

Character Sketch Of Wide Sargasso Sea

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ABSTRACT

Wide Sargasso Sea is a novel by Dominican British author **Jean Rhys**. It is a story of Antoinette Cosway and her descent into madness at the hands of the cold-hearted and money-hungry Mr. Rochester. It was first published in 1966 and the novel is divided into three parts. Adapted from Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* in an attempt to explain Brontë's character, Bertha Mason, the violently insane wife of Edward Rochester who was isolated from the rest of the world and locked in a third-floor room¹. In this novel, Rhys illustrates the emotional trauma, Sexual repression, and social isolation that Antoinette faces at the hand of Rochester resulting in the loss of herself and her sanity.

Key words: Characters description, slavery, post colonialism

Characters description

Antoinette Cosway. The daughter of former slave owners in Jamaica. She is a lonely young girl who grows up with no friends and a mother who gives her very little affection. Her husband moves her to England and locks her in the attic until she becomes delusional. She is based on the character **Bertha Mason** from Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*.

Antoinette Cosway Mason. Antoinette beautiful young mother. She is the second wife of both Alexander Cosway and Mr. Mason. She is the subject of the town's gossip and feels abandoned and persecuted by everyone except those close to her.

The English Gentleman (Rochester). Antoinette's English husband narrated part two of the story. He is pressured into marrying Antoinette by Richard, her stepbrother, though he knows nothing of her or her family. He soon regrets agreeing to marry Antoinette. He has an affair with one of the servants.

Daniel Boyd / Cosway. A spiteful, angry man, Daniel Boyd is one of Alexander Cosway's illegitimate children by one of his slaves.

Sandi Cosway. Another one of Alexander Cosway's bastard children. He defends Antoinette when she is harassed on her way to school. Daniel also suggests that Antoinette and Sandi were sexually involved when they were younger. Aunt Cora, Christophine Dubois, Richard Mason, and Grace Poole are other characters in this novel.

¹ Davies, C. (1998) "Migratory Subjectivities." In J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (Eds.) *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (pp.996-1015). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc.

A. *Post Colonialism In Wide Sargasso Sea*

Post Colonialism means a piece of literature reflecting on the effects of Colonialism. It is the period when the wrath of Colonialism came to an end in most of the colonized countries². It was during that time when many works started getting published by decolonized writers, stating the bittersweet memories of their experiences from the colonial regime. Those pieces of literature published after colonial rule is referred to as post-colonial literature. However, in the world of post-colonial literature, the name of British woman writer **Jean Rhys** is printed in gold.

Wide Sargasso Sea is considered as Rhys's masterpiece contribution to the era of Postcolonial literature. It deals with colonial issues such as identity and social ranking due to colonial hierarchal structures and for that reason, post-colonial criticism is a suitable approach to the novel. As a work of post-colonial fiction, it captures the pathos of a society undergoing deep and bitter change. Rhys chooses to relate the essence of this conflict through the relationship of White Creole heiress Antoinette Cosway and her English suitor Edward Rochester.

At the Starting of the novel, the Jamaican slaves are portrayed as enraged beings, upset for any reason. Three are traits of hybridity linked to slavery in the novel. For example – Christophine tends to stand apart from the other Jamaican servants because she is initially from the French Caribbean island of Martinique. Therefore, there is a large population who belong to mixed races because white slave owners in the Caribbean and other parts of the colonized countries were infamous for sexually abusing and impregnating female slaves. Sandi and Daniel Cosway, two of Alexander Cosway's illegitimate children are also examples of hybridity in the colonized communities.

In the Colonial era, it was common for white rulers to sexually abuse female slaves as there was little to no say for the enslaved. White people looked at the slaves as objects of pleasure, and entertainment and as beings who were only born to serve them. The white exploited their slaves in every possible way.

In the 19th century when Colonialism was intact, along with slavery and other issues gender issues were nothing new. Rhys also explores women's subjugation to male authority in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the novel female characters are intruded as feeble beings who are dependent on men for legal, sexual, and financial security³.

The men in the novel "*Wide Sargasso Sea*" can be categorized as ultimate opportunists who use their wives as a key to access wealth. Both Annette and Antoinette are dependent on men near them like children depending on their parents for things.

B. *Slavery In The Wide Sargasso Sea*

Slavery is a significant aspect of this novel. The story is set in Jamaica during the late 1830s and the 1840s. At this time in history, Jamaica was ruled by England. However, Slavery tends to be a pertinent issue for many countries around the globe. It had been there for centuries but was at a higher degree during the time of Colonialism⁴. People of Inferior races were deemed as slaves and were beaten up for issues that were not necessarily of concern at many times. In the novel there, is a constant rift between the Creoles and the

² Hanlin, A. (14 April 2003) "From Antoinette to Bertha: the process of 'colonising' within the marriage in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*." Online discussion forum, accessed 15/1/04 via the World Wide Web: www.qub.ac.uk/english/imperial

³ Moore, R. (2001) "Gender, Race and Intertextuality in *Wide Sargasso Sea*." In D Schwedt, (Ed.) CRNLE Journal (pp. 94-104). Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English.

⁴ Smith, A. (1997) Introduction and general notes to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. London: Penguin Classics.

Jamaicans. The Black people continue to serve the Creoles even after the passing of the **Emancipation Act in 1833**.

Part one of the novel sheds light on the ex-slaves who had worked on the sugarcane plantations of the rich Creoles. Although the Emancipation Act freed the slaves the servants were still ill-treated by their white employers.

C. Character Of Rochester

Antoinette's English husband who though never named in the novel. He narrates the longest part of the novel and from his story, it quickly becomes clear that he is based on the hero of Charlotte Bronte's **Jane Eyre**. Rochester, the youngest son of a wealthy Englishman travels to Jamaica for financial independence, as his older brother will inherit his father's estate. He is pressured into marrying Antoinette, although he has only just met her and knows nothing of her family.

Rochester marries Antoinette for a large sum of money but never connects with him. Soon after the wedding, he decides that he has made a terrible mistake, as he comes to believe that he has been tricked into marrying a girl with bad blood in her veins. He is controlling and unfaithful, believing his wife is conspiring against him. He renames Antoinette Bertha in an attempt to dominate her. After witnessing Antoinette's mental collapse he takes her to English and locks her in the attic of his mansion.

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