BERTHA AFTER JEAN RYHS' *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*: NEW DILEMMAS?

Márcia Cristine AGUSTINI[1]

Resumo: Mais de cem anos após sua publicação, o romance *Jane Eyre* vê um dos seus personagens mais emblemáticos ser revisitado por uma escritora caribenha. Bertha Mason sai das poucas linhas destinadas a ela em *Jane Eyre* pra se tornar a figura dramática principal em *Wide Sargasso Sea.* Enquanto que no primeiro romance a loucura de Bertha é um tema relegado à degeneração de traços pessoais, no segundo as origens de sua loucura estão ligadas ao processo de dominação imperial. O objetivo deste artigo é confrontar a representação dada à mesma personagem em diferentes momentos e tentar vislumbrar os significados propostos nestas obras.

Palavras-chave: Imperialismo. O *Outro* colonial. 'Domesticar'. Representação.

Abstract: More than one hundred years after its publication, the novel *Jane Eyre* has one of its most iconic characters revisited by a Caribbean writer. Bertha Mason leaves the few lines given to her in *Jane Eyre* to become the leading figure in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Whereas in the first novel, Bertha's madness is an issue relegated to the degeneration of personal traits; in the second, the origins of her madness are linked to the process of imperial domination. The aim of this paper is to confront the representation given to the same character at different times and try to discern the meanings offered in these novels.

Keywords: Imperialism. Colonial *Other*. 'Domesticate'. Representation.

Bertha Mason; a minor character in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), has provoked a lot of discussion and reflection after Jean Rhys' revision of the theme of Imperial domination in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). In *Jane Eyre,* Bertha is a secondary character who is mostly talked about than actively participate in the happenings of the novel. In *Wide Sargasso Sea,* this character gains the pages of the novel and becomes the central figure in the plot. Adlai Murdoch writes: "In Rhys' intertextual *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), she inscribes what purports to be the untold story of the Jamaican creole Bertha Mason's life prior to her marginal appearance in Jane Eyre" (2003). Bertha's agentive role, nevertheless, is gradually demeaned by the Englishman that has

[1] Programa de pós-graduação em Letras/inglês e literatura correspondente, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brasil, e-mail: agustinimarcia@gmail.com

taken her for wife. The makings of this subjugation are amplified and the meanings previously put forth by the narrative in *Jane Eyre* become more evident and tangible in *Wide Sargasso Sea.* The meanings each novel offer and what they reveal regarding the Imperial domination are the focus of this article.

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Bertha works as Jane Eyre's antagonist and her *deeds* eventually lead the two central characters to approximate. It is through Bertha's interference that conflict is installed and the narrative creates the tension necessary to justify Jane's suffering and Bertha's replacement as Rochester's wife. This is the case in Bertha's more determinant actions in the novel–when she puts fire in Rochester bed and later on in the whole castle. *Jane Eyre's* narrative works to develop the female individual self and as such "articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the 'native female' as such (within discourse, as a signifier) is excluded from any share in this emerging norm"(SPIVAK, 245-6). That is, in order for Jane Eyre's project to be achieved with the end of the story, Bertha has to 'disappear'.

Within the perspective of development and female possibilities, Jane reaches plenitude: marriage and family. On the other hand, Bertha is not allowed any share of this narrative. Her representation works as an icon to the colonial *Other* and in the service of it, she has to be 'controlled' and tamed. She is not an individual, but an entity that represents a group. In a postcolonial reading, through Bertha's replacement with Jane as Rochester's wife, we see the reinforcement of the ideology of imperialism. The good, humble, and tamed Jane substitutes her colonial *Other*. The threat that the colonial represents is controlled through its annihilation.

As we can see, Bertha's role in *Jane Eyre* instigates double readings. On the one hand, she is the one who prevents the central characters to marry and find happiness, on the other, her enigmatic figure works as an emblem for the effect of imperial domination over the colonies. The second reading is reinforced by her succinct depiction which characterizes her mostly as wild and fierce. Her being a threat ultimately justifies a surveillance need which is dutifully filled in by an English master. Bertha is depicted as a liminal figure that oscillates between the human and the animal:

> In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not ... 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. (BRONTË, chapter 26)

Further on, we learn that Bertha's characterization extends beyond her present madness. Previous to her disease, her temper and intellect are already portrayed as 'lack' and 'inferior'. We can see this in Rochester's words when he describes the moments after he married her. He has discovered her mother is mad, but so far, what keep them apart are their differences:

> I found her nature wholly alien to mine, her tastes obnoxious to me, her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger–[. . .]; that kindly conversation could not be sustained between us, because whatever topic I started, immediately received from her a turn at once coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile–when I perceived that I should never have a quiet or settled household, because no servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders (BRONTË, chapter 27).

Such a description fits the Imperialist project. She is wild, incontrollable and uncultivated. As a result of this ensemble of characteristics, Bertha is ultimately depicted as mad. Her depiction becomes complete with her portrayal as a disabled subject. Her disability adds up to the project of Imperialist domination and she becomes a threat for the others and for herself. Such character is "a figure produced by the axiomatics of imperialism" (SPIVAK, 1985). Gayatry C. Spivak continues her reasoning: "Through Bertha Mason, the white Jamaican Creole, Brontë renders the human/animal frontier as acceptably indeterminate" (1985). Bertha's depiction as mad, disabled and ultimately a threat to herself, becomes an emblem for the colonial *Other*. Her *lack* justifies the need for domination.

Rochester's 'benevolence' is imparted in his conclusion to this tale. In spite of Bertha' s 'narrow mind' he asserts that he "tried to devour [his] repentance and disgust in secret; [he] repressed the deep antipathy [he] felt". The magnanimity of his understanding even when he considered he had been betrayed (by his family? Her family? Herself? Himself?) shows his vocation for domination. His burden is to take care of the poor wild woman. He could have gotten rid of her sending her to another house he possesses, but he wouldn't perform such villainy:

> [. . .] my plans would not permit me to remove the maniac elsewhere– though I possess an old house, Ferndean Manor, even more retired and hidden than this, where I could have lodged her safely enough, had not a scruple about the unhealthiness of the situation, in the heart of a wood, made my conscience recoil from the arrangement. Probably those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge: but to each villain his own vice; and mine is not a tendency to indirect assassination, even of what I most hate (BRONTË, chapter 27).

In this regard, Brontë's Rochester becomes Bertha's antagonist. He comes to represent the Empire the same way Bertha represents the colony. In the imperialist project, their pairing is perfect: she needs protection, education, and understanding while his patronizing manners secure his domination over her.

In Brontë's writing, Bertha's madness is confounded with her character in such a way that it is left for the reader to infer what led her to madness. In spite of allegedly being related to her mother's genetic inheritance, her intractable nature merges in the description of her process of becoming mad. Rochester describes her decay: "her *character* ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her *vices* sprang up fast and rank [. . .] What a pigmy intellect she had, and what giant propensities!" Rochester continues by concluding: "the doctors now discovered that MY WIFE was mad–her *excesses* had prematurely developed the germs of insanity" (BRONTË, chapter 27, *my emphasis*). That is, Bertha's character is to be blamed for her present madness. Through the previous description, Rochester makes Bertha the only one responsible for this state of affairs.

As part of the imperialist project, Bertha never becomes a self– she is an institution, the postcolonial *Other* in need of a definition. Spivak clarifies: "No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the *Other* into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely *Other* into a domesticated *Other* that consolidates the imperialist self" (SPIVAK, 1985). That is, the colonial other is, by definition, *pre*-characterized, *pre*-defined. In Bertha's depiction we can see some of these features being confirmed by the imperial other. Bertha's depiction reassures the Imperialist of his project. Bertha is incapable of taking care of herself. She is, in fact, the ultimate consequence of a colonized left alone to her own care. Her character–apparently an inborn quality–along with her uncultivated intellect–as Rochester *clarifies*–have led her to madness.

On the other hand, Bertha's depiction cannot reach the extreme of construing a completely intractable figure. She cannot be completely humanized in the same way she cannot be completely bestialized. Had she received the epithet of human, the imperial project of domination would not be 'necessary'; had she 'remained' an animal, she would not need a master either, for no animal would possibly need education to evolve from heathen to human. Spivak explains the formula: "make the heathen into a human so that he can be treated as an end in himself" (1985).

Yet, the project of imperial justification is not central in Jane Eyre. It, in fact, seems to fit the narrative somewhat lopsidedly. Spivak calls this project a tangent one. She adverts that it "escapes the closed circle of the narrative conclusion" (1985). That is, it does not deal directly with the project of female individualism perpetrated by the main character. Nevertheless, this project interferes in the narrative in a peripheral but persistent way. An example of this tangentiality appears through the character of St. John Rivers. He is the one whose initial reflections over his vocation are retaken at the end of Jane Eyre. Interesting enough, his reflections do not refer at all to individualism or female closure. His work as a missionary makes him deal with the 'burden of the white man' instead. He answers Jane when asked about giving up his work:

> My vocation? My great work? ... My hopes of being numbered in the band who have merged all ambitions in the glorious one of bettering their race–of carrying knowledge into the realms of ignorance–of substituting peace for war–freedom for bondage–religion for superstition–the hope of heaven for the fear of hell? (BRONTË, chapter 32).

St. John Rivers's work is to travel to 'poor countries' to teach European values and, even though this character's reflections are never directly referred to Bertha's presence, it is unquestionable the realization that she is one of those who is in need of help.

In sum, Brontë's Bertha is animalized in a project designed to undermine her role as a wife and mostly of all, as a human being. Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* attempts to redress this image attacking mostly the notion of homogeneity and objectification that the former novel proposes of the colonial and imperial subjects. Antoinette Mason (renamed Bertha by Rochester[2]) is clearly a Creole and part of the

[2] This character is not given a name in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but the inevitable connections between this novel and *Jane Eyre* allow this inference.

colonial elite. She is not a former slave, and, even though this group constitutes the greatest mass of the group under the label of colonized, it is through Bertha's rendering that Brontë's novel propose to depict the colonial subject as a unified group. Rhys's novel complicates this view by demonstrating the internal conflicts within the colonized groups:

> By deliberately underlining and interrogating the apparently oppositional tropes of metropolitan and creole identity, both by metonymically relating Rochester to the patterns of colonialism and slavery at work in the Jamaica where he accrued his wealth, and particularly through her complex portrait of the 'madwoman in the attic,' this 'prequel' to Bronte's text deliberately destabilizes received, supposedly singular notions of 'colonizer,' 'colonized,' and 'creole' as they were used in 19th-century British prose (MURDOCH, 2003).

Jean Rhys's depiction of Antoinette makes us aware of the highly unstable position Antoinette occupies in the colony. On one side the English *Other* (in the figure of Rochester) comes to despise her 'difference' and attribute 'race' to her as a form of regaining control over what is unknown to him, on the other the black creoles reject her presence in the country. At the end, Antoinette's madness is not attributed to the disintegration of her character as in Jane Eyre but as a result of the disintegration of her subjectivity. By presenting the conflicts at play among white and black creoles on the one hand and the English gaze on the other, Rhys construes Antoinette's subjectivity as contradictory and as one of the main forces that leads her to madness.

Antoinette/Bertha's drama starts right after her marriage. Her husband has difficulties to accept her *difference* and, as a solution, he starts avoiding her presence and physical contact. One of the facts that complicates her situation is the fact that her wealth changes hands: from hers to her husband's. These were the terms of the English law at the time, and Antoinette accepts in the expectation of being protected by the *family*, that is, her husband (RAISKIN). Nevertheless, their marriage seems to have ended and Christophine tells her a rich girl should pack her things and leave. Antoinette reveals her situation: "I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him" (RHYS, 1996). The marriage represents an exchange of money: from Antoinette's hands to Rochester's. Rochester now has complete control over her wealth, and, as a consequence, of her steps. In a patriarchal society, a woman whose family is completely unstructured and has no money does not find many possibilities of

living without the assistance of a man. Antoinette finds herself in this situation. The protection she expected from her husband soon becomes a prison.

This unbalance in the familiar milieu reflects Antoinette's relation to England. The Imperial nation is geographically far away but ideologically present. Similarly to Clare Savage in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Antoinette's lessons at school recall the 'mother-country's' culture. Judith Raiskin states: "Antoinette's ultimate disempowerment and impoverishment in Wide Sargasso Sea is facilitated by a fetishized representation of the British Empire grounded [. . .] in myths of family loyalty and safety" (1996). Raiskin continues by pointing to Antoinette's past and the lack of a family structure: "from guardian to guardian–from mother to nurse to step-father to church to step-brother to husband" (1996). This instability is replaced by the firm but idyllic place England appears in Antoinette's mind. This image is so strong that when her marriage starts collapsing she dreams of going to England. She reasons:

> I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me . . . England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports, coal, iron, wool. Then imports and character of inhabitants. Names, Essex, Chelmsford on the Chelmer. The Yorkshire and Lincolnshire wolds. Wolds? Does that mean hills? How high? Half the height of ours or not even that? Cool green leaves in the short cool summer. Summer. There are fields of corn like sugar-cane fields, but gold colour and not so tall. After summer the trees are bare, then winter and snow (RHYS, 1966).

Her reflections reveal her profound knowledge of England's geography and economy. It also reveals that her knowledge does not come from experience. For instance, when she wonders–"Wolds? Does that mean hills? How high? Half the height of ours or not even that?"–we realize her knowledge derives from books. The construal of England's image is completely devoid of actual familiarity. This feature gives room to romanticize, which is what some thoughts in the above passage demonstrate when she states that she will be a different person when she lives in England. On the other hand, Antoinette knows that England might not be her answer. Another feature that stands out in this passage is that, intertwined to her reflections regarding England are some negative words which foreshadows and present her knowledge of England not being quite what she expects.

Another point that Raiskin makes is that the literature that Antoinette learns is the English one, making her to dream about this place and see the act of traveling there as a home-coming. The constant and persistent presence of the English culture makes her feel she is far away from home. On the shelves of her house we see "Byron's poems, novels by Sir Walter Scott, *Confessions of an Opium Eater*… (RHYS, 1966). Nevertheless, Antoinette's acculturation into Englishness isn't limited to geography, literature and history. Their culinary also follows English tradition. This happens when Antoinette's mother marries again and their resources improve. They start eating English food: "We ate English food now, beef and mutton, pies and puddings. I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking" (RHYS, 1996).

The force of these interferences is to convince her of her Englishness. Raiskin argues that Rhys' characters–and we can see it in Antoinette–present the difficulties of a subject in such complicate situation to understand their situation. Antoinette is an Englishwoman who has never lived in England. She is raised into the British culture while she was born in the colony:

> The myth of England and of the colonials' spiritual and racial relationship to it contributes to their feelings [Rhys' characters] of inauthenticity both at home and in England. The doubleness of their identities–as both Caribbean and English while also neither Caribbean nor English–forces them to shift between the two national 'realities,' [. . .]. Seeing one image necessarily excludes the other; it takes a great deal of mental energy to retain the existence of both simultaneously (RAISKIN, 1996).

Antoinette seeks connection to England through her marriage to Rochester while her knowledge and familiarity with Jamaica denounces her doubleness. Rochester, on the other hand, perceives these incongruities and starta having difficulties to deal with her presence. Rochester's relations in the island are restricted to a small universe in which he is the only Englishman. Similarly to Antoinette, he has also, according to Raiskin, "grown up with a cultural representation of a foreign land–that is, with the English literary creation of the abundant but menacing New World" (1996). We can read their mutual misreading of one another through their cultural view of each other's homeland. Antoinette asks Rochester: "'Is it true', she said, 'that England is like a dream?" Rochester bluntly answers: "'Well', I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream". Later on the narrative,

he admits the uneasy feelings the places and people that surround him have provoked: "But the feeling of something unknown and hostile was very strong" He then tells Antoinette: "'I feel very much a stranger here [. . .] I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side" (RHYS, 1996).

Examples abound in this matter, confirming that everything is unfamiliar to Rochester and that the feeling of alienation perpetrated by the heroine of the story is shared by him. The difference is that to regain his sense of power he *rereads* Antoinette into a racial other. "Such a reading implicitly posits Bertha/Antoinette as both native and *Other*, a 'white creole' intrinsically unable to locate her true subjective space in the white-dominated, slave-based colony" (MURDOCH, 2003). The intended misunderstanding of the terms of this interaction implicate in estrangement and silencing of the weaker side of the link. Murdoch points to the fact that this interaction irrevocably creates two sides: the agent and the subject. And, in this kind of relationship the battle is to impose one's point of view through the silencing of the *Other*: "any interaction between agent and subject is doomed to voicelessness" (MURDOCH, 2003).

This process starts through Rochester's perception of disturbing features in his wife: "she never blinks at all, it seems to me. Long, dark, alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (RHYS, 1966). Later on, Rochester complains of her intimacy with the Black Creoles: "Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?" and at her answer he adds "*I* wouldn't hug and kiss them" (RHYS, 1966).

This brief dialogue implicates in diverse meanings. On the one hand, we see his despise for the Black people, but above all *suspicion* of Antoinette's deep connection with these people. The pronoun *them* reinforces his racial view of the other as a sole entity deprived of uniqueness while the stressed pronoun *I* denounces his expectations regarding Antoinette's behavior based on the notion of his own superiority and correctness of behavior. Rochester does not understand her closeness to some Black people and interprets it as another sign of her 'foreignness'. A moment in which his suspicions become apparent is when he considers the possibility of Antoinette and Amélie being related: "For a moment she looked very much like Amélie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place" (RHYS, 1966). Due to his difficulty to understand Antoinette, Rochester solves the impasse by attributing race to her. Interestingly enough, in this case, race can only refer plausibly to

her hybridism. All the reader and Rochester knows of her lineage is that she was born in Jamaica, her mother is Martinican and her father is an Englishman. This fact, however, does not disturb Rochester's reading of her appearance and behavior.

After learning of her mother's madness, Rochester finds a justification to discharge his frustrations by attributing his feeling of dislocation and disempowerment on Antoinette. His defensive reaction includes despising and avoidance of his wife. One instance of that is in the name Rochester tries to impinge on her. Antoinette is aware of the meaning of this action: "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know that's obeah too" (RHYS, 1966). His avoidance becomes total to the point in which he ends up having sex with Amélie. The reach of this incident goes beyond jealousy and despise for his behavior for it stains the place Antoinette used to love: "I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it" (RHYS, 1966).

Antoinette refers to the farm they are living and where she lived part of her childhood. In her complex world, in which she is Jamaican and British at the same time, the farm works as a universe apart from its Jamaican position. It is in Jamaica, but it is also British. This place reinforces Antoinette's placelessness:

> If, then, Bertha/Antoinette is both European and native, then the resulting cultural and subjective chiasmus reinforces this absence of location, generating a sense of placelessness from Bertha's dual status as both and, implicitly, neither. By revealing and underlining the doubleness and instability in contemporary conceptions of social relations and 'racial' categories, then, Rhys undermines our perception of both metropole and colony and of notions of belonging and exclusion (MURDOCH, 2003).

Similarly to Rochester's disdain, Bertha faces the contempt of the Black creoles of Jamaica. The slaves, Vivian Nun Halloran states, work as "the arbiters of racial and cultural authenticity [. . .] "that works parallel to, although separate from, white Creole and European prejudices" (2006). Antoinette and her mother are not welcome among the white Creole elite: "they say when trouble comes, close ranks. And so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (RHYS, 1966), but the conflict develops further in relation to the Black *Other* that does not accept her and her family as well. In the name of this hatred, their house is burnt down and her brother dies intoxicated by the smoke. Later on, this state of affairs is reiterated by Antoinette being called 'white

nigger' and 'white cockroach'. Antoinette's feeling of dislocation is revealed in her own words. She is telling Rochester about the song Amélie was singing:

> It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder *who I am* and where is my country and *where do I belong* and why was I ever born at all (RHYS, 1966, *emphasis added*).

Being charged with Black Creole hatred and her husband's disdain, Bertha starts pondering about her existence. She is taken to London and she reasons: "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass". Antoinette repeats her feeling of displacement subsequently: "there is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now...what am I doing in this place and who am I?" (RHYS, 1966).

At this point in the novel, Antoinette meets the destiny announced in *Jane Eyre*. Deprived of her will by being kept locked in a room, Antoinette becomes the colonized in need of care while Rochester takes over his role as colonizer. The circle is closed but, on the way, the force of colonization over the subjectivity of the colonized was unveiled. Rhys' valuable attempt at reviewing former narratives by presenting the fragmented subjectivity of a strong creole character cannot prevent imperial powers to dominate the closure of her narrative the same way they dominate postcolonial countries. At the end, Antoinette/Bertha's destiny announced in *Jane Eyre* is ratified. Unable to cope with the contradictory discourses regarding their national identities, Antoinette and her mother succumb to madness:

> Ultimately, however, for both Antoinette and her mother, it is the psychological conflict between their desire to belong and their recognition of their exclusion from both the metropolitan and the slave-based axes of colonizer and colonized that highlights the interstitial pluralities of their creole subjectivity (MURDOCH, 2003).

A final instance of the difficulties of this conciliation happens when Antoinette is in England and continues to perceive the country as two separate images. On the one side, the idyllic England and on the other, "the political reality of the England that has denied her freedom and civil rights" (RAISKIN, 1996). Antoinette does not fully realize that England as a set of economic, political and ideological rules has turned her life into

madness. She does not see the "England that has betrayed her. That which does not correlate with the myth of roses and bright snow" (RAISKIN, 1996). When she finds herself in captivity and is told she is in England, she refuses this image, and this place, according to Raiskin, becomes 'not-England' but somewhere else: "They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don't remember, but we lost it" (RHYS, 1966).

Through the conflictive relationship Antoinette develops with the English world–incarnated by her husband Rochester–and the black creoles, Rhys exposes "the presumptions undergirding the key issues of colonialism, race, and otherness" (MURDOCH, 2003). Following *Jane Eyre*'s Bertha, *Wide Sargasso Sea's* Bertha also sets fire to the house she lives in, ultimately killing herself. In the later novel, however, the happenings are tied to the character's troubled subjectivity. She does not kill herself out of inexplicable rage of madness. Her action is guided for the unbearable pain of the realization that she does not belong anywhere. In her perspective, she got lost on the way; she does not have a house to return. Neither Jamaica nor England may play this role anymore. The split character of a subjectivity construed upon the Imperialist project of division: colony/metropolis, finally drives her mad and towards an impulse of destruction. This impulse, however, is "not directed against the 'English' part of herself but against a brutal political reality that threatens her own identity as an English/Caribbean Creole" (RAISKIN, 1996).

In Jean Ryhs' novel, nevertheless and apart from the mother's madness, the facts that lead to such conclusion are different from those in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Among the opposing forces that are at play we have the black Creole island community which is represented in the novel by the slaves. These individuals are granted the power to "determine[s] which performances of whiteness are legitimate, and which are abject" (HALLORAN, 2006). On the other side, 'Englishness' is charged on her in the figure of Rochester. Placed in the middle of English and Black Creole racism, Jean Rhys's Bertha allows for the scrutiny of the diversity of colonial people. Revealing these conflicts, the novel "criticize(s) the racial essentialism and nativism that marked England's actual involvement in the slave trade and plantation economies in the West Indian colonies after emancipation", it is through the portrayal of Antoinette as a character in a crisis that leads her to a "failed performance(s) of transcultural identity" that Rhys "acknowledge the historically insurmountable power of European whiteness as a

hegemonic ideal of racial purity" (HALLORAN, 2006). That is, the power of the European character (Rochester) in suppressing Antoinette's attempts at influencing him in some way is contained by her depiction as mad and as a default, as unreasonable and not worth of further considerations.

The value of Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* extends beyond its rereading of a classic of the nineteenth century. Rhys' postcolonial view on some of the classic characters depicted in the novel has impressively marked the former novel. The closure and progressiveness of *Jane Eyre's* narrative contrasts with the open ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. While in one novel we have the stabilization of the narrative through the placement of Jane within a patriarchal model, in the latter it is the main character disintegration and inadequateness that governs the narrative. Antoinette is an outcast whose process of subjectification ends up driving her crazy. Her tale is not legitimated by master narratives. She is, nevertheless, interpellated by these narrative "scripts" in such a way that her lives become governed by the expectations created by them.

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