

The Manifestation of Psychological Alienation in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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Abstract:

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), which has been analysed by academics from a number of perspectives, is generally acknowledged to be a prelude to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). In Charlotte Bronte's novel, Rochester's insane West Indian wife lives in the attic and prevents Jane from marrying him. When she ultimately perishes in the fire she starts, Rochester's home is burned down and he is rendered blind, but Jane is now free to marry Rochester. The only way to portray the insane person in *Jane Eyre* is from the outside. The insane West Indian wife is utterly repulsive and wicked in the view of writer and Rochester. In fact, Jane is unable to distinguish between the madwoman and the beast when she first sees them grovelling on all fours in chapter sixteen of the book. In this episode, the insane woman attacks Rochester like a hyena with swollen features.

Wide Sargasso Sea is a sympathetic portrayal of the life of Rochester's insane wife, including everything from her upbringing in the West Indies, her Creole and Catholic upbringing, her courting and early marriage to the dishonest Rochester, to her last decline into madness and incarceration in England. It is obvious that in many ways Rhys' situation and the West Indian wife's situation are similar. She has created a "counter-text," a supplement to Bronte's book that fills in the "missing" testimonies and clarifies the topics that Bronte glosses over, to offer the foreign wife's side of the story. The present article focuses on how the female protagonist in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys experiences psychological alienation and experiences loneliness, meaninglessness, and grief.

Keywords: Alienation, Psychology, Madness, Trauma, Meaninglessness

Introduction:

The concept of alienation describes estrangements between humans and various components of their environment. The phrase can be interpreted in a variety of psychological and philosophical ways. Notably, Hegel's school of thought is credited with popularising the term in the nineteenth century. Later, in the 20th century, philosophers and thinkers expanded on the idea. Hegel conceptualised alienation by considering history to be a dialectical manifestation of spirit. According to the philosophy, the soul is estranged from itself because it is cut off from the real world. Furthermore, Hegel defined alienation as the desire to have another person acknowledge your consciousness without returning the favour. The same notion, however, was expanded upon by Jacques Lacan, who described it as a person's urge to find meaning in another's desire. The possibility exists because the person wants his objectives to be acknowledged by others. Lacan proposed that the fundamental desire of human beings is to be perceived relevant by others. In short, individuals are alienated since they can only understand themselves through others (Middleton, 1963). Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis suggested

that “the essence of the process or repression lies, not in abrogating or annihilating the ideational presentation of an instinct, but in withholding it from becoming conscious” (Freud, 1963). Here, Freud is implying that prior traumatic experiences might still have an unconscious influence on a person's thinking and result in painful events in the future.

Alienation in Literature

The idea of alienation based on the patriarchal character of various civilizations has been examined by several writers. The writers' ability to pursue the topic of alienation via the characters in their literary works is made possible by the ideology of a male-dominated society. Literature that thoroughly examines alienation may be found in Margret Atwood's novel *Surfacing* (1972). In this instance, the author exposes the complete alienation of Canadian women in society. Due to the chauvinistic ethos of the neighbourhood, she utilises the protagonist's estrangement to represent the everyday alienation of Canadian women. The protagonist, who is also the narrator, frequently feels cut off from the outside world. Due to the disappearance of her father and her estrangement from her mother, she is no longer living with them. Her perception of males as alienating is notable given their attempts to restrict women's decisions about marriage, religion, sex, birth, and language. She also demonstrates how Canadian males view women as the casualties of battle in relationships. For instance, she recounts how her spouse had her have an abortion and then left her. Furthermore, Atwood illustrates the severity of the estrangement by demonstrating how the hugs of the narrator's present partner did not thrill her. The circumstance demonstrates her complete alienation from males. The narrator also illustrates how early gender norms are discovered in youngsters, revealing her estrangement as systemic. She thus entirely withdraws from everyday life. It is obvious that Atwood withholds the narrator's identity throughout the narrative in order for her to act as a representative of all readers.

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys, which explores the complexity of the human psyche as influenced by gender and racial isolation, provides another example of alienation. On the book, the main character, Antoinette, faces discrimination due to her race and gender in the Caribbean islands. She is a Creole who was raised by an Indian mother and an English father, which has made her an outcast in the Jamaican colony. As Antoinette works to forge her own identity, the male-dominated colonists use legislative constraints and social exclusion to attempt to drive her away. She also encounters opposition from her black neighbours and acquaintances. Given what happened, one can interpret Rhys' artwork as depicting a woman's descent into madness in an effort to resist male dominance. Because Jean Rhys, the author, is Creole, the story of Antoinette effectively depicts Antoinette's exile and estrangement in England.

Psychological Alienation Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys illustrates the complexity of human psychological experiences, particularly in light of racial and gender discrimination concerns. Despite her previous public withdrawal from the literary scene, it's possible that her endeavour to integrate the thematic themes of her earlier works explains the intricacy of the story as well as its enormous success in the literary realm. Panizza describes Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* as “most problematic novel, revealing the author's own psychological complexity and the inner conflict that tore her mind apart... variously reflected in all her heroines” (01)

The story begins soon after Jamaica, which was under British control at the time, freed its slaves in 1833. The main character, Antoinette, tells the tale of her life, from childhood through her forced union with an unknown Englishman. As their marriage develops, Antoinette—whom he renames before locking in a room—begins to go insane.

Three parts make up the novel. The first part is recounted by Antoinette and takes place in Coulibri, Jamaica. She recounts numerous aspects of her life in the essay she wrote about her upbringing, including her mother's mental instability and the terrible death of her intellectually challenged brother. Antoinette's narrative starts when she is a small child in Jamaica at the beginning of the nineteenth century. She resides on the dilapidated Coulibri Estate estate as the white daughter of former slave owners. After the adoption of the Emancipation Act of 1833, which released black slaves from their chains and resulted in the abolition of many white slave owners, her father, Mr. Cosway, allegedly drank himself to death, his finances in ruins. Five years had gone since that time. Throughout Antoinette's early years, tensions between the ailing white elite and the bankrupt servants they retain have been raging.

Antoinette resides at Coulibri Estate with her ailing younger brother Pierre, her widowed mother Annette, and chattering servants who appear to be largely accustomed to their employers' social snubs and misfortune. In segregation, Antoinette spends her days. The wealthy in Jamaica despise her mother, a stunning young woman who spends little time with her instead opting to sluggishly pace on the glaxis (the covered balcony) of the home. The one friend Antoinette has, Tia, who is the servant's daughter, unexpectedly turns against her.

One day, Antoinette finds her mother being visited by a group of elegant people from Spanish Town, the island's equivalent of a posh metropolis. One of them is an Englishman by the name of Mr. Mason who approaches Annette about getting married after a brief romance. Antoinette and Pierre remain in Spanish Town with their aunt Cora while Mr. Mason and Annette are on their honeymoon in Trinidad. In the near future, Mr. Mason has hired new employees and had the estate refurbished and brought back to its former splendour. The emancipated blacks, however, are becoming more dissatisfied, and one night they demonstrate outside the home. They enter the house with torches, accidentally setting the house on fire, severely injuring Pierre. Antoinette scurries after Tia and her mother as the family escapes the home. Tia hits Antoinette with a sharp rock, cutting her forehead and causing blood to flow. Antoinette becomes extremely unwell for six weeks as a result of the night's events. She awakens to discover that Pierre has passed away and that she is in Aunt Cora's custody. After the shock of the fire, Annette's lunacy, which had been slowly emerging over the years, completely manifested itself. When Antoinette pays a visit to her mother, who is now in the care of a black couple, she finds a ghostly form that she scarcely knows. Annette pushes Antoinette away when she comes closer.

Following that, Antoinette enrolls at a convent school with other young Creole girls. For a number of years, she resides at the nuns' school where she studies everything from appropriate ladylike posture to the harrowing biographies of female saints. Aunt Cora relocated to England for a year, while Mr. Mason spends months travelling and just occasionally visiting from Jamaica. As a result, Antoinette's family has all but abandoned her. During his visit, Mr. Mason informs Antoinette that friends from England will be arriving the following winter, when she will be seventeen. In his eyes, Antoinette is a cultured, marriageable woman who should be introduced to the world. At the end of Part One, Antoinette's commentary becomes increasingly jumbled, hopping between present-tense accounts of her existence at the convent to jumbled recollections of previous occurrences.

Part two switches between her husband and Antoinette's points of view when they are on their "honeymoon" trip to Granbois, Dominica. The growing mistrust between the married couple and Daniel's antics, who poses as Antoinette's brother and attacks her character and mental health in exchange for money, might be the starting points for Antoinette's demise. The issue is made worse by Christophine, Antoinette's former nurse, who is openly suspicious of the Englishman and who believes the vile rumours about her. He later confesses to being unfaithful to her. Antoinette's already unsteady mental and emotional condition is upset by her growing feeling of mistrust as well as the terrible sadness of her failed marriage.

Part two is told by an anonymous Englishman who is Antoinette's husband. Following the traditional wedding ceremony in Spanish Town, Charles and Antoinette spend their honeymoon at an estate that had belonged to Antoinette's mother on one of the Windward Islands. As they travel into the sinisterly named town of Massacre, he starts to have second thoughts about the union. He authorised the marriage of his new wife days earlier when Mr. Mason's son, Richard Mason, promised him £30,000 if he proposed. He knows very little about her. He accepted to the marriage out of need for money.

The man gradually becomes uneasy around the staff and his odd young bride as the couple arrives to Granbois, Antoinette's inherited estate. Christophine, Antoinette's surrogate mother and a servant with a lot of power in the home, and the guy become less friendly. Soon after, one of the illegal offspring of old Cosway, Daniel Cosway, sends the guy a menacing letter. The letter, which has a poisonous tone, forewarns of Antoinette's immorality by alleging that she is depraved by nature and that craziness runs in her family. The man starts to see indications of Antoinette's mental condition after reading this letter.

Antoinette requests a mystical love potion from Christophine after sensing her spouse despises her. Christophine reluctantly concurs. They had a heated argument that night when the man inquires about Antoinette's history. The next morning, he awakens convinced that he has been poisoned, and he later spends the night with Amelie, a servant girl who saves his life. While seated in the adjacent room, Antoinette can hear everything. The following morning, Antoinette departs for Christophine's. She appears to be completely insane when she returns. She asks the guy to stop calling her "Bertha," a moniker he has given her without reason, while being intoxicated and out of control. Then Antoinette bites her husband's arm, causing blood to dribble. Christophine screams at him for being cruel as she collapses and slips into bed. He makes the decision to take Antoinette out of Jamaica that evening.

The third and shortest part of the book is written from Antoinette's, who is now Bertha, point of view. She is currently confined to Thorn Field Hall, the Rochester mansion she refers to as "the Great House," specifically "the attic." Her relationship with Grace, the servant tasked with keeping watch over her, and her ever-declining non-life with the Englishman as he hides her from the public are all explored in the novel. He makes hollow promises to see her more, but when he leaves to seek connections with other women—and finally with the young governess Jane Eyre—he actually sees her less. Antoinette/Bertha makes the decision to commit suicide, thinking it to be her destiny and narrating her actions in a stream of consciousness. Antoinette is a hidden hostage with no concept of time or location; when Grace tells her she is in England, she cannot even believe it. When Richard Mason visits her, Antoinette is violent and enraged and pulls a knife on him. She then lost all recollection of the event. Taking Grace's keys and visiting the basement areas of the home are recurring themes in Antoinette's dreams. She starts the home on fire and ignites candles in her fantasy. She had this dream

one night, and when she awakes, she feels she must act on it. The story concludes with Antoinette leaving her confinement upstairs while carrying a light.

The complicated psychological repercussions of human nature known as "segregation" on those it owns and the environments in which it resides are covered in further detail in the novel. Additionally, by experimenting with storytelling and delving into the unconscious, it has more to say. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the title of Rhys' book, is the first to allude to the basic essence of the human mind. According to legend, the Sargasso Sea is halfway between the Atlantic Ocean and the West Indies. It is renowned for having convoluted currents that make navigating extremely challenging for sailors. McKenzie describes: "Like the Sargasso Sea, a mass of seaweed surrounded by swirling currents in the Atlantic Ocean, novel's troubled heroine is suspended between England and the West Indies and belongs fully to neither" (1). Rhys employs the Sargasso Sea as a metaphor for the complex currents of the human psyche that relate to race, sex, and isolation. In contrast, she makes an effort to show how her heroine, Antoinette, represents the "centre" of the cyclical nature of the human brain. It's fascinating to note that identifying the "centre" predominates in Caribbean works that look at topics like segregation, exploration, and slavery. Howells in Kamila Vrankova describes the whole narrative as the psychologically traumatic effect of segregation and alienation. She writes, "Accordingly, Jean Rhys's story of alienation is centered on two crucial metaphors: the sea and the island. The sea as an image of separation and an increasing distance suggests the split in both space and time: the conflict between different civilisations, between the past and the present... as well as between the inner world of the individual and the surrounding reality...." (123-124).

Conclusion

Finally, it might be said that Rhys's heroine, like the author, is caught between two competing universes. Saying that her mentality is caught between these two worlds while being a part of neither is adequate. She experiences racial and gender estrangement, as well as hostility, at the hands of persons she mistakenly believes to be her own people, which has led some to label her a madwoman. The human mind is torn asunder by complicated human sentiments, which form complex human reactions to alienation situations, much like the complex currents of the Sargasso Sea. Although biases based on race, gender, and religion are outward signs of man's evil nature, the true cause of estrangement in people is due to a few psychiatric disorders that are difficult to identify and difficult to treat. Antoinette is not "mad" prior to her seclusion; rather, her physical and emotional alienation from society and her husband causes her to lose control and erupt in violent rages, allowing the reader to observe civilization's detrimental effects on a person.

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