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**Comparative Analysis of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte
Brontë and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys**
Bachelor thesis

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PROHLÁŠENÍ

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis is concerned with the examination of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), both being regarded as classic pieces of British literature. The principal objective of the work is to analyse and compare the portrayal of a strong female character embodied by Antoinette Cosway and Jane Eyre. Their struggle against male dominance and social constraints represents one of the central motifs the two novels are built on.

The connection between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be discussed on several levels. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is commonly known as a prequel to Brontë's masterpiece, exploring the identity of uncontrollably insane and wild figure of Bertha Mason, the first wife of Edward Rochester. However, the intention of Rhys is much deeper and complex than to provide a background story inspired by a highly praised novel. Being herself white Creole woman with the Caribbean roots just like Bertha, she was not satisfied with the way Brontë depicted a representative of Creole women in her work. In the interview for *The Paris Review* Rhys stated: "When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been."¹ Via her piece of writing, Rhys was able to give Bertha an opportunity to speak as a Creole heiress Antoinette and to present the story from a different point of view. In the alternative narrative to *Jane Eyre*, she is possibly denying Antoinette's madness in the first place and questioning Rochester's role as a victim of an arranged marriage. *Wide Sargasso Sea* should therefore not only be understood as a prelude but more precisely as a postcolonial response to Brontë's writing. However, Rhys's novel itself deserves its recognition as an independent work of modern fiction as well, without necessary seeing *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a darker counterpart to *Jane Eyre* and knowing its history.

Besides the proposed interconnection of the plots and the presence of Rochester, the two writings share a significant number of similar motifs, even though they have its own distinct content. As an example, the themes of love and marriage, morality, the importance of class or race and the touch of the supernatural can serve. Another

¹ Elizabeth Vreeland, "Jean Rhys: The Art of Fiction [Interview] LXIV," *Paris Review* 76 (1979): 235.

essential concept mentioned in both literary pieces is the idea of “otherness” and the frequently displayed image of feminine strength and determination. Their contribution to the notion of a strong female character and the appreciation of womanhood, in general, carries crucial importance up to this day and represents the main area of interest this thesis is dealing with.

The bachelor thesis is divided into four chapters. The first one has an introductory character, determining the main aim of my work and providing a brief background introduction of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*. I present their connection and mention the idea of feminine strength which can be found in both the texts. Therefore, I explain the selection of these literary pieces for my comparative analysis. The second chapter contains the relevant literary and social context that shaped the two novels, followed by the detailed analysis itself in the third part of the thesis. Primarily, the hardships Jane and Antoinette have to face, and the development of their character are described, inclusive of Rochester’s crucial influence.

2 LITERARY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

In the second chapter of my thesis, I will discuss the necessary literary and social context of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* in order to clarify the origin of some of the themes and motifs occurring in the novels. The text is further divided into two subchapters, each devoted to a particular literary period and its definition and specifics with regard to the analysed pieces of writing. The concepts of class and status, marriage, woman question and postcolonial rewriting of western literary canon are discussed in detail and displayed on concrete situations in the texts.

2.1 Victorian Literature and Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë, an English novelist and poet, is considered to be one of the most distinguished female writers of classical literature. Born in 1816 in Thornton, England, Brontë wrote her works during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901); she is thus recognized as a representative of the Victorian literature. Via publishing her famous novels such as *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* or *Villette*, she revolted against social constraints which were placed upon women, since their possibilities were strictly limited and they were seen as inferior to men. Being widely read and respected, by the presentation of strong female characters, Brontë was able to support the changing role of women in society. However, similarly to many other female writers of her time, she had to create a male pseudonym in order to achieve the publication of her novels, taking in account the low credibility of women authors compared to their male counterparts.

Unlike the preceding Romantic period, which is mainly known as an age of poetry, the novel became the dominating genre of Victorian literature. According to Sean Purchase, "the historical and cultural contexts behind the novel's rise are many and complex,"² since England has undergone several fundamental transformations, both as a society and a nation, in the course of the nineteenth century. Politics of imperialism, industrialism and increasing urbanization or the conflict between the science and religion represent the key concepts of the Victorian era, affecting the way of writing as well. British empire on the whole significantly increased in wealth and was

² Sean Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 2006), 145.

prosperous, being labelled “the workshop of the world” and governing colonies in North America, West Indies, South Africa or Asia. However, Patrick Brantlinger notes that “much nineteenth century writing about the Empire was ambivalent, at once approving and disapproving,”³ as authors were aware of burning social issues and inequality. Only a small number of successful Victorians was truly rich, letting working-class people face poverty and famine. As a result, writers used a serious tone in their works, inclining to realism and depicting the strenuous life, even though the ending could be idealized.

Victorian prose is distinguished by its broad range of various genres, even developing new styles, most importantly science fiction, horror story, and crime mystery, or applying gothic elements as in romances of the Brontë sisters. Moreover, Thomas Hardy’s writings are known for the use of naturalistic principles, whereas George Eliot is referred to as a pioneer of psychological fiction. Considering other genres, a social-problem novel, historical novel or children’s literature had a popular appeal during the period.

As a consequence of such literary diversity, it is very complicated to establish general characteristics of the Victorian age novel. However, most frequently, narratives are written from the middle-class perspective and focus on the heroic individuals and their integrity, while illustrating the development of the social relationships they are part of. Eventually, they usually prove that class mobility is possible, in spite of material wealth and money being the determining aspect in one’s life. Purchase concludes that “the struggle of the individual to accommodate his or her self to society is the most prominent theme in fiction throughout the period,”⁴ as the characters are torn by many both internal and external conflicts. Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy are reputed to be the most iconic novelists of the Victorian period.

Within the vast number of concepts and themes which are mentioned in the Victorian novels, there are a few particularly significant when looking at *Jane Eyre*, namely social class and system, marriage and woman question. The development of the hierarchical class system in Victorian England is connected with the industrialization

³ Patrick Brantlinger, *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press: 2009), 2.

⁴ Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 149.

and thus can be understood as its consequence. The class division was not only dependent on the level of income since the industrial middle class was growing richer, but additional factors such as family history, education, profession or social connections and style of clothing were also no less relevant.

Based on the highly recognized stratification system, Victorians were roughly divided into three main sections. The upper class consisted of the Royal family, aristocrats and great officers; their place in the society was privileged as well as prominence in politics. For they did not have to work and could enjoy a comfortable and secure life in luxury, the lifestyle of the highest members of society was connected with frequent socialization, traveling, books reading or games playing such as cards and billiard. Education symbolized another advantage the elite held over the rest of the society as they could afford private tutors and expensive books. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester embodies a typical member of the upper class, in spite of not being the firstborn son and thus not be able to inherit his father's possessions as a result of the custom of primogeniture.

Some of the representatives of the middle class could be almost as wealthy as aristocrats since the new industrial society was suitable for entrepreneurship. Besides successful businessmen and owners of factories, occupations like doctors, bankers or clergymen were valued and appreciated. In addition, the strength and significance of the middle class were increasing during the period, being engaged in politics as well.

The lower class comprised of an often unskilled factory and mill workers or miners. The working conditions were perilous, life-threatening even. Furthermore, child labour was prevalent, for children were expected to financially support their families, despite being at a tender age. Nevertheless, lack of money and population increase plunged many people into poverty, leaving them to struggle for their existence. Charles Dickens has a reputation as one of the most important social critics of the Victorian era, commenting on unfair stratification of the society, children being involved in labour or the high crime rate. The dark and realistic images of thefts, pickpocketing or prostitution and death he described in his novel *Oliver Twist* (1839) disturbed many readers, as he was calling for a change.

When comparing the status of Rochester and Jane, firstly the socio-economic difference between them is evident, demonstrated in various situations throughout the

novel, imposing the sense of inequality on Jane. Purchase suggests that the “class distinctions were, however, often less rigid than is generally supposed, and there does seem to have been a limited degree of flexibility and class movement,”⁵ which can be demonstrated on Jane’s fate. Growing up as an orphan without any relatives nor money, she falls into the lower social class, even though she is raised in the Reeds family, which belongs to the middle class. Both Mrs. Reed and her children make Jane aware of her low social status and strong dependence. During her experience in Lowood Institution, Jane still remains repressed by another representative of higher social status, Mr. Brocklehurst. The situation changes as soon as she arrives at Thornfield Hall. According to Esther Godfrey, Jane’s newly gained position of a private governess represents “a step that doubles her salary and raises her social rank considerably,”⁶ thus symbolizing a significant development in her life. By inheriting a huge amount of money, Jane becomes financially independent in the end.

During the reign of Queen Victoria, the concept of marriage was highly praised and reckoned as one of the fundamental values of society as well. However, a union of two people which would initially begin with the feeling of mutual love was rather rare, since Purchase acknowledges that “marriage across class lines was still considered a taboo.”⁷ As a result, Victorian marriage tended to be based on society’s expectations and financial profit.

The rights of married women were strictly limited throughout the first half of the nineteenth century in England. The call for reforms which would reduce inequality in a relationship was not left without a response. In 1857, the Matrimonial Causes Act allowed married couples to get divorced through civil proceedings. Moreover, Purchase points out that after the Married Women’s Property Act, passed by English Parliament in 1870, “were women able to retain their own property and money, which up until then were appropriated by their husbands.”⁸ Thus, the position of women in society finally began to change.

In *Jane Eyre*, marriage and its different forms serve as one of the crucial themes of the novel. When Rochester marries Antoinette in West Indies, their union represents

⁵ Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 23.

⁶ Esther Godfrey, “‘Jane Eyre’, from Governess to Girl Bride,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 45, no. 4 (2005): 858, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3844618>.

⁷ Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 23.

⁸ Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 65.

a simple business agreement, financially securing Rochester for the rest of his life, not taking in consideration Antoinette losing all of her property and becoming utterly dependent on her spouse. Furthermore, such practice of making one's fortune via marriage in one of England's prosperous colonies was seen as a common manner. Additionally, the figure of Blanche Ingram, a daughter of an aristocrat and a socialite, embodies a typical affluent woman a gentleman of Rochester's social status would possibly marry in compliance with traditional standards. Rochester, nevertheless, rejects Blanche's superficiality and does not obey social norms as he favours Jane, falling in love with her and being overwhelmed by the depth of his feelings. In terms of the striking age difference between Rochester and Jane, frequently stressed throughout the novel and strengthening Rochester's dominance, Godfrey suggests that "the text participates in Victorian obsession with male-female relationships in which an older, fatherly male exceeds a younger, childlike female in age by twenty years or more."⁹ To conclude, St. John Rivers's proposal to Jane serves as an example of marriage, in which reason and religion are superior to emotions. By accepting the offer, Jane would deny all her values and moral principles.

In the Victorian age, society was still dominated by men, placing women at a disadvantage in various aspects of everyday life. However, this period in English history is also connected with women's pursuit of emancipation and visible improvement of their position, since they did not have the same rights as their male counterparts. Outnumbering men, women were striving for equality, although they were standing only at the beginning of a lengthy and exacting process. According to Purchase, "politically, the plight of women was made most visible ... by the suffragette movement's calls for the women's vote, and culturally by the changing social roles."¹⁰

However, even though some of the important reforms were carried through and women could possess their own property, or from 1848 attend the first women's college in London, the traditional female role in society did not drastically shift, as the options were still very slim. The generally accepted opinion derived from Queen Victoria's belief that a woman should fully submit herself to her husband remained strong. Thus,

⁹ Godfrey, "Jane Eyre," 860.

¹⁰ Purchase, *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature*, 6.

the primary role of women was to become a model wife and a mother, tend the husband's needs, always being his emotional backup.

Presenting another outcome of industrialization, lower-class women had to work in factories, similarly to men but earning smaller income, in order to secure the family and avoid poverty. Dressmaking or domestic service was an option as well. Unfortunately, many desperate women struggling to survive would turn to prostitution, therefore flourishing. On the other hand, women coming from the middle class who needed to work were expected to remain in the settings of home, even in terms of their occupation. As a result, Marianne Thormählen observes, that such limitation “obviously excluded them from a vast array of careers that depended on everyday interactions in public contexts.”¹¹ Considering the biggest employment opportunity for middle-class women, many became private governesses and teachers. Such career was not depicted only in *Jane Eyre*, but in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) or Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) as well, followed by many others. Thus, analysing nineteenth British century literature, among the stories depicting the lives and struggles of young women, the governesses are often portrayed, being strongly familiar figures both in Victorian society and fiction. For the novels show to be similar in their basic characteristics, they are understood as a specific literary genre.

2.2 Postcolonial Literature and Jean Rhys

Jean Rhys, born as Ella Gwendolyn Rees Williams in 1890 in Roseau, Dominica, represents a modernist novelist, short-story writer, and essayist, whose name is mainly associated with the postcolonial literature. Via her highly praised economical and almost poetic style of writing, Rhys was mentioning themes such as love, identity, communication, race or colonialism. In her novels, there is a typical pattern of recounting the life journey of a marginalized woman coming from West Indies, finding only solitude, unhappiness and lack of understanding once being displaced from her homeland to Europe, England in particular. Such stories prove to be in some aspects similar to Rhys's experience of leaving Dominica after girlhood days and undergoing

¹¹ Marianne Thormählen, *The Brontës in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 303.

three unsuccessful marriages or withdraw from public life. Regardless the fact she is nowadays considered to be one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, Rhys spent her life mostly in obscurity, becoming famous only in her seventies after her masterpiece *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the politics of colonialism was greatly promoted, not only in England but in other powerful European countries as well. In consequence of later decolonization, postcolonial literature serving as a critical response to long-term oppression emerged in many former colonies across the world; however, the ex-British territories are particularly literary fertile. Gina Wisker claims that writers from such locations felt the need “to explore and create literary expressions about their and other’s positions, histories and experiences as people who have lived under colonialism or imperialism,”¹² once having the opportunity. In many cases, authors would question canonical works of British literature, introducing an opposing point of view. The stories of European authors were often picturing the life and culture of colonies or its natives in an unflattering light, benefiting from the superior position and justifying their acts. Furthermore, such highly regarded works were widely spread and read worldwide, influencing people’s opinion and proposing universal values and perceptions. The role of literature is therefore equally as significant as the mission of activists and fighters, who rebelled against the colonial rule, demanding justice and freedom, since the writers were purifying the countries’ names and history.

While writing, authors had to usually deal with one of the general issues bound to the postcolonial approach to literature; thus the choice of a language they would use for reaching the readers. For centuries, English was understood as a tool of colonial oppressors, repressing one’s identity and thus rejected. On the contrary, native languages could not produce a message directly addressed to the ex-colonialists nor to cover vast areas of the world and find a wider audience, due to the language barrier. Silvia Cappello notes that Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* focuses on the added value of language as she by its means “emphasizes and constructs the setting; the Creole, Black and European identity; and the race relationships of the novel.”¹³

¹² Gina Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): x.

¹³ Silvia Cappello, “Postcolonial Discourse in ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’: Creole Discourse vs. European Discourse, Periphery vs. Center, and Marginalized People vs. White Supremacy,” *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 6, no. 1 (2009): 47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40986298>.

According to Wisker, postcolonial writers would come from almost every continent; nevertheless, the discussed themes were common, namely “identity, nationhood, finding a language, a discourse both creative and critical, issues of relations to the ex-colonial power, engagement, re-engagement, renewal and recuperation.”¹⁴ Racism was also an often discussed subject matter, as a response to white supremacy. In spite of poetry being an important part of postcolonial literature, novel stood for the dominating genre, determining the character and key concepts of the whole movement. Majority of classical postcolonial literary pieces were published in the second half of the twentieth century, together with texts of Gabriel García Márquez and Derek Walcott, who are both distinguished Nobel prize winners.

Wide Sargasso Sea is understood to provide background story of one of the female characters figuring in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason. For its alternative perspective, the novel is interpreted within the scope of postcolonial literature. Among other mentioned, the concept of postcolonial rewritings of classical literary canon represents a method widely used by a number of authors, who were seeking the opportunity to write in opposition to colonial discourse. Since *Jane Eyre* has always been highly praised and popular novel of Western literature, *Wide Sargasso Sea* can serve as an example of a counter-discourse piece of writing, exploring the gaps in the text. Wisker suggests that its goal is to give the readers a chance to “re-read history and cultural expression through the lens of the marginalised, disempowered, maddened and silenced Other.”¹⁵

In *Jane Eyre* Bertha is depicted as a mad, demonic woman, responsible for a great tragedy and crippling Rochester for the rest of his life; thus not inspiring compassion nor understanding. It is vital to note, however, that Bertha is denied the possibility to defend herself since she remains silent throughout the whole novel. On the other hand, Rhys is not afraid to doubt Bertha’s lunacy, as she steps back in time and portrays her as a young, unspoilt Antoinette, afterwards suffering in the hands of Rochester. More importantly, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette also gains power, fully expressing her thoughts and emotions while being able to face Rochester and fight him, if necessary. The transition from Bertha’s assigned role of a villain by Brontë to a victim is evident. Capello points out the crucial importance of the fact that Rhys “takes a different structural approach to the first-person narrative technique employed by

¹⁴ Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*, xi.

¹⁵ Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*, 161.

Charlotte Brontë,”¹⁶ turning *Wide Sargasso Sea* into multiple narrative and giving the voice not only Antoinette in the first place, but Rochester and briefly Grace Pool as well, preserving a more objective approach.

Similarly to many other works of postcolonialism, Rhys attempted to truthfully describe her native land’s society and culture, rejecting often over-generalized beliefs formed and spread by colonists. Via the novel’s background, the culture and its elements are shown, including values, norms, and customs, different from European standards. In this context, the figure of Christophine carries significance, being familiar with traditional songs, narratives, and superstitions, speaking patois¹⁷ or practicing obeah.¹⁸ Moreover, Cappello emphasizes that Rhys “provides a detailed geographical description of the place with rich terminology and particular attention to translating into words sounds, colors and scents”¹⁹ as well, in order to guarantee the highest possible degree of authenticity.

The notion of slavery and strong racism is presented as an integral part of the narrative. Wisker suggests *Wide Sargasso Sea* “replays the ways in which colonial history was silent about the origins of British wealth,”²⁰ hence the widespread slavery practises and exploitation. In addition, Rhys intentionally shifted the dates, setting the story immediately after The Emancipation Act abolishing slavery in 1833, so she could illustrate the transformation of the society and the frequent clashes between slaves and their former owners.

¹⁶ Cappello, “Postcolonial Discourse in ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’,” 49.

¹⁷ The regional dialect of French used by the Caribbean islanders.

¹⁸ Jamaican variant of voodoo; the practice of using magic powers in order to hurt someone.

¹⁹ Cappello, “Postcolonial Discourse in ‘Wide Sargasso Sea’,” 53.

²⁰ Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*, 160.

3 ANALYSIS OF JANE EYRE AND WIDE SARGASSO SEA

In the third chapter, I will focus on describing the portraits of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway as strong heroines, analysing the development of their characters and finding possible links between their fates. Since the early childhood, both of them experience a series of character–shaping events, which carry essential importance in their personal growth and perception of living, emphasizing the feminine strength when facing oppression and making hard decisions. Edward Rochester, with whom both heroines become romantically involved, symbolizes the turning point in their lives as he embodies the main male oppressor they have to deal with in order to free themselves.

3.1 Childhood days

As Michael Thorpe correctly points out, the way Rhys depicted Antoinette “bears striking resemblances to Brontë's portrayal of the younger Jane.”²¹ In many means, Antoinette’s childhood is presented as challenging and full of hardship as Jane’s is, especially in terms of growing up in a loveless place, without the vital influence of a father. In this case, the absence of a positive male role model can possibly be the primary cause of further struggles against male dominance and oppression. Jane and Antoinette are presented as victims, placed in an uneasy position, finding comfort in their own company, a world of imagery and education, which serves as both forms of escape and self-realization.

Jane’s early childhood is connected with Gateshead Hall, where she suffers as a forgotten orphan, constantly rejected and humiliated by her guardian, who Jane curtly refers to as Mrs. Reed. Jane has lost both of her parents as an infant and therefore was brought up by her uncle, Mr. Reed. Even though Mrs. Reed has promised her late husband and Jane’s uncle, to obey his sincere last wish to raise his niece like her very own daughter, she does not stay true to her words. Being portrayed as a cold-hearted woman, she favours John Reed and his sisters, thus only her own children. Towards Jane, she is frequently abusive instead, as Jane notes “it was her nature to wound [her]

²¹ Michael Thorpe, “ ‘The Other Side’: *Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre*,” *Ariel* 8, no. 3 (1977): 103, <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/32207>

cruelly.”²² The source of Mrs. Reed’s coldness and disapproval of Jane is correlated with seeing her as a corrupted creature with a mean spirit, and more importantly, as a heavy burden. Mike Edwards argues that Mrs. Reed remains simply “unchangeable in her conviction that Jane is a compound of all evils.”²³ Hence, Jane lives in constant fear, excluded from family life.

As a child, one of the key situations Jane goes through is the moment of the first sign of resistance and rebellion towards her male oppressor, John Reed. For her, he is an embodiment of brutality and immaturity, continually reminding her status: “you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg.”²⁴ He does not hesitate to use physical violence as well, remaining the only male figure in Jane’s life who has done so. The significant scene captures the instinctive reaction of Jane, full of rage and despair after John Reed assaults her:

He ran headlong at me: I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing. I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don’t very well know what I did with my hands, but he called me ‘Rat! Rat!’ and bellowed out aloud.²⁵

Depicted behaviour suggests, in particular, Jane’s desire not to be victimized and to not be afraid to fight against injustice. Her longing for revenge arises from knowing she has nothing more to lose. Despite the fact that her feeling of satisfaction does not last long enough and is redeemed by severe punishment, the conflict still symbolizes a turning point in Jane’s approach to life. According to Pauline Nestor, she is led to a realisation that “she has choices to make and that even in a situation of virtual powerlessness she is not necessarily condemned to a passive betrayal of self.”²⁶

As a result of her abrupt disobedience to John Reed, Jane is locked up in the red room, where her resistance does not fade away at first. This episode draws clear links to Antoinette’s later suffering in Thornfield Hall, picturing similar experiences. Since Jane

²² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999), 27.

²³ Mike Edwards, *Charlotte Brontë: The Novels* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 38.

²⁴ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 6.

²⁵ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 7.

²⁶ Pauline Nestor, *Charlotte Brontë* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 1987), 52.

remains in a state of defiance, she is about to be tied down, considered to be in irrational temper, even referred to as a “mad cat,”²⁷ behaving uncontrollably. Her proposed signs of madness can be seen in parallel with Antoinette’s mental instability as well as Jane’s violent way of behaviour. The demonstration of the use of a physical strength reminds situations of Antoinette attacking Rochester or her brother, Richard Mason.

The red room is depicted as a rarely visited chamber, despite being large and richly furnished. The reasoning behind its seldom usage derives from the closeness of death, as Mr. Reed passed away there nine years ago. At first, during Jane’s temporary imprisonment, she reflects on her unfortunate position and lack of support and understanding, placing herself in a place of full right to stand against the despotic treatment, repeating that all of that is “unjust! – unjust!”²⁸ Struggling with the massive flow of too many thoughts in her mind, Jane starts to question her sanity. Thorpe notices that “her temptation to a superstitious doubt of her reality, as when she peers in the looking glass, is counterpointed in Rhys's novel by the looking-glass motif linked with Antoinette, who constantly needs one to be reassured of her identity.”²⁹

In addition to Jane’s crisis, being still locked in in the red room, once the evening darkness sets in, Jane feels uncomfortable and loses her courage, thinking of Mr. Reed’s last breaths. She meditates, whether he would be satisfied with the way Mrs. Reed treats her. Suddenly, she recalls “what [she] had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjurer and avenge the oppressed.”³⁰ Also, Jane notices a light on the wall, convinced Mr. Reed’s spirit has returned to this world. Without the ability to rationalise, Jane becomes terrified and copes with the sensation of suffocating, describing “[her] heart beat thick” and “[her] head grew hot”³¹ in agony. The combination of the child’s imagination, both mental and physical exhaustion leads to Jane’s collapse, leaving her in a state of depression and numbness. For Jane, the red room represents childhood moment of incarceration and repression, corresponding to Antoinette’s life of a prisoner in the attic of Thornfield, losing her sense of reality. Sally Minogue concludes: “it

²⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 7.

²⁸ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 10.

²⁹ Thorpe, “*Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre*,” 103.

³⁰ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 11.

³¹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 12.

marks her for life and provides a template against which all subsequent events are measured, recurring in Jane's consciousness at moments of crisis."³²

Not long after the red room incident, Jane agrees on attending a boarding school in Lowood since it is the only possible way how she can escape out of the reach of Mrs. Reed and John Reed, from whose hands she receives nothing but pain and torment. However, before gaining independence and starting a new life chapter, she has to face another strongly dominant male figure, Mr. Brocklehurst, the school supervisor and a representative of a patriarchal society.

Their very first meeting suggests Mr. Brocklehurst would look at Jane with prejudice and haughtiness, stressing the importance of his position. The fact Mr. Brocklehurst is presented as unsympathetic is strongly evident since Jane even associates his appearance with "black pillar" and his "grim face" comparing to "a carved mask"³³ as the pillar's head. Edwards points out, that in the eyes of Jane Mr. Brocklehurst is "less a man than a piece of architecture," having "none of the softness of humanity."³⁴ Soon she understands, he is another authority she is afraid of and cannot resist to, even when the truth is on her side, which she learns later in Lowood Institution. Jane is forced to look up at him, in both literal and figurative senses. Mr. Brocklehurst as a supervisor and a man is placed above Jane, concerning the social stratification. Additionally, as a ten-year-old child, Jane sees Mr. Brocklehurst as a "tall gentleman," though immediately reminding herself that she is "very little,"³⁵ which means her perception is affected by her age. Nonetheless, Mr. Brocklehurst supports the image of utter dominance as he asks Mrs. Reed: "her *size* is small: what is her age?"³⁶ referring to her like an object, not a human being. Another moment emphasizing the lack of equality comes, when Jane is not able to respond to Mr. Brocklehurst's question: " 'Well, Jane Eyre, and are you a good child?' Impossible to reply to this in the affirmative: my little world held contrary opinion: I was silent. Mrs. Reed answered for me by an expressive shake of the head ..."³⁷ After a series of questions regarding her well manners and Christianity, he ends their unbalanced conversation with cold verdict,

³² Sally Minogue, introduction to *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Brontë, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999), xi.

³³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 25.

³⁴ Edwards, *Charlotte Brontë: The Novels*, 41.

³⁵ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 25.

³⁶ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 25. Italics in the original.

³⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 25.

addressed to Jane: “that proves you have a wicked heart; and you must pray to God to change it: to give you a new and clean one: to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”³⁸ Indeed, his opinion has been already formed before the talk, as Mrs. Reed informs him that Jane is a liar and a naughty girl without morals. Arnold Shapiro observes that “Brontë makes evident the close bond between Mrs. Reed and Brocklehurst, the upholders of social order” and “the enemies of freedom and openness”³⁹ when both remind Jane her social status of a poor orphaned girl without a future.

Even though the initial confrontation with Mr. Brocklehurst leaves Jane with a very distinctive taste of degradation, the permission of becoming a Lowood student gives her an opportunity to grow not only intellectually, but personally as well. Nestor emphasizes the importance of this experience, revealing that Lowood “provides Jane with three things vital to her growth – education, love and the example of alternative forms of behaviour in the endurance of Helen Burns and the controlled rebellion of Miss Temple.”⁴⁰

Miss Temple, the superintendent of Lowood Orphan Asylum, is probably the most positively influential female character in the life of Jane. Later their relationship can be even compared to a bond between a mother and a daughter, which is something Jane lacks her whole childhood at Gateshead. Miss Temple satisfies her need to feel loved while being a role model, not only for Jane but for other pupils as well. Helen Burns, who befriends with Jane and represents another crucial figure in the development of Jane’s personality claims, that Miss Temple “is very good and very clever; she is above the rest, because she knows far more than they do.”⁴¹ With everyday actions, Miss Temple proves that women have the possibility and right to make decisions to not blindly follow male authorities. Through her genuine generosity and compassion, she tries to protect pupils from the cruelty of Mr. Brocklehurst, using a sensitive and rational approach to living. She does not give up even when Mr. Brocklehurst disapproves her decision not to left pupils on starvation with an explanation that his

³⁸ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 26.

³⁹ Arnold Shapiro, “In Defense of Jane Eyre,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 8, no. 4 (1968): 685, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/449473>.

⁴⁰ Nestor, *Charlotte Brontë*, 54.

⁴¹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 42.

“plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying.”⁴²

As Bernard J. Paris argues, since first days in Lowood Institute, Jane is “well-received until Brocklehurst stigmatizes her as a liar and instructs the girls to shun her”⁴³ and to exclude her from their company. He does so while Jane has to stand on the stool in a schoolroom, exposed as a deterrent example to other pupils. She feels humiliated and rather afraid she would become an outcast once again. Helen tries to help Jane overcome her fear of being rejected and not loved by others as a result of Mr. Brocklehurst’s untrue accusations when she reminds her:

“If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends.”

“No; I know I should think well of myself; but that is not enough: if others don’t love me I would rather die than live—I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen.”⁴⁴

Based on this scene, Shapiro points out, that as much as Jane admires Helen, she “cannot accept Helen’s doctrine of turning the other cheek”⁴⁵ and her passive resistance when undergoing any unfairness and punishment, embodying “a saintly ideal.”⁴⁶ The reason why Jane is not able to do so is based on her experience in Gateshead when she has learnt she cannot be passive while fighting for survival. Therefore, Shapiro concludes: “Helen Burns is chiefly used in the novel as a foil.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Jane still becomes heavily influenced by Helen and is heartbroken, when Helen dies from tuberculosis. The girls share a bed the night Helen dies, discussing the afterlife. According to Minogue, Jane draws from Helen “the healing power of love, warm and fleshly as much as it is spiritual; and she learns to give love”⁴⁸ which proves to be crucial later in her life.

⁴² Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 53.

⁴³ Bernard J. Paris, “Jane Eyre,” in *Imagined Human Beings: A Psychological Approach to Character and Conflict in Literature* (New York, London: New York University Press, 1997), 149, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qffv8.3>.

⁴⁴ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 59.

⁴⁵ Shapiro, “In Defense of Jane Eyre,” 687.

⁴⁶ Shapiro, “In Defense of Jane Eyre,” 687–688.

⁴⁷ Shapiro, “In Defense of Jane Eyre,” 687.

⁴⁸ Minogue, introduction, xiii.

Jane spends in Lowood six years as a student and another two years as a teacher. Nestor states that “education is the most important means of escaping the thrall of dependence for [her].”⁴⁹ Thus, when she leaves the institute, she declares she can teach English and French but also drawing and music as well.

Moving to the analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the tragic life story of Antoinette Cosway, who is later portrayed as a madwoman Bertha, begins in Coulibri, Jamaica, shortly after the Emancipation Act abolishing slavery was passed. This proves to be crucial as Antoinette comes from the family of former slave owners. Therefore, since childhood days she experiences hatred and strong enmity, living in the proximity of freed slaves, looking for revenge. Antoinette’s once wealthy and respectable family becomes impoverished, serving as an aim of occasional attacks, which escalate into a fatal ending. Antoinette has to get used to the chilling closeness of death and fear very soon, as she finds her mother’s horse poisoned and lying under a tree. She recalls: “I went up to him but he was not sick, he was dead and his eyes were black with flies.”⁵⁰ Even though she is a child, she recognizes the apparent sign of a thread. Another example of her homeland transforming into a hostile environment can be seen when Mr. Luttrell, a friend and a neighbour of Antoinette’s mother commits suicide under a pressure of changing society and general decline.

Unfortunately, Antoinette is also seen as a victim in terms of racial segregation and prejudices. Nushrat Azam correctly points out that because Antoinette’s “race is a mixture of her father’s white colour and her mother’s West Indian background,”⁵¹ she is neither accepted by her white European relatives nor by the local Black community. As a white Creole, Antoinette does not have a sense of belonging anywhere, knowing that the locals despise her family: “They hated us. They called us white cockroaches.”⁵² Thus, according to Azam, Antoinette’s search of identity is already connected with her early childhood, since she “becomes a mode of alienation as she is unable to fit in the society.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Nestor, *Charlotte Brontë*, 54.

⁵⁰ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 4.

⁵¹ Nushrat Azam, “‘Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era’: A Study of the Female Voice in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 6, no. 7 (2017): 236, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.7p.236>.

⁵² Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 7.

⁵³ Azam, “‘Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era,’” 236.

Even though Antoinette lives with her widowed mother, Anette, and her younger brother Pierre, she also needs to cope with the feelings of loneliness and a lack of affection. Therefore, Thorpe argues that despite the fact Antoinette does not grow up as an orphan as Jane does, she can still be seen as a “virtually one.”⁵⁴ Anette hurts her daughter repeatedly as she constantly ignores Antoinette’s craving for love. Instead of that, she devotes all her time and care to Pierre who is depicted as seriously ill, having problems with walking and a distinct way of speech. Antoinette is hopeless in her attempts to become closer to her mother. Once she tried to gently touch her mother’s forehead, only being rejected again:

But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. She wanted to sit with Pierre or walk where she pleased without being pestered, she wanted peace and quiet. I was old enough to look after myself.⁵⁵

As a result, Antoinette mostly inclines to a black servant Christophine, remaining one of the few servants who would not leave the family and stay loyal. Being a native of Martinique like Anette, she was her wedding present, given by her husband, Mr. Cosway. Later, she embraces the role of a mother for Antoinette, who repeatedly comes to her for support or words of comfort. Therefore, the way Miss Temple represents a crucial female character in the life of Jane, Christophine does the same for Antoinette. It is her presence and strength which saves both Anette and Antoinette, after the death of Mr. Cosway. However, she is rather depicted as a shady character, surrounded with many mysteries. When Antoinette describes her, she says Christophine “was not like the other women,” as she was “much blacker-blue-black with a thin face and straight features” and would wear “a black dress, heavy gold earrings and yellow handkerchief.”⁵⁶ In addition, the old servant is told to practice obeah and manipulate with people, thus not only locals are afraid of her, sometimes even Antoinette is. She embodies an independent woman, who never got married.

During Antoinette’s childhood, she has only one friend, coloured girl Tia. The children befriend after Christophine arranges their friendship, knowing that Antoinette is lonely. At first, they spend much time together, swimming in the bathing pool.

⁵⁴ Thorpe, “The Other Side,” 103.

⁵⁵ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 5.

⁵⁶ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 6.

However, after an argument, they insult each other when Antoinette calls her friend “cheating nigger.”⁵⁷ Then Tia steals Antoinette’s dress and runs away. Coral Ann Howells claims that “friendship, loyalty and betrayal are bewilderingly entwined, so that a childhood game between white and black can quickly degenerate into a racial confrontation.”⁵⁸ Both of the children behave in the way the society has raised them, denying their innocence.

As suggested, since the abolishment of slavery, the Cosway family has to face a painful situation. Anette rescues herself and her children when she marries a wealthy Englishman, Mr. Mason, and thus prevents the family from perishing. The local people do not understand Mr. Mason’s motive for marrying Anette, predicting he will soon regret. Nevertheless, Antoinette cannot fully accept him as a part of her life, feeling he cannot fulfil the role of her father: “... I thought I would never like him very much. I still called him ‘Mr. Mason’ in my head.”⁵⁹ Moreover, Mr. Mason lacks the ability to understand the hatred of the local people, thinking of them as “children” who “wouldn’t hurt a fly.”⁶⁰ According to Pi-Hua Ni, he follows “the patriarchal gender ideology that man is for reason and women unreason,”⁶¹ and thus refusing to listen to his wife’s advice to leave Coulibri for their own safety. His underestimation of the seriousness of the tense situation leads the whole family to a tragic end.

One night, the local rioters gather in front of the house, yelling, carrying torches and burning the house down as Antoinette remembers them: “They all looked the same, it was the same face repeated over and over, eyes gleaming, mouth half open to shout.”⁶² The Cosway family escapes, unfortunately, Pierre is badly burned while sleeping in his crib and he dies. When Anette tries to save him, it is already too late. She assaults her husband, calling him “grinning hypocrite.”⁶³ During the riot, Antoinette sees Tia, feeling confused by her presence and not believing, she would also wish for her death. Then, she is hit by a thrown stone: “I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my

⁵⁷ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 8.

⁵⁸ Coral Ann Howells, *Jean Rhys* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 110.

⁵⁹ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 15.

⁶⁰ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 16.

⁶¹ Pi-Hua Ni, “Madness Defined by Whom? Contextualizing Bertha and Antoinette in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” in *Anglophone Culture Across Centuries and Borders*, ed. Pavlína Flajšarová and Jiří Flajšar (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2015), 108.

⁶² Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 21.

⁶³ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 20.

face.”⁶⁴ Both the girls begin to cry, looking at each other. Similarly to *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette loses her only friend she was close with, although in a different manner. Another parallel between the two heroines can be seen in terms of leaving the place where they grew up. Antoinette concludes: “The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like sunset and I knew I would never see Coulibri again.”⁶⁵

After the life-changing night, Antoinette lives with her aunt Cora in Spanish Town. The death of Pierre drives her mother mad with sorrow, leaving Antoinette once and for all, both heartbroken and confused by her mother’s state of mind. Mr. Mason turns away from his wife, and as Elgin W. Mellown describes, he keeps Anette “in private confinement where she is the sexual prey of her Negro attendants.”⁶⁶ When Antoinette visits her, she cannot even recognize her mother: “She held me so tightly I couldn’t breathe and I thought, ‘It’s not her.’ Then, ‘It must be her.’”⁶⁷ Sadly for her, Anette’s fate foreshadows her daughter’s future, without any possibility of escaping. She later dies, under uncertain circumstances. Aunt Cora sends Antoinette to a convent boarding school, where she finally finds peace and liberating company of other pupils. However, during her first walk to school, she is intimidated by a boy and a girl, who call her insane:

The girl said, ‘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 zombi⁶⁸ and you have eyes like zombi too.’⁶⁹

Luckily, Antoinette is saved by her coloured cousin Sandi, who protects Antoinette and cares about her. As mentioned later in the novel, they would spend time together and even develop romantic feelings for each other. Thus, Sandi remains the only positive male figure in Antoinette’s life, always treating her with love and kindness. This particular scene suggests as well that Antoinette is considered to be mad during her childhood days by other people, which represents another similarity with the life of Jane

⁶⁴ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 23.

⁶⁵ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 23.

⁶⁶ Elgin W. Mellown, “Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys,” *Contemporary Literature* 13, no. 4 (1972): 471, www.jstor.org/stable/1207442.

⁶⁷ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 25.

⁶⁸ Living dead; a person who died and has been brought back to life, lacking human qualities.

⁶⁹ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 26–27.

Eyre, particularly with the red-room incident. However, regarding Antoinette, her whole life would be affected by this stigma, predestined to insanity.

In the boarding school, Mr. Mason occasionally visits her step-daughter and at the age of seventeen, he announces, she would get married. Howells correctly points out, that “Antoinette becomes a displaced person in her own country, entirely dependent on a dowry supplied by her English stepfather and at the mercy of an arranged marriage with an Englishman.”⁷⁰ Hence, the quality of her life is in the hands of the male figures.

3.2 Life with Rochester

Considering the life of Jane, the figure of Rochester initially symbolizes another superior male she has to stand against, as she has already experienced oppression from John Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst. Since Antoinette has grown up in a society where women play an important role, she is not used to such treatment she receives from Rochester. In spite of their different backgrounds, the effort to fight for liberation in the relationship unites them.

Both heroines fall in love with Rochester; however, the two ways they express their feelings are dissimilar. Antoinette desperately tries to physically seduce Rochester, being aware of her attractive body; yet she is unsuccessful. On the contrary, Jane remains passive as she is insecure about her appearance and unequal social status. Even though it is Jane Rochester loves and cares for, she doubts the possible love connection at first. Rochester’s affection springs from the admiration of Jane’s pureness and personality. As a result, Jane finds in the union with Rochester true happiness and equality, while Antoinette ends up confined as a lunatic in the Thornfield Hall, abandoned and renounced by Rochester.

After necessary arrangements, Jane becomes a governess in the Thornfield Hall, proving her teaching skills as a private tutor of a young French girl Adele. Rochester, the master of Thornfield and Jane’s employer, is Adele’s guardian since she is brought up without parents, similarly to Jane’s childhood experience. Nestor suggests such place “offers Jane new opportunities for growth, particularly in the area of her emerging

⁷⁰ Howells, *Jean Rhys*, 111.

sexuality,⁷¹ experiencing her first romantic relationship and dealing with unfamiliar feelings. This process shows to be necessary for the life of a young woman; however, Jane is confronted with the sense of insecurity and hesitation, being repeatedly overwhelmed by Rochester's dominant attitude.

The first time Jane meets Rochester is depicted in a romantic way, enhanced by the mysterious atmosphere of the calm winter evening and a rising moon. While Jane walks to Hay, a small village nearby to post a letter, a rider passes her on a horse, suddenly slipping on the ice and falling down. Not knowing she faces Rochester Jane insists on helping the charismatic rider, noticing she "felt no fear of him and but little shyness."⁷² Since he is not able to stand up, he has to accept the offered help: " 'Excuse me,' he continued: 'necessity compels me to make you useful.' He laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and leaning on me with some stress, limped to his horse."⁷³ According to Minogue, the style of Rochester's introduction represents "a neat way of bringing him to Jane's level, indeed dependent on her, from the very outset,"⁷⁴ thus covertly foreshadowing the novel's ending. The encounter sets up aspects, which would be crucial in the later development of their relationship, such as equality and both emotional and physical dependence. Initially, they become interested in each other. Even though Jane does not consider Rochester to be a good-looking man, she remembers his face as "masculine ... dark, strong, and stern,"⁷⁵ feeling unexpected attraction to him. Similarly, Rochester is affected by Jane, questioning her about her identity, surprisingly discovering she is a governess in his house. However, he intentionally does not reveal who he is, as he desires to have power over Jane right from the beginning. Jane comes back to Thornfield with an electrifying feeling, being excited by this short distraction from her monotonous life.

The next day after the arrival of Rochester to Thornfield, he invites Jane to have afternoon tea with him. However, when a housekeeper Mrs. Fairfax introduces her, he curtly replies: "What the deuce is it to me whether Miss Eyre be there or not? At this moment I am not disposed to accost her."⁷⁶ The whole time Rochester acts in a very reserved and superior manner, making their different status very evident. Rochester

⁷¹ Nestor, *Charlotte Brontë*, 60.

⁷² Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 99.

⁷³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 100.

⁷⁴ Minogue, introduction, xv.

⁷⁵ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 101.

⁷⁶ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 105.

does not recognize Jane as a talented painter, despite the impression in his voice being overt while looking at her paintings. Even their later conversation resumes the same, and therefore Jane declares without hesitation: “I don’t think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience.”⁷⁷ Her bold answers, full of honesty drive Rochester’s interest, for she is not afraid to tell him that according to her opinion, he is not a handsome man. The whole process of getting to know each other resembles a play initiated by Rochester, in order to test Jane and her sincere reactions, seeming to be well satisfied with the outcome.

Eventually, Rochester is pleased to spend time with Jane and does not hesitate to trust her, as he confides to her about the possibility of being Adele’s father. Even though he claims he “was thrust on to a wrong tack at the age of one-and-twenty, and have never recovered the right course since,”⁷⁸ Jane firmly believes Rochester has a good personality and intends to help him deal with his complicated, dark past. Based on Jane’s purity, according to Paris, in the relationship, Rochester is “most powerfully attracted ... by Jane's rigorous morality, which gives him the hope that she can redeem him,”⁷⁹ thinking of her as his saviour, stainless and wise; someone he might have been if not spoiled. Thus, Jane is expected to fulfil Rochester’s expectations, in spite of her unawareness about the role which was given to her.

Another incident proving Rochester’s dependence on Jane occurs when Jane saves Rochester’s life, as Bertha sets his bed on fire: “Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In the midst of blaze and of vapour, Mr. Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep.”⁸⁰ Taking control over the situation and being self-reliant, Jane successfully distinguishes most of the fire and wakes Rochester, who is stupefied from inhaling the smoke. As soon as he realizes what happened, he is reluctant to let Jane return to her bedroom, gripping her hand tightly and calling her his “cherished preserver.”⁸¹ Rochester learns he can rely on Jane when Richard Mason arrives and during the night visits his step-sister Bertha, who stabs him with a knife.

⁷⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 117.

⁷⁸ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 118.

⁷⁹ Paris, “Jane Eyre,” 115.

⁸⁰ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 130.

⁸¹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 131.

Jane's task is to take care of a man she does not know, who repeatedly falls into unconsciousness, having his arm soaked in his own blood. Once again, Jane proves her strength and the ability to act under pressure; however, Rochester hides the truth, lying her about the incident. Despite the fact Jane feels Rochester is full of mystery, she cannot help herself but keep falling in love with him.

The successful development of the relationship, with visible indications of mutual affection, is suddenly disrupted by the figure of Blanche Ingram, a beautiful young lady, who becomes Jane's romantic rival. Rochester seems to be enchanted by her elegance, making clear he would love to become a husband of hers. Thus, feeling crushed and foolish, Jane denies the possibility of being Rochester's interest, talking to herself: " 'You,' I said, 'a favourite with Mr. Rochester? *You* gifted with the power of pleasing him? *You* of importance to him in any way? Go! your folly sickens me."⁸² As a punishment for such ridiculous thoughts, Jane selects a masochistic method of comparing a portrait of herself and Blanche, she has painted truthfully. Jane realizes she has nothing to offer Rochester to impress him – neither beauty nor wealth and thus insists on leaving Thornfield, confessing her love for Rochester:

'I tell you I must go!' I retorted, roused to something like passion. 'Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton?—a machine without feelings? ... Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you,—and full as much heart! (...) I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh;—it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal,—as we are!'⁸³

To her surprise, Rochester asks her to marry him, kissing her lips. Afterwards, he explains he only pretended he was in love with Blanche, who is interested only in Rochester's fortune, to make Jane jealous so that she would reveal her feelings. Thus, Rochester without hesitation manipulates Jane, forgetting about morality. Minogue argues that "the pretended obstacle, Blanche, with which Rochester cruelly teases Jane, is herself somewhat cruelly used by him, as a decoy,"⁸⁴ which is a fact Jane strongly

⁸² Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 140. Italics in original.

⁸³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 223.

⁸⁴ Minogue, introduction, xvii.

disapproves and is frustrated with, feeling sorry for Blanche despite her superficiality. Nevertheless, according to Nestor Rochester's "choice of Jane ahead of Blanche Ingram reverses conventional expectations, exposing as empty the criteria of class and beauty."⁸⁵

Despite Jane's love declaration which stresses the equality of the relationship, there are certain occasions in which Rochester undermines and weakens Jane's position. According to Nestor, "most fundamentally Rochester denies Jane respect and equality by failing to tell her the truth,"⁸⁶ thus to confess his love for her as he uses manipulation and disguise instead. Furthermore, Rochester does not reveal the truth about Bertha either, being afraid of Jane's refusal and leading her astray. The fact he cannot be fully open with her questions the value of the whole relationship and its future.

Shapiro observes that once Rochester proposes to Jane „one feels that he would only impose a new burden on her,"⁸⁷ since he desires to possess her, based on his dominance. He perceives Jane almost as an unreal creature, out of this world, as he calls her "witch" or "sorceress."⁸⁸ Feeling overwhelmed by her presence, he talks to her: "I mean shortly to claim you—your thoughts, conversation, and company—for life."⁸⁹ Jane is worried about Rochester's imperious behaviour and great expectations for the upcoming marriage. Despite that, Jane needs to acknowledge: "My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven."⁹⁰ While the wedding day is approaching, Rochester and Jane visit the silk warehouse and jewellery store, only on Rochester's request. Jane finds herself humiliated: "The more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation,"⁹¹ as she feels uncomfortable being financially dependent on Rochester. Thus, Jane wants to remain in the position of Adele's governess in order to maintain her financial independence, since she does not want to bear a resemblance to Rochester's previous mistresses, being pampered and receiving gifts. Besides, Rochester tends to transform her into a proper English lady, denying Jane's identity. She does not appreciate expensive jewels and colourful silk gowns, rejecting to give up

⁸⁵ Nestor, *Charlotte Brontë*, 62.

⁸⁶ Nestor, *Charlotte Brontë*, 63.

⁸⁷ Shapiro, *In Defense of Jane Eyre*, 689.

⁸⁸ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 130.

⁸⁹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 234.

⁹⁰ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 242.

⁹¹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 236.

her plain style of clothing and grey and black wardrobe. Rochester allows Jane to keep her humble manners and stubbornness; however, only till the wedding. Even though he only teases Jane, there is a hidden seriousness in his voice.

During the wedding day, Shapiro suggests that “Rochester becomes completely peremptory again – he is the iron man who carries [Jane] along in his wake.”⁹² Nevertheless, with the unexpected appearance of Richard Mason, the whole ceremonial is ruined, and Rochester’s tragic secret is revealed. Confessing to being already married, he leads the wedding guests to the third floor of Thornfield, to see Bertha, whom he considers to be insane:

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.⁹³

In this scene, Bertha almost strangles Rochester, behaving not like a human. He demands the answer whether he should be judged for being sinful and immoral to want happiness by the side of Jane. He thinks of himself as a victim of an arranged marriage which has destroyed his life. When he asks Jane if her opinion on him has changed, she replies: “I don’t like you so well as I have done sometimes, indeed, sir.”⁹⁴ In spite of being still in love with Rochester, Jane knows she has to leave Thornfield, as she does not want to be Rochester’s mistress. She has to fight with the sense of guilt, leaving Rochester in despair, hurting him. Paris suggests that Jane “proves her moral growth by giving up the man who has fulfilled her romantic dreams in order to do her duty.”⁹⁵

For several days Jane survives a beggar, starving and almost freezing to death. As no one offers her help, despising her, she feels that once “an ardent, expectant woman – almost a bride, was a cold, solitary girl again.”⁹⁶ At last, she is saved by the local clergyman St. John Rivers and his sisters, Diana and Mary. Shortly after her recovery, Jane becomes very close with the Rivers sisters, sharing a passion for education and youth; however, St. John remains reserved in his behaviour towards Jane.

⁹² Shapiro, *In Defense of Jane Eyre*, 690.

⁹³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 258.

⁹⁴ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 275.

⁹⁵ Paris, “Jane Eyre,” 157.

⁹⁶ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 261.

She sees him as “good and great, but severe” and “cold as an iceberg.”⁹⁷ Later Jane finds out her unknown uncle from Madeira dies and leaves her with a great fortune. She is even more excited when the Rivers siblings reveal themselves as her lost cousins. Eventually, Jane is a member of a loving family, and financially independent.

St. John represents another strongly oppressive male figure Jane has to face. In his eyes, the only task in his life is to become a missionary in India. In spite of being passionate about faith, St. John does not try to make religion more understandable and accessible for others, similarly to Mr. Brocklehurst. He chooses Jane to learn with him Hindustani language as well. In the role of teacher, he is very demanding and harsh, not letting Jane any freedom since he takes full control over her. On top of that, he demands Jane to accompany him to India as his missionary’s wife since he finds her suitable for such a position. As Paris Points out, “St. John is in love with the wealthy, beautiful, socially accomplished Rosamond Oliver, but it is Jane who has the moral and intellectual qualities he desires.”⁹⁸ Nonetheless, Jane knows St. John does not offer her love and that the marriage would break her at some point. According to Nestor “St. John urges [Jane] to follow relentlessly the dictates of reason and deny her passionate nature,”⁹⁹ thus via refusal, Jane affirms her identity and uniqueness, stop denying her true feelings. She is prepared to see Rochester again since she can sense he desperately needs her.

Jane returns to Thornfield only to discover its charred ruins, representing a sad memorial of the horrific tragedy caused by Bertha as she sets the building on fire and dies jumping out of a window. Rochester survives; however he loses his sight and an arm, turned into a cripple. After the injury, according to Shapiro, he is transformed: “Rochester has now achieved a humanity that he never had before. His feelings about life are completely different from what they were.”¹⁰⁰ Being disabled and physically fully dependent on Jane, Rochester can no longer apply his masculine dominance and strength in the relationship. He becomes humble, admitting he should not have forced Jane to change her identity, nor to become his mistress. After their reunion Rochester emphasizes he cannot live without Jane:

⁹⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 393.

⁹⁸ Paris, “Jane Eyre”, 159.

⁹⁹ Nestor, *Charlotte Brontë*, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Shapiro, In Defense of Jane Eyre, 696.

‘No—no—Jane; you must not go. No—I have touched you, heard you, felt the comfort of your presence—the sweetness of your consolation: I cannot give up these joys. I have little left in myself—I must have you. (...) My very soul demands you: it will be satisfied, or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame.’¹⁰¹

Jane finally considers herself to be fully equal with Rochester, as she is financially autonomous and he does not have physical power over her anymore; thus Jane agrees to marry Rochester. Paris concludes that in the end is Jane depicted as “a strong, mature person who achieves an ideal happiness.”¹⁰²

Jane’s rather convoluted and even painful way to the married life contrasts with the simply arranged marriage in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Based on Mr. Mason’s arrangement, Antoinette becomes a wife of Rochester, presented as a young son of an English aristocrat. The marriage itself is a pragmatic one, as Rochester has to follow the custom of primogeniture, which disentitles him to inherit his father’s estate. Therefore, he arrives in West Indies to make his fortune via union with the heiress of wealthy plantation-owner, Antoinette. Because Mr. Mason dies before the all marriage condition can be fully established, his son and Antoinette’s step-brother, Richard Mason, assumes the responsibility. Even though the initial intention of Mr. Mason might be good, to provide his step-daughter security in life through marriage with an English gentleman, the outcome is devastating, as it proves later.

The whole marriage can be seen as a business deal. To marry Antoinette, Rochester is paid thirty thousand pounds; therefore he once notes that “she has bought me, or so she thinks.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, Richard Mason has not arranged any financial safeguard for Antoinette; thus she loses all her property, all now belonging to Rochester, as a consequence of the English patriarchal rule. Antoinette becomes entirely dependent on a man, who is a stranger for her, since he arrived in Jamaica only a month before the wedding, in which case he was suffering from fever for two weeks. However, despite all of the circumstances, she falls in love with him as opposed to Rochester’s soon realization that he does not love Antoinette, being only physically attracted to her body. Dennis Porter suggests that “Rochester's failure to care enough for the feelings

¹⁰¹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 385.

¹⁰² Paris, “*Jane Eyre*“, 160.

¹⁰³ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 39.

and the fate of his vulnerable child-bride is represented ... as a paradigm of male cruelty towards women.”¹⁰⁴

The first sign questioning the intended union occurs the morning before the wedding. Antoinette has doubts and refuses to marry Rochester since aunt Cora told her not to do so, even if he was “stuffed with diamonds.”¹⁰⁵ As a result, Antoinette claims she is “afraid of what may happen” and that she “didn’t like the way [Rochester] laughed.”¹⁰⁶ Rochester finds himself in a difficult position, being rejected by a Creole woman, not only his pride and reputation would suffer, more importantly as Ni suggests, he “would lose his chance to get rich.”¹⁰⁷ In order to avoid such a situation, he uses both physical and emotional ways of seduction to make Antoinette change her mind. Rochester promises he can ensure her peaceful and safe life; however, he never mentions he would love her as it represents something he cannot offer. Nevertheless, Antoinette agrees to marry him, despite her premonition. His memories of the wedding ceremony itself are vague: “It was all very brightly coloured, very strange, but it meant nothing to me. Nor did she, the girl I was to marry.”¹⁰⁸ He hardly remembers what Antoinette looked like, not caring much about the ceremonial, playing only the role he was expected to play. Rochester thinks of himself as a victim, being pressured to marry a woman, knowing nothing about her.

Since Rochester’s arrival in West Indies, he does not feel very welcomed in the unfamiliar environment, far away from his homeland. While travelling to Granbois, the honeymoon location, he is overwhelmed by the wild nature, which he criticizes: “Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near.”¹⁰⁹ The combination of vivid colours, bright sun and heavy sweetness of the air makes him feel only more uncomfortable. In addition, Mona Fayad suggests that “Rochester’s basic hostility is increased by the fact that he recognizes in the place a matriarchal tendency,”¹¹⁰ which is something, he is not used to as he comes from a male-centred society. The way Christophine communicates with him or the very

¹⁰⁴ Dennis Porter, “Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre,” *The Massachusetts Review* 17, no. 3 (1976): 543, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25088673>.

¹⁰⁵ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 95.

¹⁰⁶ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Pi-Hua Ni, “Madness Defined by Whom?” 107.

¹⁰⁸ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 44.

¹⁰⁹ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 39.

¹¹⁰ Mona Fayad, “Unquiet Ghosts: The Struggle for Representation in Jean Rhys’s ‘*Wide Sargasso Sea*,’” *Modern Fiction Studies* 34, no. 3 (1988): 443, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26282480>.

young maid Amélie teases him, both without timidity and with a certain amount of supremacy, undermines his position and male dominance. On top of that, coming from a society recognizing traditional class division, he does not approve such closeness between servants and their masters, demonstrated by the relationship of her wife and Christophine. Thus, Rochester once notes toward his wife: “I feel this place is my enemy and on your side.”¹¹¹

During the first days of honeymoon, both Rochester and Antoinette begin to know each other, being more open and communicative. Antoinette tries to make her husband understand the Jamaican customs, social hierarchy and generally a local way of life. However, their form of connection would always have rather physical than verbal form. Thus, Azam points out, that “sex becomes a form of communication and bonding between them.”¹¹² Antoinette’s delight in lovemaking concerns Rochester, due to the application of double standards of the strict British society he comes from. He does not see her as a proper lady, having sexual desires. Azam argues that “Antoinette’s cry for sex is her cry for attention,”¹¹³ when she feels not being loved, and she craves for attention. Nonetheless, Rochester feels disgusted by Antoinette having power over him while the act, as she uses her physical attributes to captivate him by her beauty. Therefore, lovemaking represents for Antoinette a way of expressing herself and escaping from oppression at the same time.

Rochester’s stay in Granbois is suddenly disrupted with a hateful letter from a man, who claims to be Daniel Cosway, Antoinette’s step-brother. His message is full of rumours, claiming there is wickedness and mainly madness in the Cosway family, inheriting from a mother to daughter. When he writes about Antoinette’s mother: “The madness gets worse and she has to be shut away for she try to kill her husband,”¹¹⁴ he chooses his words carefully, trying to indicate Rochester may have to face the same situation. At first, Rochester refuses to believe David, later fear and sense of treachery take over rationality and trust in Antoinette, his mind becomes poisoned against her. Since Rochester accepts David’s information about Anette’s madness being hereditary, he feels betrayed. Azam infers that his “whole perception about [Antoinette] changes and instead of coming across as a beautiful swan, that same Antoinette comes across as

¹¹¹ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 82.

¹¹² Azam, “Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era,” 239.

¹¹³ Azam, “Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era,” 239.

¹¹⁴ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 59.

a madwoman in Rochester's eyes."¹¹⁵ Additionally, David mentions Antoinette having a love affair with Sandi, before the marriage with Rochester. This revelation of incest symbolizes another bitter discovery about Antoinette, Rochester cannot bear, feeling humiliated that his wife did not come before the altar stainless. The idea of not having Antoinette's body fully just for himself makes him outraged.

When Rochester discovers that Berta was one of her mother's names, he begins to call her by this name, even though Antoinette does not like it: "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name."¹¹⁶ The fact he insists on using it represents another form of oppression of his wife. Azam states that "Rochester's refusal to acknowledge Antoinette by her name in a way is a refusal to accept and recognize her identity and uniqueness as an individual."¹¹⁷

Antoinette notices Rochester's behaviour has changed, and in a moment of despair, Antoinette seeks Christophine, coming for a solution of unrequited love. She begs Christophine to use the power of obeah to make Rochester enter her bedroom again, as she says: "... if he, my husband, could come to me one night. Once more. I would make him love me." Christophine refuses her demand, saying such task is impossible:

'Hush up,' she said. 'If the man don't love you, I can't make him love you.'
'Yes you can, I know you can. That is what I wish and that is why I came here. You can make people love or hate. Or . . . or die,' I said.
She threw back her head and laughed loudly.¹¹⁸

Antoinette does not give up; she cannot lose her husband, being dependent on him. Eventually, Christophine hears her, giving Antoinette love potion, since she understands Antoinette's despair. Howells points out that "the powers of black women like Christophine are shown to be dangerous to whites,"¹¹⁹ as Rochester is drugged, and seduced by his wife. As soon as he realizes after waking up he has been poisoned by the obeah potion, he is thirsty for revenge, wanting to break his wife. Therefore he makes love in the next room with Amélie, not being anxious about Antoinette's feelings.

¹¹⁵ Azam, "Madwoman in the Post-colonial Era," 238.

¹¹⁶ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 95.

¹¹⁷ Azam, "Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era," 239.

¹¹⁸ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 70.

¹¹⁹ Howells, *Jean Rhys*, 113.

The final confrontation between Antoinette and Rochester is full of emotions, misunderstanding, and violence. According to Howells, it “spells the impossibility of any convergence¹²⁰” between them, since there is too much untold. During the scene, The first sign of Antoinette’s violence toward Rochester occurs, corresponding with her mother’s behaviour once Pierre died:

I managed to hold her wrist with one hand and the rum with the other, but when I felt her teeth in my arm I dropped the bottle. The smell filled the room. But I was angry now and she saw it. She smashed another bottle against the wall and stood with the broken glass in her hand and murder in her eyes.¹²¹

At this moment, Antoinette becomes for Rochester a “red-eyed wild-haired stranger,”¹²² an uncontrollable mad woman, who physically attacks him and curses him. Similarly to Mr. Mason, he confines his wife as a lunatic.

Rochester decides to leave West Indies and come back to England with Antoinette, planning to take full control over her. Before the departure, he speaks with Christophine who accuses him of ruining Antoinette’s life, since he convinced himself that his wife is insane and dangerous. The old servant tries to justify Anette’s madness: “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.”¹²³ Christophine believes Rochester psychologically destroys Antoinette in the same way, caring only about the amount of money. Then she suggests Rochester forget about what happened and love Antoinette or to return to England alone, giving her a chance to begin a new life and possibly marry someone else. Rochester strongly rejects the possible scenario, not being able to let Antoinette go and spend the rest of his life by the side of another man. In the end, he justifies himself as he tells Christophine: “And do you think that I wanted all this? I would give my life to undo it. I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place.”¹²⁴

After the arrival to England, Antoinette is imprisoned in the third floor of Thornfield Hall, guarded by Grace Poole. In Rochester’s eyes, she fulfils a portrait of a

¹²⁰ Howells, *Jean Rhys*, 118.

¹²¹ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 96.

¹²² Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 96.

¹²³ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 102.

¹²⁴ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 104.

mad creole woman Bertha, his curse and burden. At this point it seems she has doubts about her identity, asking herself: “What am I doing in this place and who am I?”¹²⁵ Antoinette loses the ability to distinguish between dream and reality as she often recalls memories about her past, especially childhood in Coulibri. In addition, she attacks Richard with a knife and later she cannot remember the incident. However, even though she is told to be a lunatic, there are several aspects which prove the opposite. Most obviously, Fayad points out that Antoinette “is not slow to grasp her few moments of freedom to obtain a knife with which to accomplish her revenge”¹²⁶ on Richard. Therefore, for such action, she had to be fully sane, similarly to her attempt to escape from the ship while sailing to England. As no one tries to make deeper contact with her nor understand her feelings, Antoinette’s mental state remains a mystery.

Azam concludes that since Antoinette cannot see any possible solution which would liberate her from the oppression, “she finally chooses death as a means of freedom,”¹²⁷ rescuing herself both from physical and mental torture, feeling a relief. Her red dress serves as an inspiration for setting the building on fire: “... I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now.”¹²⁸ The image is followed by a dream in which Antoinette sets Thornfield on fire and jumps out from a window, which is subsequently transferred into reality since Antoinette becomes aware of her mission.

¹²⁵ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 116.

¹²⁶ Fayad, “Unquiet Ghosts,” 449.

¹²⁷ Azam, “Madwoman in the Post-Colonial Era,” 241.

¹²⁸ Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 121.

4 CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to depict and demonstrate the strength of a female character via the comparative analysis of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which was written as a postcolonial response to Brontë's masterpiece. In both novels, a woman figure carries crucial importance, fulfilling the idea of a feminist heroine going counter the male dominance and expectations of the society. Before the analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the thesis contains necessary literary and social background which is essential for the correct interpretation and understanding of the two literary pieces and their connection.

As it can be suggested, the relation between Jane and Antoinette is based not only on contradictions; since some of the key aspects such as challenging childhood days, the experience of facing men's oppression or pursuit of self-identity join them together. Even though the two heroines thus share a considerable number of similar experiences, emotions and even personal traits, Bertha is still most frequently seen as darker and more naturalistic alter ego of Jane, proving the characters' polarity. Moreover, the fact Jane can lead happy and fulfilled life only once Antoinette dies is an irrefutable reality; not even Rhys could avert.

The childhood of the two heroines is understood as full of hardship and injustice. Jane as well as Antoinette grows up in a loveless place, without the presence of caring parents, later losing the only friend. For both the girls, education symbolizes escape from the harsh reality. Furthermore, Jane resists the oppression of the men since her early age when she proudly faces John Reed, not being afraid to demonstrate even her physical strength. She has to endure the superiority of Mr. Brocklehurst as well, in spite of not acknowledging his views nor his personality. Later, Jane can apply her experience while confrontation with Rochester or St. John Rivers, turning both of them down. On the contrary, Antoinette does not have such experience which makes her much more vulnerable in the relationship with Rochester, being able only to resist his dominance while in West Indies during the honeymoon, encouraged by the feeling of a familiar environment, with Christophine's physical closeness in addition. West Indies bestows her power over Rochester, but once in England, Antoinette is portrayed as a broken and passive woman, becoming an outcast in an unknown country.

Whereas at least in the end the union of Jane and Rochester is based on harmony, mutual equality, even though hardly obtained, and happiness, such values in the marriage are denied eternally for Antoinette. The relationship they share can be defined as unstable, full of accusation, struggles, and demonstration of dominance and power. When looking at Antoinette, Rochester feelings spring only from physical attractiveness and lust; however, Jane symbolizes an embodiment of a uniqueness, pureness and inner beauty. The love Rochester confesses to is real and sincere.

In *Jane Eyre* Antoinette is reckoned as a lunatic, nonetheless *Wide Sargasso Sea* questions the mental illness attributed to Antoinette by Brontë without further explanation. Throughout both novels, the theme of loss of one's identity, insanity or the ability to control own emotions in connection with both the heroines is discussed on several occasions. During childhood, Jane is being called mad and unable to tame strong inner feelings as she acts impulsively and with a tendency to rashness and even physical aggression. In the following years, however, she learns to behave reasonably and temperately, following Miss Temple as her role model. Thus, such development in Jane's personality creates a sharp contrast with the state Antoinette occurs in, behaving like a wild animal, instinctively, violently and uncontrollably, being dangerous for the people around her. The nature of her actions remains unclear for Antoinette balances on the edge of sanity and madness, driven by her inner desire to take revenge on Rochester and to harm him.

The sense of being imprisoned and limited represents a common motif both Jane and Antoinette are familiar with, however in different stages of lives, creating a contradiction once again. While Jane feels to be incarcerated growing up in Gateshead Hall and Lowood Institution, when arriving at Thornfield Hall, she finally has the chance to experience completely new emotions and begins to enjoy and explore all life has to offer. Once again, Antoinette feels the very opposite, since she is torn from her homeland by Rochester, who leaves her locked up as a prisoner in the third floor of the Thornfield for the rest of her life. As a result, Thornfield serves as a symbol of both freedom and imprisonment as well.

Another example of polarity can be demonstrated in terms of property and financial autonomy. In the beginning, Jane suffers from the feeling of material dependence on Rochester, who uses his privileged position knowing he is not only the

man Jane is romantically interested in but her employer as well, thus emphasizing the sense of inequality and dominance. As soon as Jane inherits a huge amount of money and Rochester loses the majority of his property in flames, the chasm which separates them is overcome. The development of Antoinette's position represents the very opposite, since initially, she is the rich heiress, and thus a subject of interest for Rochester. Once wedded, Antoinette becomes entirely dependent, due to the English patriarchal law attributing all the possessions in the marriage to a man.

However, within the theory suggesting Jane's and Antoinette's close relation and even a kind of alliance, positive proof can be found in a text as well. During one scene before the planned wedding, Antoinette escapes from her room in an unguarded moment at night, finding Jane asleep. Afterwards, she tears the veil, which can be understood as a possible warning for Jane not to marry Rochester in order to avoid the suffering, Antoinette has to go through.

Considering the novels' endings, both Jane and Antoinette accomplish to break free from the oppression received from the hands of Rochester; and thus liberating themselves and finding inner peace, proving themselves to be strong feminist heroines. However, the very different way of gaining the freedom needs to be mentioned since Jane escapes through the acquired independence, Antoinette's liberation is connected with the possible insanity and death as the only final solution she is able to recognize.

RESUMÉ

Tématem této bakalářské práce je analýza a následná komparace románů *Jane Eyre* od Charlotte Brontë a *Wide Sargasso Sea* od Jean Rhys, přičemž primární důraz je kladen na způsob vyobrazení silné ženské osobnosti coby shodného motivu obou děl, ztělesněné Jane Eyre a Antoinette Cosway. Jednání obou hrdinek kontrastuje s tehdejšími společenskými normami a všeobecným očekáváním, zejména pak jejich revolta vůči výsadnímu a dominantnímu postavení mužů, kdy svorně čelí útlaku ze strany Rochesterera, s nímž je pojí milostný vztah.

V první části práce jsou romány krátce představeny a zároveň je rozkryto jejich vzájemné pouto, tedy skutečnost, že *Wide Sargasso Sea* lze považovat za příběh dějově předcházející *Jane Eyre*, přibližující osud Rochesterovy bláznivé ženy Berthy. Současně je zmíněn také záměr Rhys při psaní románu, který pojala coby postkoloniální feministickou odpověď Brontë, prostřednictvím níž se Berthy zastala, zpochybnila její údajné šílenství a nabídla čtenářům možnost nahlédnout na děj z pohledu postavy, v *Jane Eyre* navždy umlčené a kriticky odsouzené. V následující kapitole je prezentován nezbytný literární a sociální kontext obou knih, který napomáhá jejich správnému výkladu. Brontë lze považovat za jednu z klíčových osobností viktoriánské literatury, v *Jane Eyre* je tak možno rozeznat značné množství konceptů, typických právě pro toto období. Podrobně jsou popsána témata důležitosti společenských tříd, otázka pojetí manželství a také pozice žen v rámci společnosti, s důrazem kladeným na jejich postupnou emancipaci a snahu zisku rovnocenného postavení s muži, čemuž napomáhaly právě i literární hrdinky typu Jane Eyre s feministickými sklony. Oproti tomu Rhys svou tvorbou spadá do etapy postkolonialismu, kritizuje nejen předchozí útlak ze strany Británie, ale také představuje vlastní národ bez mnohdy zkreslených představ, uznávané zvyky a hodnoty, způsob fungování společnosti, pojetí dějin z pohledu utlačovaného či řeší otázku národní identity, zcizenou kolonizátory. Samozřejmostí je také zmínka o otrokářství a rasismu, tedy neméně důležitých motivů vyskytujících se ve *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Druhá část práce prezentuje literární analýzu *Jane Eyre* a *Wide Sargasso Sea* soustředující se na osudy hlavních hrdinek. Ta je dále rozčleněna na dvě podkapitoly, jež rozlišují dětství a pozdější dospělost Jane a Antoinette, spjatou s Rochesterem. Již v útlém věku obě dívky čelí nelehkým situacím, útlaku, nespravedlnosti a pocitu

odlišnosti od druhých. Ač ve zcela odlišném prostředí, ani jedna z nich nevyrůstá v přítomnosti milujících rodičů, důležitá je pak především absence otce coby pozitivního mužského vzoru. Jane zažívá nutnost boje a vzdoru vůči dominantním mužským postavám, ať již v podobě tyranizujícího Johna Reeda či bezcitného a pokrytecky jednajícího pana Brocklehursta v Lowoodské škole, Antoinette podstupuje kruté zacházení ze strany společnosti coby celku, a to v důsledku rodinné historie a barvy pleti. Obě hrdinky rovněž přijdou o své jediné přítelkyně, ať již v doslovném či přeneseném smyslu slova. Klíčové pro jejich další život jsou nepochybně silné ženské vzory, v případě Jane sehrává primární roli slečna Temple vyučující v Lowoodské škole, obdobnou úlohu pro Antoinette plní služka černé pleti Christophine. Největší důležitost však jednoznačně nese postava Rochestera, který zásadně ovlivní život obou mladých žen a má nemalý podíl na dalším formování jejich osobnosti. Jeho výsadní postavení a nadřazenost ve vztahu představuje opakující se vzorec chování, kdy do obou vztahů vstupuje s určitou dávkou dominance. Antoinette se Rochesterovi, kterého pojme za manžela na základě domluveného sňatku, dokáže postavit pouze v domovském prostředí Západní Indie, poté co se ocitá v Anglii je již zlomenou ženou s občasnými záchvěvy revolty v podobě agresivity a násilí. Jane se nad mužským útlakem podaří zvítězit, musí však podstoupit nelehké situace, čelit nečestnému přístupu Rochestera a učinit obtížný a zcela zásadní krok k osamostatnění, když se rozhodne Rochestera opustit. Ve výsledku tak získá nejen důkaz o čisté lásce, ale pozná sebe sama.

Prostřednictvím srovnání charakterových rysů a postojů Jane a Antoinette bakalářská práce rozkrývá jak jejich shodné, tak odlišné znaky. Analýza si všímá, že vztah obou hrdinek s Rochesterem je vystavěn na zcela odlišných hodnotách a citových vazbách. Zatímco Jane Rochester skutečně a upřímně miluje a je ochoten se pro život po jejím boku změnit, v Antoinette navždy vidí pouze nutnou oběť k zisku finanční jistoty, ačkoliv jí v určitých okamžicích podléhá a pociťuje silnou přitažlivost. I ta však vyprchá poté, co dojde ke vzájemnému ublížení a křivdám. Největší důležitost lze pak rozeznat v konečném řešení osvobození se z mužské nadvlády Jane a Antoinette. Jane po nelehkém procesu získává rovnocenné postavení a pocit štěstí ve vztahu s Rochesterem prostřednictvím dostání svých zásad, upřímných projevů a plné nezávislosti, zatímco Antoinette uniká z pod vlivu Rochestera pouze skrze vlastní smrt, s vidinou pomyslného návratu k domovu, od něž byla nedobrovolně odloučena.

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ANOTACE

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Klíčová slova: viktoriánská literatura, postkoloniální literatura, britský román, ženská osobnost, Charlotte Brontë, Jean Rhys

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou a komparací románů *Jane Eyre* od Charlotte Brontë a *Wide Sargasso Sea* od Jean Rhys, který byl napsán coby postkoloniální odpověď. Důležitou součástí práce je literární a sociální kontext obou knih. Hlavním cílem práce je popsat silnou ženskou osobnost ztvárněnou Jane Eyre a Antoinette Cosway a jejich boj vůči mužskému útlaku a omezení ze strany společnosti. Zmíněny jsou také podobnosti a rozdíly v životech obou hlavních hrdinek.

ANNOTATION

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This bachelor thesis deals with the comparative analysis of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and its postcolonial response *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. The integral part of the thesis is the literary and social context of both the novels. The main goal is to depict the strength of a female character embodied by Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway and their struggle against male oppression and social constraints. The similarities and differences which can be found in the lives of the two heroines are mentioned as well.