
Racism in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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ABSTRACT

The major concern of this paper is to show how the racism is a big issue during the colonialism period. The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* is written by Jean Rhys in order to highlight multiple issues like gender discrimination, the opposite nature of male and females, how the desires of the central characters not fulfilled and how all these things lead to the madness. The entire identity of the main character has been shattered and taken away from her. Antoinette was a Creole girl and Rochester was an English white man still they got married and the consequence is so dangerous that Antoinette had to suffer for lifetime. Let us discuss what we have chosen to discuss.

Keywords: *Racism, Gender Discrimination, Culture, Colonialism.*

Wide Sargasso Sea is a novel written by Jean Rhys is a novel that is written with special purpose as to describe the earlier life of Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre*, whose original name is Antoinette in the novel. It shows her life from the very beginning of her life, how she is married to Rochester and how her psyche gets worse and worse. The entire process is described here and the reasons responsible for that are also described at lengths.

The title of the novel is very important. The Sargasso Sea is a large area where there is a huge attention of seaweeds (sea plants) in the North Atlantic Sea. Just like these weeds, the characters here also are tangled in the web of emotions and ideas- they seem to be drowning each other. Thus, the title of the novel is actually the showcase of what it actually is.

Race and Gender issues in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Antoinette was a Creole girl and Rochester was an English white man. So there is clearly a difference between them in terms of race and gender as well. The novelist shows us that Antoinette is a weak character mainly because of her being female and black.

Rhys finds herself caught up in two different cultures and is not sure about her own identity that she reflects in her heroine. Like Rhys, Antoinette is a sensitive and lonely young Creole girl who

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grows up with neither her mother's love nor her peers' companionship. In a school as a young woman, Antoinette becomes increasingly lost in thought and isolated, showing the early signs of her inherited emotional vulnerability. Moreover, Antoinette's passion contributes to her melancholy and implied madness. Her arranged marriage to an unsympathetic and controlling English gentleman worsen her condition and pushes her to fits of violence. Eventually her husband brings her to England and locks her in his attic, assigning a servant woman to watch over her. Fearful, Antoinette awakes from a vivid dream and sets out to burn down the house.

Antoinette as a miserable woman character

Rhys often wrote about women, in various stages of their lives, living hand to mouth in London or Paris. The women are always on the economic edge, needing money, receiving cash and clothes from men, drinking, sitting in cafes, and endlessly walking. The books are very spare, bare, unsentimental, and wonderful. Here, in this novel, no outside narration, no other point of view interrupts Jean's vision, and Antoinette seems to offer a model of progress for all women. Antoinette's story is intertwined with the cultural and familial history. Narration in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is divided between the Creole woman, Antoinette, and the English man, Rochester, but Rhys seems careful to include voices other than the two central narrators, which helps offer insight into the narrator's often partiality vision.

Rhys' unsure Self-Identity reflected in Antoinette

Rhys here describes her heroine with the unsure identity as she also is suffering of. Once in an interview, the reporter asks the questions about her identity, the conversation was like following: Reporter, "Do you consider yourself a West Indian?" She hesitates and answers, "It was such a long time ago when I left." Reporter, "So you don't think of yourself as a West Indian writer? Again she nodded, but said nothing. The Reporter asks again, "What about English? Do you consider yourself as an English writer?", "No! I'm not, I'm not! I'm not even English." She shouts.

Rhys finds herself caught up in two different cultures and is not sure about her own identity that she reflects in her heroine. Like Rhys, Antoinette is a sensitive and lonely young Creole girl who grows up with neither her mother's love nor her peers' companionship. In a school as a young woman, Antoinette becomes increasingly lost in thought and isolated, showing the early signs of her inherited emotional vulnerability. Moreover, Antoinette's passion contributes to her melancholy and implied madness. Her arranged marriage to an unsympathetic and controlling English gentleman worsen her condition and pushes her to fits of violence. Eventually her husband brings her to England and locks her in his attic, assigning a servant woman to watch over her. Fearful, Antoinette awakes from a vivid dream and sets out to burn down the house.

Rochester as a new type of Colonizer

We all know that the British had colonized many countries and the Caribbean is one of them. But here the character of Rochester is shown as a different and new type of colonizer who had

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colonized a Creole Antoinette. So, here we find an oppressor who neither respects creoles nor the black ones. Rochester's dominated identity is reflected in Antoinette's capture and his domination over her. There is nothing like identity for the poor woman as Rochester destroys it and changes her name as well. By the end of Part 2 of the novel, where he is leaving Caribbean and going to England with Antoinette, he utters that:

"I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain...

She had left me thirsty..."

These lines mean that he does not love the Caribbean people and their lifestyle and therefore he is willing to go to England and to satisfy the thirst that he had.

Is Rochester responsible for Antoinette's Madness?

Many critics believe that Antoinette's husband Rochester is responsible for Antoinette's madness. However, here we are trying to prove this point that he indeed tortures her to the extent that she becomes a mad woman eventually. Rochester is the nameless creator and, as a white man, his authority and freedom allow him to present identity on others. For instance, he decides to rename his wife, calling her Bertha in an attempt to distance her from her crazy mother, whose full name was Antoinette. Later, he takes away Antoinette's voice along with her name, refusing to listen to her side of the story. As he continues to fragment her identity, he creates the new name of Marionetta, a cruel joke that reflects Antoinette's doll-like flexibility. He ultimately refashions Antoinette into a wild madwoman and treats her as a ghost. By refusing his companion and her local traditions, he over stresses his own English rule over the Caribbean land and citizens. Thus, it is clear that Rochester himself causes the madness of Antoinette. It is debated that Antoinette is insane minded prior to her marriage with Rochester and it is not Rochester who has causes the madness but here we would like to argue that even though Antoinette is a bit lost personality, she would not have become total mad if her husband could have take a bit care of her. Thus, it is clear that Rochester is the one who caused the madness of Antoinette.

Thus, after all the discussion we can say that, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a study in unfulfillment, in resigned oppositions and contrasts.

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