

WIDE SARGASSO SEA Jean Rhys, London, Penguin, 1968, 154 Pages*

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Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, having been written in 1966, assured its place among the classics being both a postcolonial response to Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and a criticism of the Victorian values concerning women who were considered either "an angel in the house" or "a madwoman in the attic". If they conform to the rules of the society they become angels in the house. However, if they behave against these rules and live ahead of their time, they are labeled as "mad women".

Despite the fact that Jean Rhys takes some inspiration from Bronte's novel in creating her woman character Antoinette Cosway, her work is very different from Bronte's *Jane Eyre* in that it is a strong criticism of the postcolonial period and the discrimination about the creole people. Therefore, although some researchers and critics consider *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a prequel or complement text to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, what Rhys actually did in her novel was to write a response, a corrective text to *Jane Eyre*. It is true that there is a kind of intertextuality, as some researchers call it, between the two works or she took some inspiration from Bronte's work. However, she didn't mean to write a complementary work, she discovered the gaps within Bronte's text and wrote back her colonial text. She took Bertha, the "mad woman in the attic", used it as a starting point, developed the character of Bertha and explored the reasons of her mysterious situation. Thus, she deconstructed Bronte's novel in order to create her own novel with a totally different perspective.

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The novel may appeal to different groups of readers with its wide range of themes such as arranged marriages, mother-daughter relationship, wife-husband relationship, loneliness, isolation, alienation, otherness, marginality, cultural displacement, exile and identity crisis. However, what it raises and strongly criticizes are the issues of Victorian values, madness and colonization.

When Rhys first arrived in England at the age of 16, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was among the novels she first read. Since Rhys herself was a hybrid, a white West Indian, she was extremely affected by the situation of Brontë's heroine, Bertha. Being a creole herself and knowing the difficulties of living in-between Jean Rhys created an autobiographical work, *Wide Sargasso Sea* where the silenced character of Brontë found voice. Jean Rhys was a white West Indian, neither English nor black, almost like her heroine Antoinette who is called "white cockroach" by the black slaves but "white nigger" by the English ladies and gentlemen not knowing where to belong to. Thus, both Jean Rhys and her heroine Antoinette are insiders/outsiders in English and the West Indian cultures as Rhys reflects it in her novel through Antoinette's words:

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 do I belong and why was I ever born at all (Wide Sargasso Sea, 77).

The idea of renaming of a woman, namely Antoinette as Bertha, by a man brings forth the notion of colonization of a woman by a man (her husband). Therefore, in this process the woman is considered as the colonized while the man becomes the colonizer. Not only does Rochester give her another name, disregarding her as an individual, but also he treats Antoinette like an object and insults her, finally locking her up in a house after learning about the illness of her mother:

Pity. Is there none for me? Tied to a lunatic for life – a drunken lying lunatic – gone her mother's way. ... In this room I wake early and lie shivering for it is very cold. ... why I have been brought here. For what reason? There must be a reason. What is it that I must do? When I first came I thought it would be for a day two days, a week perhaps. I thought that when I saw him and spoke to him I would be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. 'I give you all I have freely,' I would say, 'and I will not trouble you again if you will let me go.' But he never came (Wide Sargasso Sea, 134,144).

Thus, Rhys's novel owes its success to being a three dimensional-work: feminist with its resistance against and deconstruction of the Victorian values, postcolonial with its harsh criticism of colonization (especially of a woman) and finally postmodern with regard to the period it was written in, which renders it a masterpiece that can be read in every period and from very different perspectives. Since these three fields of study have taken a greater place in the curricula of the universities especially at the departments of literature, the novel has been taught to literature students more often in recent years.

While reading the novel, some of the questions it raises in mind are: Is Antoinette really mad or does someone force her to behave as if she were mad? If she is really mad, is it because of her genes and her mother or does her husband drive her mad? What are the reasons of her madness? The readers of the novel will find the answers to all these questions when they read between the lines of the novel.