superiority and inferiority. Even with language, Rochester shows his possessiveness, as we observe when he gives Antoinette the name of Bertha, depriving her of her identity and domesticating her in terms of race, class and sex (Cappello, 2009: 51). Furthermore, Rochester strips Antoinette of her own image, for he does not want her to “laugh in the sun again. She’ll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass” (WSS: 99).
Naming her Bertha, Rochester tries to eliminate his insecurities, culminates his oppression and completely undertakes the role of the coloniser. Not only does he annul her past and forces her to lose her mind, but he also erases her personhood and imposes his masculine and Euro-centric viewpoint: “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name” (WSS: 88). As a consequence, he blasphemously baptises Antoinette the madwoman of Brontë’s attic, bringing forth his racism, sexism and tyranny and echoing the imperial tendency to rename conquered lands (Kamel, 1995: 8).

The white female Creole body and its sexual appetite are stigmatised for accurate reproduction of power. A proper English woman is forced to restrain her sexual life to the domestic sphere and the patriarchal family. In contrast, Antoinette remains incompatible with the English domestic bliss due to her sexual appetite and excesses, according to Rochester’s beliefs. She is a victim of a homogeneous system of sexual domination because she is conceived as a whore (Ciolkowski, 1997: 343).

In their power relationship, Rochester places Antoinette at the centre of the battle over imperial control and reproduces the colonial experience of the slave through patriarchal structures: “She’s mad but mine, mine. What will I care for gods or devils or for Fate itself?” (WSS: 99). He is so devoured by jealousy that he takes possession of her alien body, transforming their lovemaking into a reproduction of “the white colonist’s sexual subjugation of darker women”. Edward abhors and inhibits Antoinette’s passionate nature and sexuality; he wants to silence her and turn her into an object (Kamel, 1995: 9-10).

The white Western male plays an important part as a “conqueror and observer who speaks for the colonised land and its women” because female bodies symbolise the conquered land. Despite not being a coloniser in the strict sense, Rochester is greatly influenced by colonial texts, considering the strategies he uses to exercise control over his wife, which are the representation of a political and ideological structure enhancing imperialist and patriarchal domination (Opreanu, 2005: 117).

To signify Rochester’s European discourse as a means of exercising colonial power, Rhys uses Standard British English, as opposed to the Jamaican varieties of English for the Creoles and the English for the black people, which Rochester despises: “Her coffee is delicious but her language is horrible” (WSS: 52), “I can’t say I like her
language” (53), “he hasn’t learned any English that I can understand” (111) (Cappello, 2009: 47).

In colonial writing, Antoinette becomes the figure of the “Other”. For Rochester, Jamaica and Antoinette are closely interrelated and become one. Antoinette’s “bad blood” and Jamaica pollute his body. Nonetheless, he fails in comprehending any of them. Throughout the story, his attitude towards these two elements changes from fascination and affection to disgust and hatred. Indeed, these dynamics of power recall the toxic relationship between England and its colonies (Pollanen, 2012: 11-12).

In Coulibri’s modern Edenic wild garden, Rhys relocates one of the founding myths by transforming the paradise’s idyllic setting into something menacing, savage and corrupted: a fallen Garden of Eden. In Antoinette’s words, the “garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible […] But it had gone wild” (WSS: 10-11). The Jamaican landscape represents the “otherness Rochester feels obliged to repress in order to maintain his Eurocentric perspective intact” (Openeau, 2005: 117).

Extremely disoriented and lost in this hybrid space, Rochester struggles to make English sense out of this erotically charged place, to which he feels attraction and repulsion. For that, he compares the Caribbean to the English landscape and believes that the former is full of dangers while the latter gives him a sense of security, as he intends to keep his Englishness untainted (Mardorossian, 1999: 81-82). As Ciolkowki determines, for the English people, “Jamaica or Barbados was where one lived but England was still one’s home” (1997: 341). It is also essential to bear in mind that

one way of life, one vision, makes war upon its opposite; for all of the West Indies is dismissed by Rochester as dreamlike and unreal, just as, by extension, all of the non- (or anti-) English world must be dismissed by the English, before it can be conquered and exploited. (Oates, 1985: 45)

Rochester also thinks that Grandbois is an uncharted dream-place that induces madness, whereas it is a friendly place for Antoinette: “It was a beautiful place-wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness” (WSS: 51-52). To him, Antoinette is associated with the hazardous ‘black magic’ of the West Indies. A token of the detachment he experiences is the fever he suffers when he arrives in Jamaica, which conveys an inconsistent sense of paranoia (Maurel, 2009: 158). However, this overwhelming atmosphere does not contribute to delving into his feelings for Antoinette, even if he is still “thirsty”. On the contrary, he feels excluded and relates
Antoinette to an unwelcoming environment, obsessively wanting to ravage it by destroying her (De Villiers, 2018: 56):

I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever color, 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. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it. (WSS: 103)

Rhys reverses Edward’s role as a white man, for he feels lost, observed and in a hostile place. On the other hand, Antoinette is aloof and alien to him, an individual infecting his Englishness. She is also indefinable and incomprehensible, approaching abjection, as shown by the simultaneous desire and loath that he feels for her. In this regard, Pollanen affirms that “Edward’s desire for Antoinette turns into loathing and rejection” due to the chaotic feelings she incites him (2012: 12).

Death and sex are linked. Sex is a means to control and dominate Antoinette. Edward longs for her body while at the same time he fantasises about her death. He introduces Antoinette to the mystique of sexuality: “Very soon she was as eager for what’s called loving as I was - more lost and drowned afterwards” (WSS: 55). Rochester suppresses Antoinette’s identity and becomes sexually superior by taking advantage of her desire and turning it down, as illustrated in the following fragment (Pollanen, 2012: 13):

[Antoinette:] ‘If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn’t have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don’t believe? Then try, try, say die and watch me die.’ [Edward:] ‘Die then, die!’ I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers. In sunlight, in shadow, in moonlight, by candlelight [...] Very soon she was as eager for what’s called loving as I was - more lost and drowned afterwards. (WSS: 55)

Additionally, to his wife’s confession that she would die for him, he grotesquely answers, “Die then, die!”, perfectly conscious of the orgasmic connotation of the term. In this manner, consumed by lust, Edward decides Antoinette’s fate by projecting his raging libido on her body, and he then destroys her without physically killing her (Gruesser, 2003: 102). Critic Meredith Harvey outlines that Rochester’s feelings of scorn for Antoinette’s contentedness “reveal his fear that sex might be the tool through which she as liminal Other corrupts, contaminates, and controls his European body” (2019: 10).
All in all, mixing orgasm and death, Rochester overtly shows his racism, fearing that Antoinette might be black to some extent. In other words, he experiences an irrational fear of miscegenation (Kamel, 1995: 10). Rochester follows colonial stereotypes and struggles with the weird otherness of his wife and the West Indies, a region he is incapable of understanding. He also personifies European imperialism and its sexual domination system. As a coloniser and a man, the only possible way to control Antoinette is to wreck her in all the possible ways: emotionally, linguistically, mentally, physically and financially.

3.3. The Female Other’s madness

After discussing both sides of the coin, the colonised and the coloniser, we would like to delve into Antoinette’s insanity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is the consequence of an identity crisis fostered by her husband’s rejection. Rhys puts forward that Antoinette’s hybridity contributed to a great extent to her derangement, that is, the lack of a stable identity altered by the colonial and patriarchal systems (De Villiers, 2008: 55).

Rhys’ postcolonial rewriting of Brontë’s master narrative highlights how the image of the Female Other is forged in terms of class, race, gender and sexuality. This representation is inscribed within the 19th-century category of “the mentally deranged Creole heiress”, whose dowries were an extra burden to them. Antoinette’s characterisation by Rochester as mentally ill sprouts from her position as the female colonial Other (Opreanu, 2005: 110).

Through a reverse mirror image, Rhys provides a much more humane depiction of Antoinette. Namely, when rewriting the scene in *Jane Eyre* where Jane faces a bleeding Richard Mason, Rhys preserves Bertha’s sanity and humanity intact. In the retelling, it is the word “legally” that unchains Bertha’s violent reaction (Spivak, 1985: 250). Richard Mason’s reference to the justice system detonates Antoinette’s attack, not a sudden urge for violence. Grace Poole talks about the incident in these terms:

So you don’t remember that you attacked this gentleman with a knife? I didn’t hear all he said except ‘I cannot interfere legally between yourself and your husband’. It was when he said ‘legally’ that you flew at him. (*WSS*: 150)
From a feminist postcolonial perspective, critic Alexandra Nygren affirms that Antoinette’s madness emanates from the interaction between patriarchy and colonialism (2016: 117). Other critics like Iida Pollanen argue that *Wide Sargasso Sea* raises the issue of the “other woman”, Antoinette Cosway, and how the oppression of her identity led to total madness and loss of self (2012: 9). Moreover, for Laurence Lerner, *Wide Sargasso Sea* alters the meaning of *Jane Eyre* because Rhys eliminates Jane from the story and transforms Antoinette into a helpless victim to prove the logic in her madness (1989: 276-277).

The gendered colonial lunacy results from the stigmatisation of Caribbean women. Rhys wanted to challenge this assumption to counterclaim British notions of the colonies. To this end, she explains the reasons behind Annette and Antoinette’s unsoundness of mind. The loss of Coulibri and the death of Pierre, her son, hasten Annette’s psychological condition, while Rochester’s oppression and his infidelity with Amélie, their mulatto servant, trigger Antoinette’s loss of self (Ho, 2019: 21-22). That being said, Rochester assumes that mental instability is congenital because he firmly believes that Antoinette’s family background plays a significant role. He was told in Daniel Cosway’s incriminating letter that Antoinette’s mother, Annette, was insane (De Villiers, 2008: 56):

> Wicked and detestable slave-owners since generations - yes everybody hate them in Jamaica […] Wickedness is not the worst. There is madness in that family […] 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. She shut herself away, laughing and talking to nobody as many can bear witness. (WSS: 57-58)

Gruesser defends that by cheating on Antoinette out of revenge and punishment, Rochester sentences her to permanent loneliness and makes evident the hypocrisy of his irrational fear towards the racialised other: “Vain, silly creature. Made for loving? Yes, but she’ll have no lover, for I don’t want her and she’ll see no other” (WSS: 99). Invoking his status as a British Englishman, Rochester blames his wife and makes her pay for his insecurities (2003: 106). He deliberately betrays Antoinette, assuming that truth and law are on his side: “Yes, that didn’t just happen. I meant it” (WSS: 93).

Rochester projects all his negative traits on Antoinette to stress her alienation. To justify his appropriation of her wealth and her eviction from Coulibri, he defines her as perverted and mentally unsound (Opreanu, 2005: 120). Rochester fulfils his role as
coloniser by refusing her access to herself. He transforms Antoinette, who is secluded from her former life, into the Other, an object. Indeed, he imposes his point of view and forces her to assume “the stance of the madwoman in the attic” due to his hatred for her condition as a hybrid individual (Opreanu, 2005: 121).

Certainly, Rochester’s attempts to control Antoinette sabotage her psyche and provoke a “progression into true mental illness” and the erosion of her sense of self (Harvey, 2019: 11). Therefore, Antoinette’s madness results from various factors, such as her oppression and misery as a white Creole woman, wedded for her fortune and later displaced from Coulibri and confined in Thornfield’s attic (Opreanu, 2005: 113).

Furthermore, Antoinette’s sanity is related to her capacity for narration, which ties her to the world and diverts her from evaporating. The limits of the narration are constantly under threat of dissolving, as is Antoinette herself. The fact of being increasingly “marooned” has side effects on both her state of mind and her narrative: “‘Now we are marooned’, my mother said, ‘now what will become of us?’” (WSS: 10).

The word “maroon” connects Annette and Antoinette’s isolation as former plantation slaveowners to the solitude of those slaves who fled to the mountains and lived in small groups (Harvey, 2019: 7). Deceived and repudiated by her mother, Tia and her black neighbours, she is also forsaken by Mr. Mason and Rochester. For this reason, she has always been obsessed with safety and shelter throughout her life, albeit each place where she has felt secure is destroyed. In exchange for her position as a Creole woman, she is deserted and isolated (Mezei, 1987: 204).

In Part Three, both the conventional narrative and Antoinette’s sanity are broken: “I saw my doll’s house and the books and the picture of the Miller’s Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, Qui est là? Qui est là?” (WSS: 112). The sequence, linear chronology and narrative lucidity give way to Antoinette’s interior monologue of her troubled and dissociated mind, that is, madness. Antoinette disintegrates along with the narration until she feels completely disempowered. She is now an outsider in her own story and a character in her narration, not the protagonist. In her mind, there is no clear boundary between past and present. This is a sign of her mental breakdown and inner turmoil (Mezei, 1987: 196-197):

We can see how narrative becomes, for Antoinette, a strategy of survival, an attempt to maintain her hold on reality, to constrain dissolution into madness and how, finally, the act of retention helps her to remember
what act (other than narration) she must commit in the future. She herself is held together by the act of narrating. (Mezei, 1987: 198)

In both novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha/Antoinette becomes insane and dies in the Thornfield fire. Rhys reuses the final part of *Jane Eyre* “as a preordained finishing line”, accepting to some extent Brontë’s ending (Ho, 2019: 27).

Imprisoned in Thornfield’s Hall’s gloomy and frigid attic, the bounds with the real world and her sanity tear apart. Antoinette is confused and does not remember who she is: “What am I doing in this place and who am I?” (*WSS*: 107). She undergoes a division of self where she endures “the death of the mind” and awaits the “death of the body”, the second death (Mezei, 1987: 205). Hence, her consciousness is found in a precarious state and her senses of time and space are distorted, yielding the loss of touch with reality (Mezei, 1987: 197):

Once Antoinette-Bertha is brought to England, to Thornfield, and placed under Grace Poole’s care, she descends rapidly into madness. Her new world is totally unreal to her, a cardboard house in which nothing of consequence can happen. (Oates, 1985: 58)

In her postcolonial analysis of the character of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, Spivak states that Charlotte Brontë blurs the line between animal and human with Bertha, the white Jamaican Creole. The basis of imperialism has helped create this “strange wild animal”. In light of this, Spivak argues that Jane symbolises Europe and Bertha, the not-yet-human Other. Jane embodies imperialism, the occidental self, whereas Bertha is an example of Orientalism and the oriental self. *Jane Eyre* imposes the characteristics of the imperialist project upon Bertha and determines her own identity in opposition to her (Spivak, 1985: 247).

Similarly, Mezei explains that, before jumping to the void, Antoinette is induced into a dreamy state. When she wakes, she subconsciously remembers: “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do” (*WSS*: 112) (1987: 208). As De Villiers argues, by setting Thornfield Hall on fire, Antoinette “frees herself from her confinement in the attic and from normative definitions of female insanity” to give way to her metaphorical rebirth (2018: 59).

The successful conclusion of *Jane Eyre* depends on the destruction of the foreign “Other”, that is, Bertha’s death. In Western feminist individualism, the Creole woman has to be sacrificed. Therefore, Jane replicates how imperial powers construct their own identities and sense of superiority by applying the same process to “inferior”

Thanks to Bertha/Antoinette’s self-immolation as a colonial subject, Jane Eyre, the coloniser, becomes the feminist heroine in British literature. Spivak reads this process as an allegory of the epistemic violence of imperialism through which the social mission of the coloniser is glorified (1985: 251). In other words, after reading *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Jane Eyre* can be interpreted as the orchestration and the mise-en-scène of the self-immolation of Bertha Mason as a “good wife” who becomes a loser woman (Spivak, 1985: 259).

By and large, Antoinette conveys the image of the colonised Other who is ravaged by a person from the metropolis. In their unsuccessfully arranged marriage, Rochester repeatedly thwarts Antoinette’s mental health as a means of submissiveness, finally imprisoning her for the rest of her life (Gruesser, 2003: 100). In any case, bearing in mind that *Jane Eyre*’s story is built upon Bertha’s being suppressed, *Wide Sargasso Sea* changes the depiction of the madwoman and questions why is *Jane Eyre* viewed as a feminist cult text if Jane triumphs at the expense of Bertha’s failure.
4. CONCLUSION

This project has allowed us to study how Jean Rhys places *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha Mason in the spotlight by giving her a better life. In doing so, Antoinette, the Female Other, leaves her marginal role and becomes a fundamental character. As we commented in the introduction, we have divided our research into two parts examining the roles of the colonised/victim/insane and the colonised/predator/sane. We have also analysed how these oppositions and power dynamics oscillate and lead to the Female Other’s madness.

In the first part, we have established a theoretical framework for the formation of the “Other”. Mainly, through Said’s work, we have discussed how Orientalism constitutes an ensemble of repressions and mental limitations through the supposed superiority of the Occident over the Orient. The European colonisation fostered the dichotomy between the Occident and the Orient, which constructs the power relationship between the West and the East. Next, through Young’s *Colonial Desire*, we have determined that colonialism is a desiring machine built upon the discourse on rape and impregnation. We have also dealt with the terms “hybridity”, “in-betweenness” and “mimicry”, introduced by Homi Bhabha, to refer to the crossing of white and black people, the space where hybridity and miscegenation occur, and the process of “white” imitation through which Creoles emulated the European behavior, respectively.

From a postcolonial feminist viewpoint, we have discussed the relevance of the dissident stories and voices of colonised women through the works of Sara Suleri, Anne McClintock and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. From Suleri, we have learned that racial oppression and gender are closely linked. Third World Women are relegated to the “object” status through the colonial desire for the Female Other. Thanks to McClintock, we have seen how women are identified with the realm of the Other, as if they were riddles. According to racial fetishism, we have also outlined how colonised women are regarded as dangerous sexual deviants. Lastly, Spivak’s work has allowed us to understand why the native female subject is marginalised from any participation in the imperialist project.

In the second part of our investigation, we have placed emphasis on the characters of Antoinette and Rochester to demystify their positions as colonised and coloniser. We have divided our research into three subparts. In the first one, we have learned that Antoinette’s inner anxiety comes from her hybridity and in-betweenness
because, being a Creole in a society transitioning from a slave economy, she pertains neither to Jamaica nor to Great Britain. She suffers and witnesses the racial tensions between black Jamaican Creoles and white Jamaican planters, which clearly impact her identity, as she is repudiated by both. We have observed that the oppression of her identity causes her abjection, first provoked by her relationship with her mother, then enhanced by her experiences with Tia, and later culminated by Rochester.

In the second subpart of this section, we have studied how Rhys reverses Edward Rochester’s role as a white man. He embodies European imperialism, for he is full of prejudices concerning the Jamaican people, and tries to dominate his wife by despising her and repressing her identity. We have analysed how he seduces Antoinette to seize her fortune and controls her through sex, reproducing the colonial experience through her objectification and possession. Antoinette was the conquered land, the Other. We have also stated that Rochester fails to understand Coulibri, a fallen Garden of Eden that, according to him, induces insanity.

In the third subpart and final section of our research, we have reached a deeper understanding of Antoinette’s madness through an insightful examination of the reasons behind her lunacy: a mixture of patriarchy and colonialism. From a feminist postcolonial perspective, we have outlined that Antoinette’s gendered colonial insanity comes from her position as the female colonial Other. Due to her stigmatisation as a Caribbean woman, Rochester intensifies Antoinette’s identity crisis, first caused by her misery as a white Creole. We have discerned how, out of revenge and punishment, Rochester sabotages his wife’s psyche and hastens her alienation and subsequent madness. Finally, through Spivak’s analysis, we have tried to proffer a more humane version of Antoinette, the Oriental self, as opposed to Brontë’s Bertha Mason.

Even nowadays, being situated at the cutting edge of postcolonial feminist criticism, Wide Sargasso Sea not only illustrates the conflict between the coloniser and the colonised, but also gives voice to the Female Other, laying the cornerstone for further postcolonial analysis on the character of Bertha/Antoinette Mason. With this project, we have tried to remind readers that many silenced voices need to be heard, regardless of their origin, gender or race.
5. WORKS CITED


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