

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys

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Introduction

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys traces the life of Antoinette, who is struggling with internal conflict to conform to society's demands. Antoinette is unable to classify herself in society, thus subjecting herself to both isolation and abjection in the colonial world. The language in the novel is not only a medium for channeling thoughts and feelings but also acts as a force that shapes the characters in the story. The theme of language marks the place of a character in the society. (Khan and Aslam, 2021)

Language and Colonial Identity

That is when the black characters speak to white characters in the English dialect, which is both broken and obscene, it signals the exotic element. However, when spoken in fear, lies, or gossip, the language is used to inspire distrust and fear. It must be noted that the story is set in the liberation of slaves in the 19th century. Hence, other than themes in the story of entrapment due to slavery, feminism, and the complexity of self-identity, the themes are projected through symbols and imagery. (Kaur, 2022)

Feminism and Enslavement

The theme of feminism intertwines with both Rhys's madness and enslavement. The proper ideals or behaviors of feminism are offered to Antoinette when she is studying at her convent school. In the convent school, the two girls, Helen de Plana and Creole symbolize the feminine virtues that Antoinette learns and emulates. Such virtues are mild, even-tempered, behaviorism, beauty, and chastity. Moreover, the phrases "imperturbable" and "poised" sister, as frequently used by Mother St. Justine, are used to suggest the ultimate womanhood, which at the time remains at odds with Antoinette's nature of hot and fiery. (Özdemir, 2023)

Cultural Displacement and Identity Crisis

The reason for Antoinette's crisis is that she continuously denies acceptance into any specific culture, and she refuses to accept particular elements of her identity. It should be noted that Antoinette has European culture, which she inherited from her family, and that of the Caribbean as a result of being born there. However, she both admires and fears the Caribbean culture, together with her black

servants' sense of identity. In particular instances, she admires Tia and wants to be like her. In some instances, she admires Christophine, whom she sees as a maternal figure (Rhys 27). She is subsequently she is rejected by both Caribbeans and her black servants, who perceive her as a threat. She describes how a young girl would describe her and the white race as a "white cockroach" in her song. On the other hand, English women refer to her as a "white nigger"; hence in her confusion, she says, " I wonder which is my true identity, which country do I belong to and why was I brought into this world? (Rhys 61)." Such confusion is reinforced by "the other" treatment by her white European counterparts. (National University of Modern Languages, 2022)

Symbolism, Otherness, and Resistance

The novel acts as a reconceptualization of the concept of identity. For example, when asking her husband about her true identity, she displays uncertainty and a sense of estrangement. Hence, the statement, "Who am I and where is my country? (Rhys 61)" illustrates the confused and contradicting qualities that have been imposed on the Creoles by the two societies. Also, the theme of black and white is linked to the imagery of color, which is not linked to the color of skin but that of the environment. Hence, when Tia calls Antoinette "white nigger" she means that the liberation of slaves has left slave owners in the same status as blacks. That is, the nonblack is then deemed as inferior to the blacks. Hence, Antoinette feels inferior due to a lack of true identity.

Moreover, the author uses the name "Jane Eyre" to reflect the character of Jane as supernatural. She can tell things by looking at someone's eyes. On the other hand, the novel's title, *The Sargasso Sea*, which is a mass of swirling currents, represents Antoinette's trait of turmoil. Furthermore, the description of the land becomes the foundation of the drama in the novel because it reflects emotions like innocence, lust, despair, fear, love, and hope carried by various characters. Antoinette tells Rochester that she loves the land since she has nothing else she can love (Rhys 36). Hence, from the lush gardens of Coulibri to the thick forests of Granbois, Antoinette only whiffs happiness in part III when she is in the English countryside. On the other hand, it is the land that influences Rochester's treatment of Antoinette. For example, Rochester finds Jamaica to be beautiful and untouched by an Alien (Rhys 52), just like Antoinette, whom she describes as stunning with sad and dark alien eyes (Rhys 39). Hence, though the beautiful colors and charming scent lure Rochester to the beauty of the land, the unfamiliar feeling forms uneasiness within him. That is, with the trait of white male dominance yet powerless in a foreign territory, Rochester is motivated to exert control over his wife Antoinette to control his fear of the wild land as he associates her with the Jamaican island.

Moreover, the theme of rebellion is symbolized by fire. Rebellion in the story is both emotional and political. Political rebellion is witnessed when ex-slaves set out to express their disagreement with Mr. Mason's idea of importing slaves from the East Indies. On the other hand, Antoinette dreams about setting fire thus suggesting her protest against her husband's controlling behavior (Rhys 98). Here, she is beginning to find her identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the themes in the story are entrapment due to slavery, feminism, and the complexity of self-identity and character traits portrayed through symbolism and imagery. In the story, the theme of feminism intertwines with both Rhy's madness and enslavement. Christophine represents a mother figure, while white nigger signifies the inferiority of Antoinette to her black slaves. "Jane Eyre" reflects the character of Jane as supernatural. Finally, the land represents the emotions of the characters in the novel.

References

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