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Patriarchal madness

-Patriarchal oppression and madness in Jean Rhys's *Wide
Sargasso Sea*

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Introduction

Patriarchy, madness and colonialism are central concerns in Jean Rhys's novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which was published in England by André Deutsch in 1966. Rhys wrote this novel as an answer to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; Rhys wanted to give the female character Bertha, Mr Rochester's foreign wife, a life since Bertha was only portrayed as a "mad ghost" in Brontë's novel (Harrison 128). Rhys's main female character is named Antoinette, but she is a representation of Brontë's Bertha before her arrival in England to her husband Mr Rochester's estate, Thornfield Hall. The first and the second parts of Rhys's novel are set in the British West Indies of the early nineteenth century, and the third part is set in England. The first part is narrated by the main female character, Antoinette, in which she describes her tragic childhood with rejection and racial conflicts. The second part is told by her husband, Mr Rochester,¹ in which he uses his patriarchal power to dominate, control and diminish his wife who finally goes mad. The third part is once again told by Antoinette, now "mad" and locked up in the attic of her husband's house in England. The story ends with Antoinette dreaming that she burns down his house and commits suicide.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Mr Rochester is described as a man who wants to stay in control and keep his patriarchal and colonial position of power, while Antoinette is described as an innocent being who seeks love and appreciation. Geert Hofstede in his *Masculinity and Femininity: The Taboo Dimensions of National Cultures*, defines the male stereotype as active and strong while the female stereotype is passive and weak (109). Hofstede's study shows that a masculine society is tough and aggressive; men are focused on material success while females are considered to be modest and tender beings concerned with the quality of life (6-7). Hofstede's ideas can be applied to both Mr Rochester and Antoinette; several critics have discussed how Mr Rochester is more active than the passive Antoinette. Antoinette's innocence has even been discussed as the reason why her marriage to Mr Rochester fails. I will discuss and question these critics' views of the two characters in my analysis of the novel.

In this essay I focus on the themes of patriarchy and madness since I find their connection particularly interesting in Rhys's novel. Patriarchal domination

¹ I will call him Mr Rochester, although he is named nowhere in the novel; the reader only knows of his name because of the connection to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

and control of women reduces female self esteem and can, *Wide Sargasso Sea* suggests, lead to madness. I have studied critical texts about Rhys's topics of patriarchy and madness to support and test my thesis, but I have also included discussions about colonialism, racial conflicts and cultural differences since these are important if one is to understand the characters of the novel fully. The cultural differences between the main characters Antoinette and her English husband, Mr Rochester, create a wide gap between them, a gap they will never bridge. Rhys's novel thus not only discusses madness and patriarchy; it also foregrounds different perspectives on colonialism.

"Madness" is problematic to define, since it can be interpreted in various ways. Madness can be viewed as both a disorder of the brain and a social phenomenon. A person's cultural differences in norms and values can be looked upon as madness but madness can also be a consequence of oppression in society, such as patriarchal oppression. David Cooper writes that "one does not go mad but is driven mad by others" (Foucault viii) and this is, in my opinion, what happens to Antoinette. I will examine the definition of madness; what is considered to be madness? Is a person who acts outside the dominant norm of society to be considered mad? Using feminist theories and Foucault's work *Madness and Civilization* I will establish the patriarchal structure of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in order to verify my thesis that Antoinette eventually goes "mad" because of her husband's patriarchal oppression.

My thesis is that the patriarchal Mr Rochester deliberately drives Antoinette "mad" by oppressing her with his patriarchal male superiority and dominance. I will use the social definition of madness in order to explain how Mr Rochester drives Antoinette mad, since I do not believe her "madness" is a disease of her mind. I will show that Mr Rochester considers Antoinette to be "mad" because she does not act according to his English Victorian norms of repressed female sexuality; he thus ascribes to her qualities of "madness". These cultural differences in norms and values derive from colonialism as well; Antoinette is colonized by her British husband who tries to alienate her from herself and from her own culture. I will use the term alienation to express Antoinette's feeling of non-belonging; her patriarchal husband, I will show, separates her from her own identity. I will further explain how the rejection by the unloving Mr Rochester makes Antoinette miserable; his cruel behavior towards her diminishes her self esteem and makes it easier for him to break her down. I will also examine how Mr Rochester converts Antoinette's activity into passivity

throughout the novel. Antoinette is active at first; she tries to resist her husband's domination by arguing with him, but his oppression makes her more and more passive. This changes in the third part of the novel, though, when Antoinette regains her activity. I will further explain that her "madness" is a consequence of an unhealthy patriarchal society. Although Mr Rochester's cruel behavior towards Antoinette may derive from his hatred towards his father, who rejected him, a patriarchal society still allows and accepts his behavior. Thus I explain the patriarchal society to be unhealthy; it is a society that allows the oppression of women.

I start by defining patriarchy and Victorian sexual norms and values, in order to explain how they interact with Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Then I give a short summary of Foucault's discussions about madness, and finally I look at how the issue of colonialism has affected Rhys's novel.

Central Theoretical Concepts: Patriarchy, Madness and Colonialism

Patriarchy

Maria Olausson explains in her work *Three Types of Feminist Criticism* how woman, through cultural constructions, has been considered as "the other" in relation to man. The focus on ideology as the main reason behind women's oppression leads to a distinction between sex as a biological category and gender, which is a social construction (21). Despite improvements in women's situation, there are still inequalities between the sexes in most societies of today, because societies remain patriarchal.

The word "patriarchy" comes from Greek; *patria* means father and *arché* means rule, and thus patriarchy means rule of the father. The anthropological definition of patriarchy is that men tend to dominate in society through their positions of power; the majority of higher economic, political, industrial, financial, religious and social positions are governed by men. In gender studies patriarchy refers to a social organization marked by the supremacy of one or more male figures or men in general; women and children are subordinated in this system (Wikipedia, Patriarchy). Maria Olausson uses in her work the definition of patriarchy from the Webster Dictionary: "Patriarchy is a social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in class of family in both domestic and religious functions, the legal dependence of wife or wives and children and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male

line” (Olaussen 102). Feminists of most persuasions believe patriarchy to be a system valuing power over life, control over pleasure and dominance over happiness, and they examine how gender interacts with ethnicity, power and social class (Wikipedia, Patriarchy).

In order to discuss why Mr Rochester assigns “mad” features to Antoinette, because of her sexuality, I will explain below how the Victorians looked upon sexuality. Queen Victoria (1819-1901) married her first cousin, Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in 1840. He influenced her to adopt his conservative ideals and values, which later became significant for the Victorian era. Her marriage to Albert also turned the independent monarch, Victoria into a devoted mother and wife (Corey and Ochoa 468-70). Albert made Victoria value private life; she stayed at home most of the time and was at the centre of family life (Wilson 57).

In 1861, Albert died and Victoria was devastated. To prove how devoted she was to her husband, she mourned for the rest of her life (Corey and Ochoa 468-70).

The Victorians tried to control the spread of venereal diseases by creating the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864. It was commonly accepted that soldiers and sailors needed prostitutes, and thus it was the prostitutes who were blamed for spreading the diseases and not the men who bought their favours. It was considered a greater sin to be a prostitute than to be the one who bought their favours; they were thought of as “fallen women”. The Contagious Diseases Acts meant that any woman who was found nearby the garrison areas could be arrested (Wilson 308).

The people of the Victorian era, 1837-1901, were considered to be prudish, repressed, and old fashioned ([Victorianweb/Victor4](#)). In the early days of the Victorian era, women were thought of as weak, innocent and non-sexual beings. Men were represented as sinful and lustful beings who took advantage of the vulnerable women. In the later half of the Victorian era, men were no longer blamed for their sexuality; they were thought of as slaves to their sexual appetites. Sexually active women, though, were thought of as “fallen women” ([Victorianweb/sextheory](#)).

In the next section I will briefly explain the French philosopher Michel Foucault’s discussions of madness in his *Madness and Civilization*. His ideas are important in order to discuss Antoinette’s “madness” as a social phenomenon and not a disease of her mind.

Madness

Wide Sargasso Sea deals centrally with the theme of madness which I will discuss by using theories from the French philosopher Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. Foucault is known for his critiques of various social institutions: psychiatry, medicine and the prison. The English edition of *Madness and Civilization* is an abridged version of *Folie et déraison*, which was originally published in 1961. This was Foucault's first major book, which he wrote when he was the director of Maison de France in Sweden (Wikipedia/Foucault). Foucault demonstrates in his work that madness is a social phenomenon.

Foucault discusses in *Madness and Civilization* how madness has been looked upon in different historical eras. He begins with the Middle Ages when lepers were excluded from society. Foucault argues that leprosy was replaced by madness. He goes on to discuss "The ship of fools" in the fifteenth century when mad people were sent away in ships. He further discusses the Great Confinement of seventeenth century Europe, when "unreasonable" members of society were locked up and institutionalized. In the eighteenth century madness came to be seen as the opposite of reason and later with Freud as a mental illness. Foucault believes that madness is an invented disease; it is a disease of our civilization (viii).

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette's "madness" can be interpreted as a social phenomenon; she is driven "mad" by her patriarchal husband. Her "madness" is a consequence of Mr Rochester's oppression in a diseased patriarchal society, a society that allows and accepts cruelties towards women. Mr Rochester's oppression of Antoinette is not only a consequence of his patriarchal upbringing; it also derives from his role as a colonizer, which I will discuss in the next section.

Colonialism

The themes of colonialism and racial antagonism in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are important in order to explain the cultural differences between Antoinette and her husband, Mr Rochester. The West Indies was still a British colony in the late 1830's, around the time when the novel is set. The white west colonized the black people with a belief that they were superior, more powerful and civilized than the "inferior, primitive and less developed" black societies. This attitude derives, according to Rosemarie Buikema and Anneke Smelik, from Christian ideology with its hierarchical way of

thinking; white symbolized the Good God while black symbolized the threatening and demonic Devil (136-37).

Teresa F. O'Connor enlightens us in her work, *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels*, about the symbolism of the Sargasso Sea that is used in Rhys's novel. The Sargasso Sea is situated in the North Atlantic between the West Indies and the Azores and divides the opposite worlds of the old and the new hemispheres. In Rhys's novel it symbolizes the divisions between whites and blacks, colonizers and colonized, evil and good, the English and the West Indian Creoles, hate and love, power and submissiveness, men and women, devils and innocents, and the possessors and the possessed (145).

Since Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set in the period right after the abolition of slavery, her novel deals with the confusions of the post-slavery area (Howells 110). The slavery issue created severe conflicts between the white and the black populations of the West Indies. Antoinette's mother, Annette, who is a white Creole from French Martinique, married an old slave-owner in Jamaica. This connection with a slave-owning family makes Antoinette alienated from the other people of the island. She does not belong anywhere; she is rejected and despised by both the black and the white population. Antoinette explains her feeling of non-belonging to her husband, Mr Rochester, when she explains the song the black servant girl, Amélie, sings about Antoinette:

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. (Rhys 64)

The feeling of not belonging anywhere alienates Antoinette and makes her more vulnerable, which affects her relationship with her husband. She is desperate to belong somewhere and believes that Mr Rochester will help her fit in the society from which she has been rejected. But he does not love her and alienates her even more; this finally drives her "mad".

Mr Rochester's role as a colonizer makes Antoinette oppressed in two ways; she is oppressed by her patriarchal marriage and by her husband's colonizing

values. The connection between cultural conflicts and gender is that they are built upon the same type of hierarchical order; in a patriarchy the father or the man is at the top of the hierarchy and the woman and her children are at the bottom. In a colonized country the colonizers (the British in *Wide Sargasso Sea*) are at the top of the hierarchical pyramid, and the colonized (the West Indians in *Wide Sargasso Sea*) are at the bottom. A hierarchical power structure makes the people at the top superior to the ones at the bottom. The social power structure of the colonial days, made the British superior to the West Indians, whom they colonized. The same power structure exists in a patriarchy, where men are superior to women and children. Women, children and the colonized are thus all oppressed by the top hierarchy. In Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* Mr Rochester serves as a double oppressor; coming from England he stands for British colonialism but since he is also male, he is at the top of the patriarchal hierarchy. Thus, Antoinette's Creole heritage and her sex make her doubly oppressed by Mr Rochester.

Analysis

Patriarchal Structures in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

The patriarchal power structures in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* are exposed as dominant and unhealthy. They are apparent in economic, legal, family and educational systems in Rhys's novel, which affect all of the characters since they all belong to a patriarchal society. Mr Rochester does not only represent patriarchal ideals; he is also a Victorian who believes that female sexuality should be controlled. The patriarchal power structure of Rhys's novel is important to examine in order to show how it has oppressed Antoinette her whole life, and how it has helped produce her "madness".

The economic inequality in a patriarchy is apparent when considering the situation of Antoinette's mother, Annette, who is economically dependent upon men. After her first husband's death, she becomes so poor that she cannot support her family, and her economic situation is only solved when she marries Mr Mason. Maria Olausen argues that Annette signifies the gender-ideology in the patriarchal economic system, since she needs to be provided for by men. She uses her beauty as her only means to compete with other women in search for English protection (Olausen 103) and economic support.

Marriage was a way of becoming economically supported at the time when *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes place. The feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote in 1792 about patriarchal education systems in her *Vindications of the Rights of Woman*, questioned why only men were prepared for professions and not women. She believed this was the reason for women's need for marriage; they had to marry in order to be economically supported (Wollstonecraft 150). *Wide Sargasso Sea* contradicts Wollstonecraft's theories on marriage in one sense; Mr Rochester is the one who needs to marry Antoinette since he, as the youngest son, will not inherit from his father. By marrying Antoinette, he secures her fortune and she becomes completely economically dependent upon him.

Patriarchal law prohibits women from inheriting money if there is a son in the family; inheritance runs in the male line. Mr Mason's son, Richard Mason, represents patriarchal law since he, after his father's death, becomes the lawful provider and protector of Antoinette. He makes her decisions and arranges her marriage to Mr Rochester, without her consent (Olaussen 108-9).

In most patriarchal family structures, the father has authority over his wife and his children, who are economically and legally dependent upon him. Women are raised to believe in the supremacy of the father and thus the patriarchal family structure survives over time. Mr Rochester uses his patriarchal power to drive Antoinette mad; she is dependent upon him in the patriarchal family structure (both legally and economically) and this makes it almost impossible for her to leave him.²

As noted, the patriarchal education system of the eighteenth century was criticized by Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote that men preserved women's innocence by keeping them ignorant (131). She argued that men and women would be equal if they were educated in comparable manners (124) and she scorns Rousseau's ideas about education in his *Emilius*:

'O how lovely,' exclaims Rousseau, speaking of Sophia, 'is her ignorance! Happy is he who is destined to instruct her! She will never

² In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the family nurse, Christophine, does not live according to a patriarchal family structure. She is the only free and independent female character in Rhys's novel; she supports herself economically, lives alone and serves no man. She criticizes Antoinette's marriage since it has made Antoinette dependent upon her husband (Olaussen 105).

pretend to be the tutor of her husband, but will be content to be his pupil. Far from attempting to subject him to her taste, she will accommodate herself to his. She will be more estimable to him, than if she was learned, he will have a pleasure in instructing her. (Wollstonecraft, fn 137-38)

Wollstonecraft criticizes Rousseau for naturalizing the inequalities between men and women in the field of knowledge; in a patriarchy the man is the superior and educated being who tutors his ignorant wife and not the other way around.

As a Victorian, patriarchal Englishman, Mr Rochester has difficulty accepting his wife's superior knowledge about the West Indies. Since he is a novice to her world, Antoinette tries to teach him about its nature and life. He chooses, though, to maintain his superiority by resisting her advice; he believes it to be a sign of weakness and inferiority to be tutored by a woman. When he tries to teach Antoinette about England, she annoys him by continuing to be convinced of the West Indies' greater beauty compared to the industrialized England:

If she was a child she was not a stupid child but an obstinate one. She often questioned me about England and listened attentively to my answers, but I was certain that nothing I said made much difference. Her mind was already made up. . . . I could not change them [her fixed ideas] and probably nothing would. Reality might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her, but it would not be reality. It would be only a mistake, a misfortune, a wrong path taken, her fixed ideas would never change.

Nothing that I told her influenced her at all. Die then. Sleep. It is all I can give you... (Rhys 58)

Mr Rochester is very irritated with his wife for resisting his attempt to educate her. He feels that he cannot influence her and bitterly states that he has nothing to offer her. He fears to acknowledge his lack of knowledge since that would lead to a loss of control. In line with Rousseau's ideas, Mr Rochester feels contempt towards his wife for trying to tutor him; he is expected to be the one to educate her and not the other way around. Teresa F. O'Connor explains that Mr Rochester, who comes from the male-identified England, is protected by Antoinette when he lives in her female-

identified West Indies. I agree with O'Connor that their roles are reversed and that Mr Rochester is afraid of finding himself in a female role in a female world (148-49).

In the next section I will discuss how madness is a result of patriarchy. I will begin with defining "madness" and discuss how Michel Foucault's ideas about "madness" can be applied to Antoinette. Then I will explain Mr Rochester's motives and methods for breaking Antoinette down and driving her "mad". I will further explain Antoinette's psychological breakdown and how she rebels against her husband and his patriarchal oppression.

Madness as a Result of Patriarchy

Michel Foucault and Social Definitions of Madness

In Wikipedia's dictionary, mental illness is described as a disorder of the brain which causes disruption in a person's way of thinking, feeling, moods and ability to relate to others (Wikipedia, Mental Illness). Wikipedia also questions this definition by discussing "madness" from a cultural perspective; insanity does not necessarily have to be a disorder of the mind but can also be a different way of behavior, a behavior not considered acceptable to dominant social and cultural norms. This implies that what is considered as madness by some might not be considered as madness by others (Wikipedia, Madness). For this reason "madness" is a term that must be used very carefully, since its interpretation can vary.

Michel Foucault believes madness to be an invented disease and therefore a disease of our civilization (Foucault viii). Those who act outside the dominant norm of society are often thought of as "madmen" since they do not act and behave like the mainstream. Foucault questions the normative frameworks of society and discusses how madness is considered to diverge from the norm. Foucault does not deal with gender issues. However, since women are considered to be a deviation from the patriarchal norm of society (where man is the norm), female "madness" is a double deviation from the norm. Women are not part of patriarchal power structures and are therefore more vulnerable than men. In Antoinette's case the issue of normative frameworks is important; I do not interpret her "madness" as a disorder of her brain but rather as a result of patriarchal oppression.

Foucault draws attention to how the men of reason (the "sane") experienced and treated the men of unreason (the "madmen"). He argues that until the

seventeenth century, madness was brought out into the open in order to punish it. This changed, though, when imprisonment started to be utilized as a function to prevent madness from turning into a public affair and producing a scandal. Madmen were hidden away so that their families and the Church would not be ashamed (62-63). As Foucault puts it: "All those forms of evil that border on unreason must be thrust into secrecy" (64). Confinement was also a way of trying to organize madness (Foucault 65). These arguments can be applied to Mr Rochester's fear of scandal. When Christophine advises Antoinette to leave her husband and go to Martinique, she replies that "he would not give me any money to go away and he would be furious if I asked him. There would be a scandal if I left him and he hates scandal" (Rhys 71). In my opinion Antoinette is imprisoned. In the West Indies Mr Rochester does not want her to leave him for fear of scandal since a woman is not supposed to leave her husband, and in England Antoinette is confined to his attic in order to avoid scandal. Antoinette is imprisoned by the patriarchal rules of her marriage, which eventually leads to her "madness".

Foucault further explains how the fear of a scandal made people treat the "madmen" as non-human beings. They were assigned animal features; the animal in man became his madness. The animality that rages in a mad person takes away what is human in him (69) and makes the madman invulnerable and preserved from disease, just like nature has done with real animals. Insane animality can only be mastered by discipline or brutalizing (70), and when reducing the madman to an animal, the scandal is eliminated since the human being in him is gone.

Foucault also points out how many physicians used to believe that too many extended excitations without repose could lead to madness (85). This can be applied to Antoinette's mother, Annette, who was driven "mad" by others. She is rejected by the people of her island, she witnesses her home Coulibri burn down and she loses her only son. These incidents were revengeful acts carried out by the black people of their town, since they despised Antoinette's family for being ex-slave owners. This finally drives Annette beyond sense. Christophine tries to explain Annette's "madness" to Mr Rochester:

They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husband

he go off, he leave her. They won't let me see her. I try, but no. They won't let Antoinette see her. In the end- mad I don't know- she give up, she care for nothing. (Rhys 101)

Too many traumatic incidents made Annette "mad"; Christophine argues that she was driven insane. The death of her son finally drove Annette over the edge; she lost both her hope and her sanity. This also shows how madness can be a social phenomenon; a person can be driven mad by others. Antoinette's madness is also a social phenomenon, induced by Mr Rochester's cruel patriarchal oppression.

In the next section I will discuss Mr Rochester's motives for driving Antoinette mad. I will examine further his methods; how he convinces himself of Antoinette's madness and justifies his cruel behavior towards her.

Mr Rochester's Motives and Methods

The definition of patriarchy as a system valuing power over life, control over pleasure and dominance over happiness (Wikipedia, Patriarchy), are all values that can be applied to Mr Rochester, who is a dominant man. His cruel treatment of Antoinette does not derive solely from his patriarchal upbringing, however, since all men in a patriarchy do not treat their women cruelly and drive them "mad". I agree with Teresa F. O'Connor's arguments about Mr Rochester's cruel treatment of Antoinette; she argues that his cruelties derive from his own rejection by his father, and Antoinette becomes his scapegoat for the hate he feels towards him (162). Although Mr Rochester's cruelties derive from his hatred of his father, his cruelties are still approved of by the patriarchal society. He is, through patriarchal norms, allowed to treat his wife disrespectfully.

Thomas Staley argues that Antoinette is to blame for her failed marriage to Mr Rochester. Staley considers Antoinette to be hollow; she lacks an instinct for survival and understanding of human nature and the world. He further explains that Antoinette stays in the world of her childhood; her innocence and limited capacity for understanding are the reasons why there can never be a mature union between her and Mr Rochester (115-16). I agree that Antoinette's character is innocent; she is gay and playful in the beginning of her marriage and she does not realize that her husband married her for her money and not for love. But I disagree with Staley that Antoinette is hollow; I consider her to be a rather passionate character, who longs to be loved, as

I will demonstrate below. The reason why she stays in the world of her childhood is that she has no other choice; women of the early nineteenth century could not move anywhere they wanted. Neither do I consider Antoinette to have a limited capacity for understanding; she is not ignorant since she possesses greater knowledge of the West Indies than her husband, and still wants to learn about his life in England. Mr Rochester, by contrast, lacks understanding of the world. He comes to the West Indies with a closed mind and chooses to stay ignorant of Antoinette's world by refusing her attempts to introduce him to it. Thus Mr Rochester, with his patriarchal oppression, is the reason for their failed marriage.

Teresa F. O'Connor argues that Mr Rochester is more active than Antoinette; his actions have effects while Antoinette is always the receiver of action. O'Connor further argues that Mr Rochester acts as the colonizing English: aggressive, controlling, urban, and a warrior that captures wealth, property and people (170). Geert Hofstede's definition of masculine societies as active, strong and aggressive can also be applied to Mr Rochester, who possesses all of these characteristics. The reader knows, though, that he also feels fear and weakness, since he writes about the importance of repressing his feelings: "How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted" (Rhys 64). By hiding his fear he can show the stronger, tougher and more aggressive sides of himself. He keeps his feelings at bay in order to maintain his superiority and control.

Mr Rochester's concern with material success is evident. He married Antoinette for her money and does not love her. Still he is determined to own her in order to show his patriarchal power. He considers her to belong to him and she is therefore not allowed to leave him and love someone else:

I tell you she loves no one, anyone. I could not touch her. Excepting as the hurricane will touch that tree- and break it. You say I did? No. That was love's fierce play. Now I'll do it. She'll not laugh in the sun again. She'll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass. So pleased, so satisfied. 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. (Rhys 107)

Despite the hatred he feels towards Antoinette, he considers her to belong to him. He refuses to let her leave him and lead an independent life, since that would result in him losing his patriarchal power and dominance over his wife.

His patriarchal and strict Victorian upbringing makes him obsessed with control and dominance. Although he is attracted to his wife, he does not want to fall in love with her since that would lead to a loss of control, dominance and power. Instead he prefers to have authority and maintain his patriarchal power. Although Mr Rochester married Antoinette for her money, he is still attracted to the exotic beauty of her and her island. He is careful, though, not to fall for their charm and thus denies the attraction he feels:

I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, 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. (Rhys 111)

This quotation can also illustrate Mr Rochester's role as a colonizer. As an Englishman, he wants to colonize both his wife and her island. His lack of knowledge about her world makes him fear that he is losing his colonial power. He feels alienated from her since he, as a colonizer, is not part of her world and does not understand it. Thus he tries to protect himself by condemning Antoinette and her world and acting blind to the attractions he feels.

Mr Rochester is not surprised when he receives a letter from Antoinette's half brother, Daniel Cosway, in which Daniel has written about Antoinette's "lunatic" mother and her "crazy drunkard" of a father. Mr Rochester reflects about this letter:

It was as if I'd expected it, been waiting for it. ... [he gets up] I walked stiffly nor could I force myself to think. Then I passed an orchid with long sprays of golden-brown flowers. One of them touched my cheek and I remembered picking some for her one day. 'They are like you,' I told her. Now I stopped, broke a spray off and trampled it into the mud. (Rhys 62)

He is relieved to be in possession of what he believes to be the truth; coming to the West Indies as a stranger he needs to maintain his role as a superior patriarch which he cannot do unless he knows what others already know. Mr Rochester has a feeling of something hostile and unknown on the island and he tells his wife that “I feel very much a stranger here” and “I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side” (Rhys 82). The letter relieves him from his fear of losing control since it gives him a logical explanation for his confusions.

Antoinette’s attempt to make her husband love her by seducing him into having sexual intercourse with her is ineffective. She slips a “love potion” into his wine and they make love, but when he wakes up afterwards he reflects: “I woke in the dark after dreaming that I was buried alive, and when I was awake the feeling of suffocation persisted” (Rhys 87). The suffocation he feels derives from finding himself in the power of his wife and not the other way around; he has lost control over his wife. Thomas Staley argues that this is why he takes revenge on Antoinette by sleeping with the black servant girl, Amélie. He believes this brings back his patriarchal manliness and his ability to dominate and destroy Antoinette (114). I agree with Staley on this point, but also believe Mr Rochester’s infidelity is a way for him to demonstrate his patriarchal power over Antoinette and show her that she can not control him.

As Foucault has shown, the definition of madness can differ depending on different cultural norms of a society. Mr Rochester considers Antoinette to be “mad” because she does not act like a Victorian woman. She acts outside the normative frameworks of a Victorian society; she rages at her husband when she is angry and expresses her sexuality openly. These are signs of “madness”, according to the Victorian Mr Rochester. Her sexuality frightens him since female sexuality is oppressed in his Victorian England; this is why he attaches qualities of “madness” to his wife. When Antoinette finds out about her husband’s infidelity, she gets drunk and rages at him. Mr Rochester reflects over his unfortunate choice of wife and feels sorry for himself:

Pity. Is there none for me? Tied to a lunatic for life- a drunken lying lunatic-gone her mother’s way.

[Christophine's voice echoes in his head] '*She love you so much, so much. She thirsty for you. Love her a little like she say. It's all that you can love- a little.*'

Sneer to the last, Devil. Do you think that I don't know? She thirsts for *anyone*- not for me... She'll loosen her black hair, and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl. She'll not care who she's loving). She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would- or could. *Or could.*
(Rhys 106)

Mr Rochester is convinced that Antoinette is a mad woman, although her "madness" is rather a cultural difference between the two of them; for a Victorian, Antoinette's behavior can be described as promiscuous. Mr Rochester is repelled by his wife's behavior, since she does not act like the Victorian women, who oppressed their feelings; they did not get drunk, rage at their husbands or try to seduce them (as shown in the example with the "love potion"). Mr Rochester fears that his Victorian ideal of a devoted wife will never be fulfilled since, as he says, "She thirsts for *anyone*". He doubts Antoinette's fidelity because she does not act like an asexual Victorian woman; however, it is actually he who is unfaithful to her. He sleeps with the black servant-girl, although he is married to Antoinette, and then he blames her for being unfaithful and promiscuous. Mr Rochester's imagination that Antoinette is unfaithful derives from the fact that she does not act and behave like a Victorian woman, since she is passionate and expresses her sexuality openly; thus he decides that she must be "mad". The last words of the quote, "or could" proves Mr Rochester's patriarchal power over his wife; he decides what she can and can not do. The fact that he believes no sane woman *would* or *could* act however she wants serves as evidence of the male authority in a patriarchal system; a woman must act according to her husband's rules and norms.

Foucault's discussions of hysteria can be applied to Mr Rochester's ideas of Antoinette as a "mad" person. Hysteria was thought of as a female disease, often related to passionate excitement, where women invent, exaggerate and repeat all the absurdities a disordered imagination is capable of (131-32). Mr Rochester is shocked that Antoinette rages at him and opposes his cruelties towards her. He reflects over her behavior: "Then she cursed me comprehensively, my eyes, my mouth, every member of my body, and it was like a dream in the large unfurnished room with the

candles flickering and this red-eyed wild-haired stranger who was my wife shouting obscenities at me” (Rhys 95). Mr Rochester is incredulous about Antoinette’s behavior; by opposing passionately his cruelties, she does not act according to the patriarchal norm of a passive woman. Thus Mr Rochester considers her to be “mad” and he might interpret her “madness” as hysteria. I do not consider Antoinette’s “madness” to be hysteria; it is rather a product of patriarchal oppression and rejection from her unloving husband. Since Antoinette is refused the love and appreciation she longs for, she acts her passions out; she yells and curses her husband for not loving her and instead being unfaithful to her. Antoinette’s “hysteria” is more accurately described as the passion she expresses for being mistreated by her husband.

In line with Foucault’s discussions of animality in madness, Mr Rochester tries to assign animality to his wife. He describes Antoinette degradingly by trying to destroy her human identity and make her more animal-like. When Antoinette comes out of her room and rages about her husband’s infidelity with Amélie, he diminishes Antoinette’s human features in order to explain her madness: “Her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen. Her feet were bare . . .” (Rhys 93). This way of assigning “animality” to a “mad” person also appears when Antoinette, as a child, is being bullied by two children on her way to school:

Look the crazy girl, you crazy like your mother. Your aunt frightened to have you in the house. She send you for the nuns to lock up. Your mother walk about with no shoes and stockings on her feet, she *sans culottes*. She try to kill her husband and she try to kill you too that day you go to see her. She have eyes like zombie and you have eyes like zombie too. (Rhys 27)

Mr Rochester and the children eliminate Antoinette’s and her mother’s human features by describing them with uncombed and dull hair, inflamed, staring zombie eyes and bare feet. These are not considered to be appropriate features of a human being; they are more animal like. By turning “madmen” into animals, their human identities are removed and can only be re-established by discipline and brutality. Mr Rochester dehumanizes his wife in order to defend his own cruel behavior towards her.

In the next section I will look at the psychological breakdown of Antoinette. I will explain that Antoinette's behavior is not typically "female" from a patriarchal perspective, since she is not only passive and weak; she is also active and argues against her oppressive husband. Her activity changes, though, throughout the novel, since Mr Rochester forces her into a more passive role. I will furthermore examine how Mr Rochester uses his patriarchal power to drive his wife "mad".

Psychological Breakdown

Geert Hofstede defines "female" characteristics as passive and weak. Although Antoinette does show both passivity and weakness, since she stays with her abusive husband, she also possesses characteristics that are more "male": she is strong, determined, aggressive and active. I am of the same opinion as Teresa F. O'Connor that Mr Rochester is more active than Antoinette, but Antoinette's passivity is complex. As a woman of the early nineteenth century, she is the receiver of her husband's actions and cannot choose her own course of life, but she is still active since she does not let her husband rule and control her without a fight.

She becomes increasingly passive throughout the novel. In the beginning of her marriage to Mr Rochester she is active and differs from the "female" stereotype of passivity and weakness. She is vivid, happy and acts as Mr Rochester's tutor when she tries to teach him about her island and its culture. This disconcerts Mr Rochester who, as the superior male authority, is not prepared to be placed in a passive female role. Thomas Staley argues that Antoinette lacks an instinct for survival, but this is not true, since she does at first try to defend herself. When her husband tries to teach her about the lifestyle he finds correct, she argues against him in order to maintain her own ideals and values. She also fights to keep her husband when she finds out about his infidelity; she asks Christophine to help her with Obeah (voodoo) in order to make her husband love her. This is a rather radical action and not passive at all. Mr Rochester's continuous cruel behavior towards Antoinette, through infidelity, rejection, and alienation transforms her activity into passivity. He even makes her aphasic and finally drives her "mad". In order to examine how Mr Rochester uses his patriarchal power to drive Antoinette "mad", I will first discuss the rejection Antoinette has experienced her whole life.

As a female Creole in a patriarchal society, Antoinette has been rejected all her life. She is rejected first by her mother, who favored Antoinette's younger

brother (women in a patriarchy usually favored their sons), then by the people of her island who rejected her for being Creole and a former slave owner's daughter, and finally by her patriarchal husband, who married her for her money and not for love. These rejections have made Antoinette vulnerable, which makes it easier for Mr Rochester to drive her "mad". He rejects her despite her desire to be loved by him. Christophine is aware of Mr Rochester's attempt to destroy Antoinette and quarrels with him:

Everybody know that you marry her for her money and you take it all. And then you want to break her up, because you jealous of her. She is more better than you, she have better blood in her and she don't care for money-it's nothing for her. Oh I see that first time I look at you. You young but already you hard. You fool the girl. You make her think you can't see the sun for looking at her . . . You make love to her till she drunk with it, no rum could make her drunk like that, till she can't do without it. It's *she* can't see the sun any more. Only you see. But all you want is to break her up. (Rhys 98)

Mr Rochester can distance himself from Antoinette since he does not love her; this together with her vulnerability makes it easier for him to drive her "mad". Antoinette wishes that the rejection she has experienced her whole life will disappear when she marries Mr Rochester. She hopes that she will, through marriage, experience love and happiness. By pretending to love Antoinette in the beginning of their marriage, Mr Rochester uses his patriarchal power to make her feel falsely secure. His rejection thus hits her harder and will, through alienation, eventually lead to her "madness".

Alienation is the major reason for Antoinette's psychological breakdown. I use the term alienation to define Antoinette's feeling of non-belonging and her separation from her own identity. First Antoinette is alienated from the people of her island. Her heritage as a French Creole and a former slave owner's daughter make her feel alienated from the population of the island; she feels that she does not belong anywhere. This alienation increases when her mother marries Mr Mason, since his English presence provokes the people of the island even further (Olaussen 98). Secondly she is alienated by her husband, who exerts his patriarchal power in

marriage and tries to turn her into someone else. Mr Rochester alienates her by eliminating her identity and forcing a new one upon her.

By calling Antoinette “Bertha”, Mr Rochester takes away part of who Antoinette is and turns her into someone she cannot identify with. In Part Three of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette reflects about names: “Names matter, like when he wouldn’t call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass” (Rhys 117). Names matter because they are part of a person’s identity and through a person’s name he or she can be identified in a community. Mr Rochester also shows his colonial power when he eliminates his wife’s identity; as a colonizer he tries to force a British identity upon her.

The patriarchal Mr Rochester’s obsession to dominate and control his wife makes him alienate Antoinette from her own identity. Her female sexuality gives him a feeling of insecurity and fear. By calling Antoinette Bertha, he tries to eliminate Antoinette’s identity and turn her into a Victorian Englishwoman. He explains to Antoinette why he calls her Bertha: “it is a name I’m particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha” (Rhys 86). I believe the reason for his fondness of the name Bertha is that it is an English name; by calling her Bertha he alienates her from her West Indian identity and forces a British identity upon her instead. He tries to create a woman whom he can control, dominate and possess. Antoinette resents her new name, though, and wants her husband to stop calling her Bertha:

Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that’s obeh too (Rhys 94). [...] [Antoinette goes on] Do you know what you’ve done to me? It’s not the girl, not the girl [he had sex with]. But I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it. It’s just somewhere else where I have been unhappy . . . (Rhys 94-95)

Mr Rochester has, through his patriarchal position in their marriage, the power to destroy both Antoinette’s identity of soul and identity of place. Teresa F. O’Connor argues that the “mad” females in *Wide Sargasso Sea* turn their “madness” inwards (197). This is what happens to Antoinette; the destruction and alienation of her

identity leads to her “madness”. Being turned into someone else and losing the only place where she has felt happiness and safety, gives her nothing to identify with. She turns inwards and goes “mad”.

In the end of Part Two, when Mr Rochester and Antoinette are about to leave for England, he fears that he has gone too far; she does not express any feelings at all anymore. She has lost her vitality and acts completely passive. He fears that he has destroyed her beyond all knowledge. Although he eliminated her identity on purpose in order to turn her into an English Victorian wife, whom he can control, he fears that she is beyond repair and feels remorse:

She said she loved this place. This is the last she'll see of it. I'll watch for one tear, one human tear. Not that blank hating moonstruck face. I'll listen... If she says good-bye perhaps adieu. *Adieu*- like those old-time songs she sang. Always *adieu* (and all songs say it). If she too says it, or weeps, I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but *mine, mine*. What will I care for gods or devils or for Fate itself. If she smiles or weeps or both. *For me*. Antoinetta- I can be gentle too. Hide your face. Hide yourself but in my arms. You'll soon see how gentle. My lunatic. My mad girl. Here's a cloudy day to help you. No brazen sun. No sun... No sun. The weather's changed. (Rhys 107)

He is afraid that she is beyond his control now that she has turned inwards with her “madness”. Antoinette’s absence of expression when they are leaving the West Indies disturbs her husband; although he has destroyed her sense of self, he still feels that she is not completely in his power. Her passivity annoys him since he does not know her thoughts and cannot therefore control her feelings; he cannot master her mind. Furthermore, his patriarchal personality is evident in the phrase, “*Mine, mine*”; it indicates his obsession for material success, control and power. Her “madness” is less important than the fact that she belongs to him.

Mr Rochester’s obsession with control and domination derives from his patriarchal position. When he feels remorse for having alienated Antoinette’s from her own identity, he tells her that he has made a terrible mistake. Then he sees the hatred in her eyes and his own hate is brought up to the surface again:

If I was bound for hell let it be hell. No more false heavens. No more damned magic. You hate me and I hate you. We'll see who hates best. But first, first I will destroy your hatred. Now. My hate is colder, stronger, and you'll have no hate to warm yourself. You will have nothing. I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight. Nothing left but hopelessness. *Say die and I will die. Say die and watch me die.* (Rhys 110)

This quote demonstrates Mr Rochester's hatred and cruel personality. As soon as he sees a spark of emotion in Antoinette's eyes, he forgets about his feelings of remorse for having destroyed her. He wants to destroy her even more by eliminating every autonomous part of her; he wants complete control over her body and mind. By destroying her last spark of life, her hatred towards him, he turns Antoinette into an aphasic object. Mr Rochester is in control and can maintain his patriarchal power since Antoinette has now become passive; a quality woman in a patriarchy is supposed to possess.

Antoinette's alienation is completed in Part three of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, when she is dreaming that she is walking around her husband's house in England and burns it down. In her dream she sees her own reflection in a mirror: "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. I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of a tablecloth and I saw flames shoot up" (Rhys 123). Antoinette does not recognize her own reflection; she believes that the person looking back at her in the mirror is the ghost of the house that everyone is talking about. This is how much Mr Rochester has succeeded in alienating her; she does not even recognize her own reflection in the mirror anymore.

In the next section I will look at how Antoinette opposes the patriarchal oppression by rebelling against her oppressive husband. She finally regains her activity in the third part of the novel, and takes responsibility for her own life; she takes her destiny in her own hands.

Rebellion

Teresa F. O'Connor disagrees with other critics about the third part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Antoinette appears to burn down her husband's house in England and commit suicide; she does not believe that Antoinette's act of burning down the house is an act of rebellion and resistance. She believes it to be a passive act since Antoinette is unaware that her act is rebellious (168). When she appears to burn down his house, she is passive since she acts in a dream-like state of mind, without reason or rationalization (170).

I disagree with O'Connor that the apparent act of burning down Mr Rochester's house is a passive act. Antoinette does not really burn it down in her dream; she has a premonition in her dream that she sets his house on fire and commits suicide by jumping from the building. When she wakes up she is convinced of what she has to do: "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (Rhys 124). This statement is made by a woman perfectly awake with a clear mind. Antoinette's act of burning down his house is an active choice which brings her back from her apathy. This is an act of revenge that restores her agency that her husband had tried to eliminate.

Antoinette's rebellion against her patriarchal husband can be related to the incident when her childhood home, Coulibri, was burnt down. When Antoinette saw her home set on fire she thought: "When they had finished, there would be nothing left but blackened walls and the mounting stone. That was always left. That could not be stolen or burned" (Rhys 24). The everlasting walls and mounting stone can be compared to Antoinette's inner spirits. Despite her husband's efforts to destroy her identity and take away her sanity, he can never control her completely; she still has her own memories, thoughts and some of her own will left, which is displayed in her final act of revenge and rebellion against her oppressive husband. She sets herself free from patriarchal oppression and takes command over her own situation by deciding her own course of life or, as in this case, death. She decides to leave the oppressive world behind by choosing death instead of an imprisoned life, although the choice of death in order to be free may seem as a poor alternative. It does show, though, Antoinette's determination not to be governed and have someone else decide her destiny; by committing suicide she takes her destiny in her own hands.

Conclusion

In this essay I have examined how Antoinette is deliberately driven “mad” by her oppressive patriarchal husband. Her upbringing in a colonial and patriarchal society with racial conflicts also contributes to her “madness”; being a French Creole and daughter of a former slave owner makes her feel alienated and rejected by the people of the island. She feels that she does not belong anywhere and this makes her more vulnerable; it becomes easier for Mr Rochester to drive her “mad”.

The patriarchal society she lives in prohibits her from leading an independent life. Antoinette has always been controlled and governed by men; first her step-father, Mr Mason, provided for her and made her decisions, then his son Richard became her caretaker, and finally her husband controlled her. Since Antoinette lives in an unhealthy society with patriarchal norms and values, she has been brought up to depend upon men and live according to their patriarchal rules. She must obey her husband since she lives in a society where men and women do not have the same opportunities.

I have used the social definition of “madness” in order to explain how Mr Rochester drives Antoinette “mad”, since I do not consider her “madness” to be a disorder of her brain. Foucault’s discussions about madness as a disease of our civilization apply well to how I interpret Antoinette’s “madness”. It is a consequence of her husband’s oppression in the unhealthy patriarchal society they live in, a society that accepts Mr Rochester’s cruel behavior towards his wife.

Mr Rochester serves as a double oppressor; coming from England he stands for British colonialism, but since he is also male he is also at the top of the patriarchal hierarchy. His major concern is to maintain his patriarchal position to control and exercise power over Antoinette. He oppresses and drives her “mad” through rejection and alienation; by calling her Bertha he tries to turn her into a Victorian English woman.

I have also explained that Mr Rochester considers Antoinette to be “mad” because she expresses her feelings and sexuality openly; she does not act according to his English Victorian norms and values of oppressed female sexuality. Thus he assigns her qualities of “madness”. Antoinette also acts outside the patriarchal norms since she tries to educate her husband; as a man Mr Rochester is the one who should tutor her and not the other way around. Her deviations from his patriarchal and Victorian norms are reasons for his fixed ideas to destroy her.

Mr Rochester changes Antoinette's activity into passivity throughout the novel. In the beginning of their marriage, Antoinette is active and tries to resist her husband's patriarchal oppression. Later on, she subsides to his oppression and becomes completely passive. In the end, she regains her activity and takes control over her own life by choosing death instead of an imprisoned life. Although suicide is a poor solution to her misery, it is the final act that sets her free from patriarchal oppression.

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