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"SAY NOTHING AND IT MAY NOT BE TRUE:"

FOCALIZATION AND VOICE IN

WIDE SARGASSO SEA

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
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"SAY NOTHING AND IT MAY NOT BE TRUE":
FOCALIZATION AND VOICE IN
WIDE SARGASSO SEA

por

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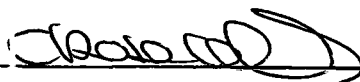
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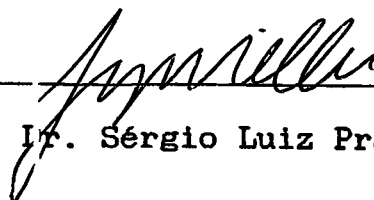
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ABSTRACT

Jean Rhys published in 1966 *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the story of Bertha, Mr. Rochester's mad first wife from Charlotte Brontë's classic *Jane Eyre* (1847). In *Wide Sargasso Sea* both Bertha, called Antoinette by Jean Rhys, and her husband are granted the narrative voice. It is a critical common sense that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is Rhys's best novel in terms of fictional craft. Criticism in general says that Rhys gives voice to Bertha Rochester, the obscure character of *Jane Eyre*. Critics also say that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is marked by silences.

This dissertation proposes an investigation of the silences in the novel, mainly those related to Antoinette as both character and narrator. The analysis is based on Gérard Genette's theory of focalization and voice. Following Antoinette's and her husband's roles as characters and narrators, it is possible to conclude that silence is a feature of Antoinette as a character. She seldom speaks to other characters, and when she does the communication is frustrated. There are also silences, or gaps of communication, in the information one character has about the other one, leading to misinterpretations. For the reader there are also omissions of important information, preventing conclusions about events that have happened in the story. Using silences to tell the story of Antoinette, Rhys suggests that the truth in the story of a colonial woman is indeed made of omissions.

RESUMO

Jean Rhys publicou em 1966 o romance *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a história de Bertha, a primeira esposa, louca, de Mr. Rochester do clássico *Jane Eyre* de Charlotte Brontë (1847). Em *Wide Sargasso Sea* Bertha, denominada Antoinette por Jean Rhys, e seu marido contam a história. É senso comum na crítica literária que *Wide Sargasso Sea* é o melhor romance de Jean Rhys e que com ele a autora supera alguns problemas de seus romances anteriores. A crítica de uma forma geral afirma que Rhys concede voz a Bertha Rochester, a personagem obscura de *Jane Eyre*. Críticos também dizem que *Wide Sargasso Sea* é marcado por silêncios.

Esta dissertação propõe-se a uma investigação dos silêncios no romance, principalmente daqueles ligados a Antoinette como personagem e narradora. A análise é baseada na teoria sobre focalização e voz narrativa de Gérard Genette. Examinando os papéis de personagens e narradores é possível concluir que o silêncio é efetivamente uma característica de Antoinette como personagem. Ela raramente fala com outros personagens, e quando isso acontece a comunicação é frustrada. Também há silêncios, ou lacunas de comunicação, nas informações que um personagem tem sobre o outro, levando a mal-entendidos. Também para o leitor são omitidas importantes informações, impedindo conclusões sobre eventos ocorridos na história. Usando silêncios para contar a história de Antoinette, Rhys sugere que a verdade na história de uma mulher colonial é, de fato, feita de omissões.

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INTRODUCTION

Wide Sargasso Sea,¹ first published by Jean Rhys in 1966, became widely known as the story of the first Mrs. Rochester, the mad wife in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847. Named Antoinette in Rhys's book, the so-called "mad" Mrs. Rochester tells her story from a West Indian perspective, elucidating aspects of her life that were not mentioned in Brontë's novel. Yet, Rhys does not grant exclusiveness to Antoinette in terms of expression. Rochester, though never named in the text, also tells parts of the story.

Although the revisionist characteristic of Rhys's novel *per se* is enough to assign her and her work both popularity and critical interest, there are other aspects in *WSS* that have been largely discussed. The relationship between the West Indian and the English characters, Antoinette and her husband in particular, embody the conflicting political relations between the British colonies and the metropolis in the eighteenth century, with the complicated effects in the culture of the West Indian black and white population. Critics interested in Commonwealth Literature have found in *WSS* fertile ground for their research. Furthermore,

1. Hereafter referred to as *WSS*.

commenting on *WSS* Rachel Blau DuPlessis says that "a woman from a colony is a trope for the woman as a colony" (46). So, at the same time that *WSS* is analysed in terms of the power relations between metropolis and colony it is also analysed in terms of the power relations between men and women in the view of feminist criticism. Other critical approaches include examinations of the structure of the novel, of the novelist's use of modernist themes and techniques, and of the autobiographical aspects embedded in the text.

Since *WSS* is such a rich work in terms of possible critical approaches, it is not an easy task to decide from which perspective to examine the novel without leaving out important considerations. The focus of this dissertation is the structural aspects of *WSS*, namely the way in which events are perceived and told by the characters/narrators. This analysis of *WSS* proposes to answer some questions related to Antoinette's and her husband's role of characters/narrators. Is Antoinette's version of the story contradictory in relation to her husband's? May she be considered an unreliable narrator, since she is "mad" according to Brontë's story, or is her husband's version unreliable? Finally, did Rhys really give voice to Bertha/Antoinette granting her the opportunity to tell her true story? And who hears her? Literary critics affirm that Rhys has granted voice to Antoinette, but at the same time they discuss about silences in the novel. In this way, this study also proposes an investigation of *silences* in the novel.

Structural analyses of *WSS* have not been as numerous as feminist or political studies, leaving spaces that can still be

filled in terms of studies of the narrative structures in the novel. The aim of this study is then to discuss the particular aspects of focalization and voice, based on Gérard Genette's Structuralist theories, investigating the silences in *WSS*.

In this way, the first chapter of this dissertation will analyze the criticism on Jean Rhys's work in general and on *WSS* in particular. In the second chapter Genette's theory on focalization and voice will be discussed and applied to the analysis of *WSS*.

CHAPTER I
REVIEW OF CRITICISM

1. JEAN RHYS AS A COLONIAL, FEMINIST AND MODERNIST WRITER

To determine the importance of this study of *WSS* it is necessary to review the most important criticism written about the book up to now. Some considerations about Jean Rhys' life and her work in general are also relevant for a better view of *WSS* in the literary context. As remarked by Thomas F. Staley,

The extraordinary circumstances of Jean Rhys' nomadic and bohemian life are fascinating in themselves. Her origin, cultural milieu, and experiences no doubt explain many of the unique qualities of her art and must be taken into consideration in any serious treatment of her fiction. (01)

Besides, the very choice of Rochester's mad wife as the protagonist of *WSS* points to an identification that can only be understood in the context of the author's life.

Jean Rhys was born Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams in Roseau, Dominica.¹ The year of her birth may be 1890 or 1894. It

1. The biographical information are mostly based on Thomas F. Staley's *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study*, and Carole Angier's *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*.

is not known for sure since, according to David Plante, she never revealed her age, and the record office in Roseau burned down and with it her birth certificate (153). Her father was a Welsh doctor, and her mother a third-generation Dominican Creole. Her mother's family had been plantation and slave owners, and felt the decline of the plantations in the nineteenth century. The house of the family in an estate in Geneva was burned down several times. Her Creole heritage is important to the treatment that Jean Rhys gives to the Creole culture and its problems in her work, in special *WSS*. She had two brothers and a younger sister. According to Carole Angier, based on Rhys's own comments, the mother preferred the youngest daughter, Brenda, neglecting the girl Ella Gwendoline. Once more, critics like Carole Angier find in Jean Rhys's work echoes of her life. Antoinette, her husband and Daniel Cosway, to cite only characters from *WSS*, are children rejected by their parents, who prefer younger brothers.

Jean Rhys attended a convent school as a girl. For some time, she was so fond of the Roman Catholic Mother Superior and her teachings that she wanted to be a nun. At the same time, she was also in touch with the Negro culture. She knew Negro songs and was familiar with obeah, the form of religious belief involving witchcraft practiced in the West Indies. From Meta, her Black nurse, she learned how to fear zombies, loup-garoux and soucriants as well as centipedes, scorpions, lizards and cockroaches. So, as a girl Jean Rhys was very much in touch with West Indian culture, and with the conflicting relations she depicts in her work. As Staley remarks,

As a young girl she was seemingly able to draw these diverse surroundings together without conflict: at fourteen she cried for the sorrows of the world and thanked Jesus for His Redemption, and she also learned to sing Negro Hymns. The Dominican sunsets reminded her of Judgement Day. At the same time, the colonial mentality with its aura of superiority was very much present in her house as she grew up. Her family, for example, was not sympathetic to her interest in the Negro culture. Her mother, although she went to church on Sunday, was also not enthusiastic about Jean's fervent devotion. (03)

When she was about seventeen, Jean Rhys left Dominica with her father's sister to study in Cambridge. After a term in Cambridge, though, she enrolled in what is now the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London to study dance and acting. This was a difficult period in Jean Rhys's life. The English climate, too cold in contrast with the warmth of her island, almost killed her in the first year. This is also a recurrent theme in her work, according to Staley: "the drastic climate change becomes a constant metaphor in her work to dramatise the parallel, chilling psychological effects of England" (05). Besides the cold climate, she had to deal with the difficulty of adapting to a country which had become virtually alien to her. Because of familiar problems and with little money of her own, Rhys had to leave the RADA, eventually joining a musical chorus travelling troupe.

Her experience as a chorus girl provides material for her novels, especially *Voyage in the Dark*. She travelled for around two years, just prior to World War I. She was an attractive young woman, but with no voice or personality suited for the stage. The memories that she recreates in her novels consist for the most part of "cheap boarding houses, mean

landladies, boiled onion suppers, and bottles of gin in the dressing room" (Staley 06). When the company was not travelling, she lived in London and posed as model for an artist and for advertisements. It is as a chorus girl that she also began to meet men. The girls, generally beautiful and with no money, easily became mistresses or prostitutes. In many of Jean Rhys's novels, "male domination is intricately tied with financial dependence; hence money becomes a theme with a major importance and has great psychological as well as social significance in Rhys's work" (Staley 07).

Around 1910 she had a love affair with Lancelot Smith, a wealthy man of twice her age that pensioned her off after eighteen months. According to Carole Angier, Jean Rhys never recovered from the loss, which would influence the love relationships of her heroines (61). Her novel *Voyage in the Dark* fictionalizes her abandonment as well as the ensuing life of drunkenness and prostitution, including her back-street abortion, paid by Lancelot.

At the end of the war she met Jean Lenglet, a Dutch-French *chansonnier* and journalist. In 1919 she left England for Holland to marry him. Rhys and Lenglet moved to Paris, where they endured financial difficulties. Their son was born in 1920 and died three weeks later. According to Carole Angier, the baby had been left by an open window in January and developed pneumonia. In *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys describes the death of a baby that resembles her own experience. They went to Vienna where Lenglet worked as secretary to Japanese officials who were representatives at the Inter-allied Disarmament Conference.

Fragments from her life at this period also appear in the short stories in *The Left Bank* and *Tiggers are Better Looking*. Eventually, Langlet got involved in a currency swindle and they had to flee. In 1922 their daughter Maryvonne was born in Brussels. The girl was most of the time left in institutions, for her parents were constantly moving from one place to another, and frequently with no money. In Paris, Jean tried different jobs--mannequin, shop assistant, governess, guide. She tried to publish some of Lenglet's articles but the editors were not interested. Instead, Pearl Adam, the wife of *The Times* Paris correspondent, asked whether Jean had some stories of her own, and tried to transform some of her sketches later collected in *The Left Bank* into a fictional narrative titled "Triple Sec." The project was not successful, but Mrs. Adam introduced Jean to Ford Madox Ford, who had an important participation both in her life and in her work. In 1923 Lenglet was arrested on a charge of illegal entry into France, being sentenced to prison and extradited to Holland. Meanwhile, Jean went to live in Paris with Ford and Stella Bowen, the Australian painter with whom he was living. Jean Rhys became Ford's *protégée* and lover.

The influence of Ford Madox Ford in Jean's life deserves special attention. Ford had already helped other young writers, and it was through him that Jean Rhys improved much of her style, met other writers, and got some work published. Ford pointed her toward French writers, and told her to translate passages of her writing that she was not sure about into French. If they looked silly she should cut them. Staley remarks that the development of Rhys style, although sharpened by Ford, was

largely intuitive:

it emerged out of her sense of proportion and design, her concern for form, . . . she knows instinctively when something interferes with the shape of a sentence, a paragraph, or a chapter and is able to cut it. . . . She writes draft after draft until she has created the symmetry and wholeness which her intuitive sense of form dictates. (10)

Ford introduced her to modern literature. Through him, she met figures of the Paris literary circle, like Joyce and Hemingway, though she did not take part in this society. She was frequently shy and formal and did not develop a further relationship with them. Ford helped her to find publishers as well. Her first published story appeared in his magazine *The Transatlantic Review* under the nom de plume Jean Rhys. He made arrangements with Pascal Covici, the American publisher, for her to translate Francis Carco's *Perversité*. In 1927, *The Left Bank and Other Stories* was published by Jonathan Cape with an introduction by Ford.

After Ford left for the U.S., Rhys joined Lenglet in Amsterdam with Maryvonne. There she completed her final version of the novel *Quartet* based on her affair with Ford. The publishers, recognizing that the novel was too close to life and fearing a reaction from Ford, insisted that the title should be changed to *Postures* and Rhys agreed. The novel was published in 1928, and the title was later changed back to *Quartet*. Her works did not sell well, but the reviews were not discouraging.

This was the only time that Rhys, Lenglet and Maryvonne lived together. In 1928 Rhys moved to London, and Maryvonne

continued to live from one institution to another. During the thirties she spent summer holidays with her mother. When World War II broke out she returned to Holland to be with her father. Rhys and Maryvonne's attempts to be together were never successful.

From 1929 to 1932 Jean lived in England with Leslie Tilden Smith, a literary agent, marrying him in 1932 after divorcing Lenglet. Jean used to make constant visits to Paris while working on her novel *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, published in 1930. The contrast between Paris and London is recurrent in her work. In spite of the hard times she spent in Paris, "London is always dark, cold, and harsh; Paris is bright and open" (Staley 16). Rhys and Tilden Smith had financial problems, Jean's books did not sell, and she was drinking heavily. In 1934, though, his father died leaving him a substantial inheritance. Both went on a trip to Bermuda, the West Indies, and the United States. This was the only time that Rhys returned to her island. This visit gave her background for *WSS* at the same time that she began working on *Good Morning, Midnight*, published in 1939. As World War II was approaching things got worse. Rhys's visits to the Continent were interrupted; Tilden Smith volunteered for the war but was considered too old for active work and served in para-military capacities. He and Rhys moved a lot about England. After some time Rhys moved back to London and began to write again, but with no success. She was arrested in 1940 for being drunk and disorderly, and Tilden Smith resigned his commission in the RAF and went back to London. Suddenly, in 1945 he died of a heart attack. Max Hammer, his cousin, came to help Rhys.

It was during the period that she lived with Tilden Smith that Rhys wrote most of her books. Besides doing all the house work he typed, edited, and sold her books. Rhys had difficulties in dealing with the practical life, she was not able to get herself organized, and he did it for her. Even so, her drinking was getting worse and she was frequently violent with him. Her books did not sell much and were criticized for the "amorality" in them, the sordid subject matter of sex, money and drink. According to Carole Angier, Rhys did not write about low life as a literary subject, but as the life she lived.

In 1947 Rhys and Max Hammer got married; her health declined and they had serious financial problems. Hammer had been a sailor; he did not understand about literature as Tilden Smith did and was not able to help Jean. According to Staley, "throughout the forties and the fifties Jean remained in obscurity, trying to cope with problems of health and finances, and almost completely unable to get very far with her writing" (18). She was forgotten as a writer and her books were out of print. There was a brief reappearance of Jean as a writer, though. Selma vaz Dias, an actress, decided to adapt *Good Morning, Midnight* as a dramatic monologue for BBC radio and they required the author's permission. There were rumours that Rhys was dead but no death certificate was found. Through an advertisement in the *New Statesman*, Selma "rediscovers" Jean Rhys. But it is Diana Athill, from Andre Deutsch, and Francis Wyndham, who after the broadcast of *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1957, play a more important role in the further publications of her work. In 1952

Max was imprisoned for misappropriating check forms from his company. Rhys herself had further problems with her drinking and was brought up before the magistrates several times. She even spent a week in a women's prison and was ordered to undergo a psychiatric examination. Her experience with prisons appear in some of her short stories, as for example, "Let Them Call it Jazz." Even after the success of the BBC broadcast she had difficult times. After Max was released, they moved from one cheap and uncomfortable place to another, until her brother bought them a cottage in Cheriton FitzPaine in Devon, where she had continuous problems with her neighbours. She was working on *WSS* and both she and Hammer were facing health problems. Max died in 1964, in the same year that Jean suffered a heart attack.

Jean Rhys took around ten years to finish *WSS*, rewriting it several times and interrupting the writing for health and financial difficulties. Whyndham and Diana Athill, Rhys editor, helped her with the organization and typing of the manuscripts, but Jean was not an easy person to deal with, making any attempt to help her a quite hard task. The publication of *WSS* in 1966, however, brought her recognition and popularity, besides causing her earlier books to be reissued. *WSS* won the W. H. Smith Award, the Arts Council of Great Britain Award for Writers, and the Heinemann Award of the Royal Society of Literature. Jean Rhys did not go to ceremonies to receive her prizes. Her health condition and difficulties to deal with people prevented her. She said the prizes had come too late.

Jean Rhys continued living in Cheriton FitzPaine and used to spend periods of time in London with friends. In 1978 she

received the Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her contributions to literature. With the help of friends she started working on her autobiography, but died in 1979 in the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital without finishing it. *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* was posthumously published in the same year.

Jean Rhys did not want her biography written, and it seems indeed not an easy task. Dates are controversial, there are periods of obscurity in her life that demand a great deal of research. Furthermore, the relations between her life and her work lead both to interpretations of her work and inferences about her life that are sometimes far fetched. Teresa O'Connor, for example, says in 1986 that Louis James's *Jean Rhys*, the first book published about Rhys, is a "short, impressionistic work in which he unqualifiedly reads Rhys's work as a simple autobiography" (09). About Staley's study she says that "it remains the most comprehensive treatment of Rhys and her work, though Staley is prone to oversimplifying the relationship of her work to her biography" (09). Carole Angier's *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, shows a great deal of material about Jean Rhys' life and work, but its 762 pages are also criticized for relating Rhys's work too closely to her life and inferring facts of her life based on her novels. It also presents a negative idea of Jean Rhys, mainly of her relationship with men. A. Alvarez wrote in a review in *The New York Review of Books* (1991) that "Jean Rhys was one of the finest writers of the century but the best way to read her work is to know nothing about the woman who wrote it" (43). Even at the risk of making mistakes, one cannot ignore the relation

between Rhys's life and her work. Some information about her life constitutes an interesting material for the reading of her books.

Besides the biographical characteristics of Rhys's books, some critics recognize as well the fact that she develops her heroines from novel to novel as if they were the same character, getting older and more mature. Elgin W. Mellown, for example, says in the article "Characters and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys":

Although each novel centers upon one woman, the four individuals are manifestations of the same psychological type--so much so that if we read the novels in order of their internal chronology, we find in them one, fairly sequential story, albeit the principal figure suffers a change of name from novel to novel. (460)

The sequential story would start with *Voyage in the Dark*, the first novel to be written¹, which is loosely based on her affair with Lancelot Smith. The story continues in *Quartet*, Rhys's fictionalized account of her affair with Ford Madox Ford, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Good Morning Midnight*. The themes of money, sex, drinking, female dependency on men, and the sense of belonging nowhere are recurrent in the four novels. They form the "sordid subject matter" that, according to the criticism of the time prevented her books from being successful.

Although critics like Elgin W. Mellown, Erika

1. The five novels written by Jean Rhys were published in the following sequence: *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

Smilowitz, and Carole Angier recognize in *WSS* some thematic aspects that were already present in the earlier novels, the story of *WSS* itself cannot be directly placed within the narrative continuum examined here. The recurrent themes of Jean Rhys's fiction are present in *WSS* but there are innovations. *WSS* contains a more complex narrative structure and Rhys's technique of shifting points of view is improved. Also, the psychological treatment given to Antoinette's husband considerably differs from the one given to Jean Rhys's previous male characters. Furthermore, the revisionist character of the novel, being as it is a (re)writing of a muted "story" in *Jane Eyre*, determines certain aspects of plot which cannot be tampered with.

Jean Rhys's work in general, mainly her novels, is usually discussed by critics in terms of its importance as colonial, feminist, and modernist literature. From the perspective of the colonial aspects, the major questions, as raised by Kenneth Ramchand, are: "What makes a novel a West Indian novel?" and "What do we mean when we say that a writer is a West Indian writer?" (1976; 93). Considering as West Indian works "which describe a social world that is recognizably West Indian, in a West Indian landscape; and which are written by people who were born or grew up in the West Indies" (Ramchand 1976; 93), *Voyage in the Dark*, short stories such as "The Day They Burned the Books" and "Let Them Call it Jazz", and *WSS* are not difficult to classify. Regarding Jean Rhys's personal position as a writer from the West Indies, however, the answers are not so easy. After leaving Dominica when she was seventeen she returned to her island only once for a brief visit. She did

not keep in touch with other West Indian writers--or with any other writers, as a matter of fact--nor was actively engaged in discussions about political or social aspects of the West Indies. Even though, her life and the life of her characters, mainly of her heroines, were marked by a strong sense of deracination, of not belonging to any place. These feelings may be regarded as a result of the complicated relationship between Blacks, English, and white Creoles in the West Indies, aggravated by the need she and her heroines had to live in England or other European countries. As V. S. Naipaul puts it,

The Jean Rhys heroine of the first four books is a woman of mystery, inexplicably bohemian, in the thoughest sense of that word, appearing to come from no society, having roots in no society, having memories only of places, a woman who has "lost the way to England" and is adrift in the metropolis. (29)

Furthermore, there is also a feeling of hostility coming from England in Rhys's works, mainly in relation to her heroines. As Nancy Hemmond Brown puts it in her article "England and the English in the Works of Jean Rhys," the English were, according to Rhys, "fond of their animals but full of a hatred for women which they did not acknowledge. They were, in short, insular, snobish, hypocritical and unwelcoming, and they inhabited an inhospitably wet and cold island" (08). The values Rhys cherished, Brown continues, like emotional honesty and warmth, spontaneity and compassion for those less fortunate, could only be accomodated in a Caribbean setting (08). It is also patent in Rhys's work the identification between men and

England and between women and the West Indies. The English culture is essentially masculine. For Brown, Rhys's heroines are women who suffer because they cannot collude with the English system:

Their natural home is the essentially feminine world of the West Indies, with its lush landscape and more unrestrained style of living. This instructive dichotomy in Rhys's fiction has a wider and more overtly political implication: the irritating dependency all her heroines exhibit to some degree and the domineering stance of the men they have as their lovers has an obvious parallel in the relationship of an imperial power to its dependent colonies, a political situation of which Rhys, as a native-born West Indian who came to live and work in Europe, would certainly have been aware. (08)

So, Rhys's heroines are frequently trapped in the political power relations between metropolis and colony, which has implications in the power relations between men and women. According to Lucy Wilson in the article "European or Caribbean: Jean Rhys and the Language of Exile," the powerless position that women occupy in the fiction of Jean Rhys is stressed by the aspect of exile. She says that "in [Rhys's] novels and stories, matters of race, gender, class, and ethnicity are intensified by the contrapuntal vision of exile, which highlights the interplay of power structures within British, West Indian, and Continental societies" (69). The aspect of exile is also discussed by Mary Lou Emery in her book *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*. She says that there are in Jean Rhys's fiction in-between spaces that show colonial and sexual exile. These spaces would be the streets of London, the bars of Paris,

and "the rooming houses in either city that both shelter and isolate most of Rhys's solitary protagonists" (Introduction xi). For Emery, the characters that occupy these marginalized spaces can be seen sympathetically, from a feminist perspective, as victims of "the social structure" or of "patriarchal oppression." Their apparent complicity in their own oppression have become, according to Emery, a critical commonplace. For her, "reading Rhys's fiction as West Indian literature suggests a cultural and historical context outside of the strictly European and offers possibilities for interpretation that go beyond the psychological" (Introduction xii). For Emery, feminist and Third World perspectives rarely combine in readings of Jean Rhys's works and when they do their conclusions relate to analogies between colonial hierarchies and sexual oppression that positions the protagonist as a victim. Emery proposes, thus, a study that considers the tension between the West Indian colonial context and the modernist European "as it is inscribed in terms of sex/gender relations in [Rhys's] novels" (Introduction xii). She suggests that the Caribbean cultures present an alternative to European concepts of character and identity, adding that,

from the vision of this alternative, evaluations of Rhys protagonists as passive or masochistic victims no longer hold; instead, we can perceive their efforts at dialogue, plural identities, and community. We can also attempt to understand the reasons for the successes and failures of their efforts within a historical framework that takes into account the ideologies of a male-dominated colonial system and its decline in the early twenty century. (Introduction xii)

Coral Ann Howells, in her book *Jean Rhys* also sees connections between colonial mentality and gender relations in Rhys's work. She views them as a resistance to imperialism. For Howells, there is in Jean Rhys a sense of misfit for both her positions as woman and colonial writer, since otherness is the condition of woman and displacement, of colonial writer. Rhys has been regarded as an outsider by both Caribbean and English cultures: she was not perceived as English in Europe, and she was not recognized in the Caribbean. Although critics who focus on other aspects of her work blank out the aspect of colonialism, Howells, sees clear evidence of Rhys's Caribbean inheritance. For her, Rhys belongs historically to the period of Empire, but her subversive critique of Englishness and imperialism place her work as post-colonial (20-21). She considers Rhys's fiction as multivoiced texts that "interweave the different discourses that coexist within hybridised Caribbean culture" (24) and she adds that, in their resistance to imperialism,

these fictions adopt many of the strategies of colonial and post-colonial counter-discourse, insistently figuring internalised narratives of loss which run as subtexts to the main texts, disrupting the voices of authority in the narrative subject's attempt to reconstruct an identity that is already fragmented. (24)

In this way we can see that contemporary criticism has recognized the Caribbean characteristics of Jean Rhys's fiction, viewing them as an "alternative to European concepts of character and identity", as suggested by Emery, or as resistance to imperialism, as suggested by Howells.

Feminist analyses of Jean Rhys's fiction are equally problematic. Her heroines are viewed as victims, but also as women who wish to belong to a system that despises them. In this way, not only men but women themselves would be responsible for female victimization. Although Jean Rhys herself did not have a sympathetic attitude toward feminism, at the same time she complained about the lack of comprehension from men in relation to women, and disagreed with Freud's essays about femininity. So, contradictions come from Rhys's life and work, giving way to different interpretations.

Talking about the common critical view of Rhys's heroines as female victims, Erika Smilowitz warns that this archetype must be considered in a context: women are victimized by men and society; in fact, the men are the society (93). Smilowitz concludes that dependent females are pitted against powerful, institutionalized male forces which parallels the colonial relationship. According to her, helpless women seek out powerful males for protection, but the men fail them. In this way, she says that Rhys's final message is that "control by others doesn't work. Women must be adults, autonomous and independent, not perpetual children . . . [they] must resist the trap of false protectionism" (102).

Laura Niesen de Abruña in the article "Jean Rhys's Feminism: Theory against Practice" expands Smilowitz's view. For Abruña, Rhys's heroines are "unco-operatively anti-feminist" (332), *WSS* excepted. They dislike and fear other women, and they hope for the love and security of men who will finally reject

them. They know about this rejection, and their predictions "become self-fulfilling prophecies that legitimize their fears and preserve them from responsibility" (326). For Abruña *WSS* and, to a certain extent, *Voyage in the Dark* are exceptions, for the childhood experiences and shifts in narrative point of view give the victims "psychological plausibility" (326). Abruña comments on the fact that since 1970 critics in general place Rhys's fiction as feminist or social statement, but Rhys's biography and work have shown that she had an anti-feminist posture in relation to the place of women in society. She laughed at feminist interpretations of her work and she was hostile to other women. When the protection her heroines look for in men fail, they do not seek solution for their isolation in other women, and when they do the women are hostile. For Abruña, Rhys's compassion for the "underdog" is a "compassion for individuals, perhaps like Rhys herself, who suffer from apparently irremediable wrongs, starting in childhood, and who will continue to live frustrated, bitter lives" (327). Abruña continues, citing Marsha Cummings, that the characters do not rebel against patriarchy because they have internalized its value system and become "other" to themselves. They accept society's rejection and anticipate it. They feel like innocent victims and want to belong to the system in order to be protected (327). For Abruña, Rhys is at her best in her fiction about the Caribbean, "going beyond self-pity to find outside sources for feelings of alienation in the realities of West Indian life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (328).

Coral Ann Howells acknowledges contradictions in Jean

Rhys's role as a woman writer. In her statements, Rhys sometimes presents the fictional creative process as product of inspiration, with herself as a passive instrument, and at other times she presents herself as a conscious fabricator. Analyzing these contradictions, Howells says that Rhys speaks both as a romantic who is a professional writer and a woman who associates writing with transgression against "traditional notions of feminine decorum" and "defiance of masculine authority." Howells continues saying that Rhys presents her writing as a "curiously involuntary process related either to inspiration or to therapy [as] a way of evading full responsibility for her fictions of radical protest at the same time as preserving her image of feminine dependence" (08). For Howells, Rhys writes in her fiction her personal sense of marginality and exclusion, for her heroines are women on the margins of respectability. What is disturbing, though, is that her female protagonists never manage, or perhaps never wish, to "evade those traditional structures or to unsettle the bastions of male power" (11). These considerations lead to Rosalind Coward's question 'Are Women's Novels Feminist novels?'¹ For Howells, "[Rhys] denied any feminist label, and on the face of it it is difficult to argue for the political consciousness of a writer who seems to derive her literary identity from the male symbolic code" (11). Furthermore, Howells says that Rhys reveals a sexual politics imbricated in a wider system of social power relationships.

1. Rosalind Coward, "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" in *The New Feminist Criticism*, edited by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 225-39.

Discussing female submission and feminism in Rhys's fiction Howells says that "these stories of women's entrapment do not revise the old female romantic fantasy narratives nor do they really effect, even in fiction, any shift in the traditional balance of power between the sexes" (20). For her, there is a question of complicity between Rhys's fiction and its reader, for women readers may be collaborative critics, recognizing themselves in the fiction and enjoying the pains of such recognition, or they may be resisting readers, or still they may oscillate between the two positions. Howells concludes that

though her novels may be read as offering a radical critique of sexual power politics, it could equally well be argued that in her retelling of romance plots which always end in women's betrayal and failure, she speaks to women's deepest insecurities, just as her stories of women's rage at social and sexual injustice and their silencing may be read as confirming women's deepest fears. (20)

In this way, the attitude of Jean Rhys herself towards feminism is problematic for a feminist reading of her work. Even if we do not consider the author's life and opinions and focus only on her work, the attitudes of the heroines--their apparent cooperation with the system that rejects them seeking male protection and turning against other women--prevent readings of Rhys's work as alternatives to patriarchal modes. Though not overtly preoccupied with the position of Women in society, Rhys's work does nevertheless expose the female sense of not belonging that is not an exclusivity of the woman Jean Rhys as an individual. Jean Rhys's heroines are indeed submissive to male

wishes and dependent on them. However, Rhys subverts her own subject matter in the structure of her novels, making her heroines speak through silences, a typically female literary device.

The last aspect of Rhys's work discussed here relates to the modernist characteristics of her writing. Howells affirms that Rhys's fiction belongs to the aesthetic of modernism although critical recognition of her as modernist writer was possible only after redefinitions of modernism in the view of postmodernism and feminism (25). Howells says that "the deconstruction of the male modernist metanarrative has opened up spaces within which [Rhys's] feminine poetics of alienation and compromised resistance may be accommodated" (25). For Howells the modernist characteristics of Rhys's fiction, both in terms of aesthetic and subject matter, offer feminine alternatives to male modernist narrative. Her fiction of the twenties and thirties is concerned with constructing a poetics of urban space, but from a feminine perspective. Like male writers, Rhys's modernist fiction has a sense of isolation and psychic fragmentation, multiple voices of male and female characters, voices of memory and history, popular songs and literary allusions, interweaving past and future. Her feminine version, though, has no myths for reassurance, for she is always referring to literary and cultural traditions that she, as a woman, does not take part in. Her women are placed in the situation of modernist *flâneurs*, but as women they cannot take advantage of the metropolitan experience, a male prerogative. They desire rescue and protection rather than adventure, but their hotel rooms, instead of shelter, become

privation and imprisonment (26-27). Howells concludes saying that "as a modernist voice, Rhys speaks from a self-consciously marginal position, raising issues of gender and colonial difference in fictions of resistance which are always compromised by the conditions of female dependency" (27).

Finally, although criticism on Jean Rhys's writing may present controversial points, it seems a critical common sense that when she combines sexual, economical and political power relations with structural innovations she can produce master pieces that do speak back to patriarchal modes. Her treatment of both subject matter and aesthetic devices develop through her literary career, culminating with *WSS*. In this way, it seems worthwhile to dedicate a special chapter to the discussion of colonial, feminist and structural aspects of Jean Rhys's master work in preparation for the analysis of focalization and voice in *WSS*, which is our main concern.

2. WIDE SARGASSO SEA

Rhys's masterwork, *WSS* is acknowledged as the culmination of a process in which she develops and improves her treatment of gender, colonial and structural aspects. The novel shows, in addition, a revisionist concern, based as it is on Charlotte Brontë's classic *Jane Eyre*.

Among the numerous analyses of the relations between *Jane Eyre* and *WSS*, the first aspect that deserves attention is whether *WSS* could stand without the support of *Jane Eyre*. In the article "'Apparitions of Disaster': Brontëan Parallels in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Guerrillas*" John Thieme disagrees with critics like Walter Allen who say that *WSS* cannot stand apart from *Jane Eyre*. For Thieme, the fact that other critics such as Wally Look Lai and Kenneth Ramchand in their studies of *WSS* make no reference to *Jane Eyre* proves the novel's autonomy (119). Thieme also perceives that, although her acknowledged motivation to write *WSS* was the excessively shadowy aspect of Bertha in the previous novel and Brontë's apparent anti-West Indian bias, Rhys does not dehumanize Rochester. Instead, she shows him as another victim and grants him the position of narrator. In this way, Rhys presents a different view in her novel since she does justice to both sides, English and West Indian (118-19). Thieme thus endorses the critical view of Rhys's novel as both an appreciation and a commentary upon *Jane Eyre*, but also, and especially, as "an independent creation of great subtlety and skill" (cf. Staley 101). For Thieme, however, although *WSS* stands

apart from *Jane Eyre*, reading it with Brontë's narrative in mind adds an apocalyptic dimension to the novel (119). Furthermore, beyond the relations between the two novels in terms of subject-matter, Thieme also sees similarities in their authors' attitude to form regarding the use of point of view. In both novels, according to him, the memories of the heroines are recalled by a narrator more mature than the earlier self described, although Rhys uses a number of centers of consciousness, and Antoinette's impressionistic interior monologue is influenced by modernist fictional techniques (120).

Rhys's belief in Brontë's bias against the West Indies is also acknowledged by critics as Hite Molly, for example. In her book *The other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narrative*, she says that Bertha needs to be presented as lunatic and at the same time as cunning and malignant in *Jane Eyre* so that Rochester can have "no moral authority for his attempted bigamy or his desire to be rid of her" (33). In *Jane Eyre* Bertha's West Indian origin predetermines her vicious behaviour. In *WSS* Rhys reverts this position, making Antoinette's behaviour a consequence of her husband's attitudes (37).

Female narrative patterns are also compared in both novels. In the article "The Sisterhood of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway" Elizabeth R. Baer suggests that Jane's narrative is based on fairy tales which traditionally lead to marriage. Brontë suggests, however, that it is not only marriage but also autonomy that constitute a happy-ending (132). Similarly, but to an extended degree, Jean Rhys subverts the

traditional fairy tale, presenting a man who instead of rescuing the heroine and bringing her back to life imprisons and kills her. Also fragile, he himself is a victim (133). For Baer there are two texts in the novels, a superficial one, following the archetype of fairy tales, and another one, of Jane's and Antoinette's dreams, that revise the surface narrative (137). In *WSS* the two texts merge at the conclusion of the novel when Antoinette favours the dream text recovering her childhood, her identity. The dream, not the fairy tale, in this way, becomes "the instrument of her awakening, her assertion, her autonomy" (147).

Karen E. Rowe also discusses the aspect of fairy tale in *Jane Eyre* in her article "'Fairy-born and human-bred': Jane Eyre's Education in Romance." For Rowe, the narrative of *Jane Eyre* presents aspects both of fairy tales, as for example the myth of woman as the "angel in the house," and of the structure of male Bildungsroman, following the models of Milton and Shakespeare (69-70). In *WSS* Rhys subverts the fairy tale giving voice not to the "angel in the house" but to the mad or monstrous woman.

As can be observed, Rhys's motivation to write *WSS* sends the reader back to *Jane Eyre* for determining certain outcomes of the novel, as for example Bertha/Antoinette's death in the fire at Thornfield Hall. However, when Rhys writes a life to the shadowy, voiceless figure of *Jane Eyre* inserted in a West Indian background she deviates from Brontë's novel at the same time talking back to it and creating an independent story. The story of Antoinette has plausibility in its West Indian setting,

with all the problematic political, financial and cultural relations among Blacks, Whites and Creoles in the nineteenth century. Even the relations between French and English colonizers are suggested in the French names of Antoinette and her mother and in the ruins both of a French road and of the priest's house that Rochester discovers hidden in the forest. Furthermore, Rhys gives her characters psychological consistence so much so that Antoinette and her husband's personal drama of the failure of their marriage may be analysed simply in terms of their own relationship, without reference to Jane as the second Mrs. Rochester. In fact, there is no reference to Jane in *WSS*. Antoinette behaviour may be explained in relation to the colonial background of *WSS*, agravated by her personal situation of abandonment in her childhood, without reference to *Jane Eyre*.

The supremacy of men over women regarding money and the exploitation of metropolis over colony present in *WSS* send us back to DuPlessis assumption that "a woman from a colony is a trope for the woman as a colony" (46). Echoing DuPlessis, political and emotional exploitation has been the cornerstone of most of the critical articles about *WSS* of both feminist and colonial orientation. The social background and the setting of the novel leave no space for doubts that *WSS* is a West Indian novel. The theme proposed by Rhys is West Indian, answering Ramchand's question about what makes a novel a West Indian novel (Ramchand 95-97). The landscape of the island is strongly present in the novel from Antoinette's childhood up to the moment she leaves for England with her husband. The impressions of the geographical features of the Carribean island are analysed by critics in their

psychological relations to both characters. The political-historical aspects, however, seem to be even more relevant in the novel. Jean Rhys discloses for the reader the unique characteristics resulting from European colonization in the Caribbean aggravated by the deep interventions in the culture and values of White, Black and Creole people caused by slavery. Rhys makes the feeling of deracination speak in the huge voids between people from different races. Antoinette's voice comes from the vacuum of these spaces. As a Creole she is not white European nor Black, she is looked at as a stranger from both sides. She does not belong to any group and they feel no obligation towards her. Blacks believe they have the right to burn her house and hit her justified by the hatred they feel for the ill-treatment they had received from her ancestors; at the same time, they despise her for the destitution of the power Whites had before. Her white European husband does not feel he has to respect her wishes and her personality, or even try to understand her since she does not belong to his group, she has nothing to do with him. Jean Rhys wrote about all these delicate subjects in a subtle manner in her novel. She does not tell things at once, she leaves much of the work of perceiving them to the reader.

Feminist criticism also investigates the themes of exploitation in the novel. Antoinette becomes her husband's property through marriage. Ironically, she is financially dependent on him because *her* money belongs to him, mirroring the colonial dependency on the metropolis after the latter has appropriated the former's wealth. Besides this aspect, feminist critics also acknowledge Rhys's concern with names. Antoinette

Cosway becomes Bertha (Rochester) after changes in her name which show that, besides belonging to no ethnicity, she has no right to identifying her personality. Thus, after dominating Antoinette in economical terms, her husband also deprives her of an identity. Besides male exploitation, feminists also investigate male repression. After arousing sexual desire in his wife, Rochester condemns her for manifesting it.

Silences are commonly acknowledged as a female form of manifestation against male exploitation and repression. In the article "The Fantastic as Feminine Mode: *Wide Sargasso Sea*" Anne Koenen discusses the aspect of silence in *WSS*. For her Rhys overcomes the silence in *Jane Eyre* and, more than that, dramatizes this silence by letting the reader feel what is missing and thus elevating the silence to a conscious level, showing the lacunae of feminine voice (15). Antoinette is allowed to narrate her childhood and adolescence, but her husband controls the narrative from the moment of their marriage. So her voice is interrupted, and silence is imposed. For Koenen, Rhys incorporates silence into the structure of the novel avoiding the danger of masking it, which would deny its persistence in women's literature. Because omissions, interruptions and silences have been the essence of feminine voice, to give uninterrupted voice to Bertha would be to deny that this silence exists (15-16). Koenen adds that

[i]t is one of the great achievements of Rhys's novel to both tell Bertha's story and to render the silence tangible. This double function is realized in the novel's structure; the suppression of the female voice by the male in a patriarchal society is the major

structural element of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. (16)

The shifts to Rochester's narration are studied by other critics concerned with the structural aspect of *WSS*. For Marsha Z. Cummins, for example, in the article "Point of View in the Novels of Jean Rhys: The Effect of a Double Focus," the shifts in focus in Rhys's work create an emotional environment of determinism and humiliation and legitimize the heroine's paranoia. The narrative follows the heroine and, at crucial moments, shifts to a more respectable or powerful character. For the reader, Cummins adds, this device has the effect of looking down at the victim from her persecutor's point of view (360). In *WSS* the two first-person narrators imply that one of them has only a partial knowledge. Besides, the shifting points of view also represent the divided self, the conflicts between victim and victimizer, conveying their mutual suffering and humiliation (369).

According to some critics Antoinette's degeneration from sanity to madness is also perceptible in the structure of the novel. Kathy Mezei in the article "'And it Kept its Secret': Narration, Memory, and Madness in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*" argues that Antoinette tells her own story to prevent a false telling by others or, in other words, to prevent lies. When the narrative disintegrates, so does Antoinette; when the narrative stops, she dies. Mezei relates Antoinette's sanity to her capacity to remember and order events. While she can do it in a temporal and causal sequence, creating even an illusion of sequence and maintaining a measured sense of space and time, she

can hold her life and self together. In Thornfield Hall, however, the links with sanity are broken. For Mezei, such links are the elements of conventional narrative: linear chronology, sequence, narratorial lucidity, distance. Antoinette no longer knows where she is. In the same way, the relation between text-time and story-time becomes indistinct, creating a sense of anachrony. Thus, her notion of space and time becomes distorted (196-97).

Reviewing the criticism about *WSS* it is possible to note that the structural aspects of the novel are acknowledged by most critics. Revisionist, feminist and colonial matters are studied in the ways Rhys treats them in the structure of the novel. She manipulates shifting points of view, silences and voices, creating subtle effects that match the uniqueness of the characters' situations. It is a critical common sense that *WSS* is marked by silences. The heroine is silenced by her mother, by her husband, both as a woman and as a colonial subject, and finally--or originally--by Charlotte Brontë. It is acknowledged that Rhys gives her voice, but which portion of Antoinette receives such voice? If we must acknowledge that silences do exist in Rhys's text, then the mad colonial woman from *Jane Eyre* is not fully heard in *WSS*. For a better account of the speeches and silences of Antoinette it would be advisable to consider her functions as character and as narrator in the novel separately. Of course this does not mean that any of the narrators, Antoinette or her husband, performs these two functions independently from each other. This would be only a device for a more effective description of the complicated structure of focalizations and voices present in the novel. Since we have more

than one narrator in *WSS* it is interesting to investigate which events each one tells and whether there are discrepancies between the different narratives. At the same time, they participate in the story they narrate. So, who focalizes the events they recount? How do they get to know what they tell about? Where are the silences exactly located? A structural analysis considering characters and narrators would be helpful to find the answers.

Kristien Hemmerechts in the book *A Plausible Story and a Plausible Way of Telling It: A Structuralist Analysis of Jean Rhys's Novels* considers focalization and narrating in *WSS*. She makes interesting considerations about certain aspects of focalization and narrating, as for example about the use of several characters for focalization, the paralipses in the focalization, the narrating time, the embedded texts, and finally, about the reliability of the narrators (Hemmerechts's positions about these aspects will be discussed in the next chapter, along with the analysis of *WSS*). Her analysis, though, can still be expanded in terms of the two protagonists' roles as characters and narrators. Hemmerechts discusses *WSS* in terms of *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, dividing the study of the last aspect into *tense*, *focalization* and *narrating*. Her book, though, is criticised by Martien Kappers-den Hollander and Gene M. Moore for attempting to bring together the methods of Greimas and Genette "under the headings of 'fabula' and 'sjuzhet', as if these terms were synonyms for 'deep structure' and 'surface structure'" (714). In this way, aspects other than focalization and narrating in Hemmerechts's study will not be taken into account since they are not relevant for the present analysis. Hollander and Moore

suggest that Hemmereichs invokes *fabula* and *sjuzhet* on the basis of a remark of Rhys cited in the title of the book. However, they add: "the difference between the 'story' and 'the way of telling it' seems closer to, say, Chatman's distinction between 'story' and 'discourse' than to the Formalist terms" (714). However, the distinction between story and discourse in itself is problematic and we believe that Genette's theories on focalization and voice form a basis solid enough for the analysis of *WSS* in terms of its character narrators. In this way, this is precisely the aim of this dissertation: a structuralist analysis of focalization and voice based on Genette's theories that would detect the silences in *WSS*.

CHAPTER II

FOCALIZATION AND VOICE

1. GENETTE'S THEORY

The first section of this chapter discusses Genette's theoretical concepts of focalization and voice, which will be used for the study of what the narrator-characters of *WSS* perceive and of what they tell while narrating ¹. We will also have to recall Genette's concepts of mood and voice when we come to his differentiation between point of view and voice. Genette extends his metaphor of the narrative--the narrative seen as the expansion of a verb--to reach the aspect of mood. He says that since the function of narrative is simply to tell a story, its mood can be only the indicative. Genette adds, however, that there are differences not only between affirming, commanding, and wishing, but also between degrees of affirmation which are expressed by modal variations. Genette specifies narrative mood saying that "one can tell *more* or tell *less* what one tells, and can tell it *according to one point of view or another*; and this

1. The concepts discussed in this study are in Genette's book *Narrative Discourse* (1980). Some references are also made to the book *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988). Unless otherwise indicated, references will be to Genette 1980.

capacity, and the modalities of its use, are precisely what [the] category of *narrative mood* aims at" (161-62; Genette's italics). The narrative can keep at a greater or lesser distance from what it tells, providing the reader with more or fewer details. The narrative can also choose to regulate the information it provides according to the capacity of knowledge of one or another participant in the story; in other words, from one perspective or another. So, *distance* and *perspective* "are the two chief modalities of that *regulation of narrative information* that is mood" (162; Genette's italics).

The choice of point of view determines the narrative perspective. Genette says, however, that most of the theoretical works about point of view confuse mood and voice, or in other words, that there is a confusion between "the question *who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very different question *who is the narrator?*--or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*" (186; Genette's italics).

Genette recalls some classifications of point of view and proposes a three-term typology in which he replaces the visual connotation of the terms *point of view*, *vision*, and *field* by the term *focalizations*. Later, Genette even changes his question "who sees?" to the less visual question "where is the focus of perception?" For him, focalization is not only visual, it may be auditory, for example (Genette 1988, 64). He calls the first type *nonfocalized narrative* or *narrative with zero focalization*. It corresponds to what English-language criticism calls *omniscient narrator*. In the second type, *narrative with*

internal focalization, the narrator tells what a given character knows. Genette subclassifies this second type into three subtypes: *fixed*, where the focal character is the same throughout the narrative; *variable*, where the focalization shifts from character to character; and *multiple*, where the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view of several characters, as in epistolary novels, for example. In the third type, *narrative with external focalization*, the narrator says less than the character knows (188-91). For Genette, focalization is a restriction of "field," a selection of narrative information. He classifies a narrative as narrative with zero focalization when the reader is supplied with completeness of information; the reader is, thus, omniscient, and there is no restriction of field. The instrument of a possible restriction is a situated focus. In internal focalization, this focus coincides with a character. The narrative, in this case, can tell the reader everything this character perceives or thinks, although, Genette remarks, it never does. In principle, a narrative with internal focalization is not supposed to tell anything beyond the focal character's perception. In external focalization the focus is situated at a point in the diegetic universe chosen by the narrator, outside every character. This means that all possibility of information about anyone's thoughts is excluded (Genette 1988, 74-75).

For Genette, however, no single one of the three types proposed can ever be applied to the whole of the narrative. More commonly, a specific type will cover a definite portion of the narrative. In the same way, the different types of focalization

may not be easily distinguished. As Genette points out, external focalization in relation to one character may be defined as internal focalization through another one; the division between variable focalization and nonfocalization, in the same way, is not always clear (191-92).

There may be changes in focalization, termed by Genette as alterations. Such alterations can be analyzed as momentary infractions of the code which governs that specific narrative without denying the existence of the code. Genette compares these alterations to the momentary variations of tonality in a musical composition, variations that do not contest the tonality of the whole. The alterations may be of two types: **paralipsis** or **paralepsis**. When **paralipsis** occurs, there is omission of some important action or thought of the hero which neither the hero nor the narrator can be ignorant of, but which the narrator deliberately hides from the reader (194-96). For Genette, **paralipsis** also occurs when an "autobiographical" type of narrator chooses a focalization through the hero at the moment of the action. Genette adds that, in this case, "the narrator, in order to limit himself to the information held by the hero at the moment of the action, has to suppress all the information he acquired later, information which very often is vital" (199). **Paralepsis**, on the contrary, consists of an information about the consciousness of a character when an external narrative is conducted, or of information about something that the focal character is not able to perceive, or still information about the thought of another character. Genette concludes that we should not confuse the information given by a focalized narrative with

the interpretation the reader may infer from the information, for "narrative always says less than it knows, but it often makes known more than it says" (194-98).

There are other aspects, however, that cannot be covered by the analysis of focalization. They are related to the narrating itself, not only to the perspective from which events are told, but also to who tells them. Here we come to the realm of voice. The category of voice takes the person who narrates into account. Differently from point of view which is a question of perception, voice is a question of transmission. Genette distinguishes three categories of elements in narrative related to voice: *time of the narrating*, *narrative level*, and *person*. He adds that a narrating situation is a complex whole and that, as a result, even if these elements are studied separately their actual functioning is simultaneous (219).

Genette classifies narrative in four types according to the *time of narrating*: *subsequent*, *prior*, *simultaneous*, and *interpolated* (215-17). *Subsequent* narrative is the most frequent type. The use of past tense is enough to make a narrative subsequent although it does not indicate the temporal interval which separates the moment of the narrating from the moment of the story. In third-person narratives this interval is not generally determinate although a relative contemporaneity of story time and discourse time may be achieved by the use of the present tense at the beginning or at the end. In autobiographical narrating, the reader expects the hero to join the narrator at the point in time when the hero is becoming the narrator. Whenever this does not occur, the narrative may just come to a

halt (220-26). The prior narrative has a predicative function. Generally in the future tense, it hardly appears in the literary corpus except in premonitory dreams (219-20). Simultaneous narrative follows a rigorous simultaneousness of story and narrating, and the time is the present contemporaneous with the action, like in interior monologues, for example (218-19). Interpolated narrative, occurring between the moments of the action, involves a narrating with several instances; in this case the discourse and the story can become so entangled that the latter has an effect on the former. This is the case of epistolary novels with several correspondents. The letter is at the same time the medium of the narrative and an element in the plot. The narrator is at one and the same time the hero and someone else, since the events of the day are already in the past and the point of view may have been modified since then (217-18).

Answering to criticism of his theories, Genette said later (Genette 1988, 83) that he had exaggerated a little the narrative consequences of using the past--a tense that does not always give the reader a very heightened feeling of the subsequentness of the narrating--and underestimated the narrative consequences of using the present. For him, the preterite "serves more to connote the literariness of the narrative than to denote the past of the action" (79). On the other hand, epilogues in the present tense indicate the completed nature of the action, since they move everything that has preceded back into the past. Genette adds that "every ending in the present . . . introduces a measure of . . . *homodiegeticity* into the narrative, since it positions the narrator as a contemporary and therefore, more or

less, as a witness" (80; ellipsis added, Genette's italics).

There may be distances between events in narrative that occur due not to differences in time or space, but to differences in *narrative levels*. When a character, for example, retells to another character an episode that has happened before, the distance between the episode retold and the encounter between the two characters lies not in time or space, but in narrative levels. The episode narrated is inside--inside the narrative--and the encounter is outside. Genette defines this difference in level saying that "*any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed*" (228; Genette's italics).

Genette calls the first level *extradiegetic*. It is the level in which events in a narrative are told; the universe of this level is the *diegesis*. If there is another narrative within this first level, it is characterized as a second level, called *diegetic* or *intradiegetic*. The universe of this level is the *metadiegesis*. Genette says that these terms have already been presented in his *Figures II*. He defines them in these words:

The prefix *meta-* obviously connotes here, as in "metalanguage," the transition to the second degree: the *metanarrative* is a narrative within the narrative, the *metadiegesis* is the universe of this second narrative, as the *diegesis* (according to a now widespread usage) designates the universe of the first narrative. We must admit, however, that this term functions in a way opposite of that of its model in logic and linguistics: metalanguage is a language in which one speaks of another language, so metanarrative should be the first narrative, within which one would tell a second narrative. But it seemed to me that it was better to keep the simplest and most common

designation for the first degree, and thus to reverse the direction of interlocking. Naturally, the eventual third degree will be a meta-metanarrative, with its meta-metadiegesis, etc. (228)

The extradiegetic narrating may produce an oral narrative, or a written text, like a memoir or a fictive literary text. It may also present an inward narrative, like a dream, or a recollection from a character. The second narrative can present still a nonverbal representation, a sort of iconographic document the narrator converts into a narrative by describing it or having another character describe it (227-31). Genette says that his theory of narrative levels simply systematizes the traditional notion of "embedding" that, according to him, does not sufficiently mark the threshold between one diegesis and another (Genette 1988, 84). Some types of relationships can connect the metadiegetic narrative to the first narrative in which it is inserted. Among others, Genette acknowledges direct causality as one kind of relationship. There may be a direct causality between the events of the two levels, conferring to the second narrative an explanatory function. Sometimes it provides the answer to the question "what events have led to the present situation?" only as a means for replying to the curiosity of the reader.

Now we come to the last category of elements in narrative related to voice: *person*. Genette uses the terms "first-person" and "third-person narrative" with quotation marks of protest. For him, these terms are inadequate since they stress variation in the element of the narrative situation that is invariant. According to this terminology, the narrator is present

only in the first-person narrative. The novelist's choice, according to Genette, is not between two grammatical forms, but between two narrative postures: to have the story told by one of its characters, or to have it told by a narrator outside the story. Both cases may present first-person verbs that may designate the narrator's self-denomination as such or an equivalence between the narrator and one of the characters, the so-called "first-person narrative." Although identical in grammar, both forms are distinguished in narrative analysis (243-44). Instead of first or third-person narrative, Genette considers two types of narrative: heterodiegetic and homodiegetic. In the first type, the narrator is absent from the story s/he tells; in the second one, s/he is present in the story. Genette subdivides the second type into two: the narrator may be the hero of his/her narrative--autodiegetic narrative--, or s/he may play a secondary role, as an observer or witness (244-45).

In this way, Genette defines the narrator's status in four basic types according to his/her narrative level (extra- or intradiegetic), and to his/her relationship to the story (hetero- or homodiegetic). The first type is the extradiegetic-heterodiegetic paradigm: the narrator, in the first level, tells a story s/he is absent from. In the second type, extradiegetic-homodiegetic paradigm, the narrator in the first level tells his/her own story. In the intradiegetic-heterodiegetic paradigm, the third type, the narrator in the second level tells a story s/he is absent from. Finally, in the fourth type, the intradiegetic-homodiegetic paradigm, the narrator in the second

level tells her/his own story (248).

Such are the basic concepts which will be useful for the analysis of *WSS*. It must be pointed out, however, that the fact that this chapter investigates structuralist theories as a basis for the analysis of *WSS* does not mean that such analysis should be considered sufficient. It seems to be a common sense that no literary theory or critical approach will cover completely a literary text. A structural analysis will leave aside, for example, the important aspects of historical and political relations between England, the metropolis, and the West Indies, its colony in the nineteenth century. The relationships man-woman, or husband-wife between the two character-narrators is not taken into account either. An analysis starting from those aspects, however, could dangerously lead to interpretations that are justifiable outside the text, in the real world, and not applicable to it.

One of the strongest aspects of *WSS* is the fact that Jean Rhys gives voice to Antoinette, the mad woman from *Jane Eyre*, who does not speak there. It is not only Antoinette who tells her story, however. Her husband is also a character-narrator. In this way, there are characters speaking that are in the opposite sides of the metropolis-colony and man-woman conflict. Any direct interpretation here could leave in shadows important aspects developed by the two narrators. The structuralist analysis, at this point, aims to "isolate" the text and to point out what each character is doing with the voices they are granted in the novel in terms of what they perceive and how they transmit their perceptions. "Isolate" is between

quotation marks for I believe that it is neither possible nor desirable to isolate a literary text from its social context and from the relations it bears with its real author and real readers. Not all the readers have to agree with the affirmation that "we can accept imaginatively what we reject ideologically." Any woman from the colonies could see in Antoinette's husband the torturer of his wife, in the same way that a man or woman could see in her a mad woman that does not deserve credit. Jean Rhys, however, grants voice to both characters and it seems a sign of respect to her work to hear what they have to say.

The analysis of *WSS* will try to answer some questions related to focalization and voice of both character-narrators. Do their views conflict? What kind of narrative is *WSS* in terms of focalization, and what effect does it have in the way certain story elements are brought up? The reader knows several facts through the narrative of one character to another. Who tells each fact and to whom? How do the diegetic levels function in the novel? Finally, after analyzing the aspects above, is it possible to affirm that one, or both, of the narrators is unreliable? The answers to these questions aim at a reading of *WSS* that will provide a "map" of it following focalization and voice as a criteria for its drawing.

2. *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*

Wide Sargasso Sea is divided into three parts. Part I is narrated by Antoinette, Part II is narrated by both Antoinette and her husband. Finally, Antoinette narrates Part III, with a short preface apparently by Grace Poole. The structural analysis of focalization and voice provides elements for the discussion of the role of Antoinette and her husband as foci of the narrative and as narrators.

2.1 PART I

Part I of *WSS* is clearly Antoinette's section. She narrates the whole of it, from her childhood at Coulibri Estate to her stay with the nuns at the Convent in Spanish Town. The story time, in this part, spans a period of about 17 years, Antoinette's age when she left the Convent, around 1839 (44). Antoinette, as narrator, retells events she has participated in and recalls others she has heard from the people related to her. For a deeper analysis of the aspects mentioned above, Part I will be divided into three sections according to periods in Antoinette's life: the first one will deal with her childhood at Coulibri before her mother's marriage to Mr. Mason; the second one, with the period at Coulibri with Mr. Mason up to the fire; and the last one, with Antoinette's stay in Spanish Town. In these sections, Antoinette's role as focal character and as narrator will be discussed, as well as other characters' point of

view that Antoinette retells while narrating the events she has participated in.

Based on Genette's classification of focalization, we will consider all of *WSS* as a narrative with internal, variable focalization. The events in the story are focalized mainly through two characters, Antoinette and her husband, with no objective external analysis by a narrator. There is, though, an arguable exception in Part III. The narration in *WSS* tends to follow the focalization, with the two characters taking turns in the focalization and in the narration.

The focus of narration in Part I is mostly restricted to Antoinette. It is her eyes and ears that govern the perception of the story. Antoinette as narrator tells only what Antoinette as character has seen or heard. Her reports are introduced by the pronoun "I" and verbs like "asked," "heard," "saw," which either show her presence in the events described, or show that such events were directly told to her. Some passages may be cited in order to show Antoinette's focalization: "I don't know what the doctor told her [her mother] or what she said to him" (16). The character has not focalized the talk between the mother and the doctor about Pierre, so the reader does not have access to such information. In other passages she retells what she has heard from other people: "Soon the black people said it [Mr. Luttrell's house] was haunted" (15). The narrator reports what other characters say after Antoinette as a character has heard them.

In the second section of Part I the narrator retells the women's opinion about Annette and Mr. Mason's marriage, transmitting the words that the girl has listened to without

being noticed: "I had heard what all these smooth smiling people said about her when she was not listening and they did not guess I was. Hiding from them in the garden when they visited Coulibri, I listened" (24). All these passages show Antoinette's presence in the story she tells. There is no *paralepsis*, no information about a place where Antoinette has not been or heard about, or about a fact she has not participated in or heard from other people, or about other characters' consciousness. There is information about the thoughts of other characters only when they are verbalized by the character and heard by Antoinette. As a character, Antoinette interprets some attitudes or words of other characters: "perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass" (16); "She is ashamed of me" (23). These passages do not characterize an incursion into the other characters' consciousness; they are just interpretations the girl Antoinette gives to the facts that she observes.

In this first part of the novel there is *paralipsis* in Antoinette's narrative since she does not comment on the story as a narrator that knows what will become of the events she is describing now. The narrator limits the focalization to the character's impressions at the moment that the action happens. Some examples show the perception of the character as a girl and not as a grown-up woman who would have lived throughout the whole story. At the same time that she sees and hears things, the girl thinks about them, making her interpretations and giving her conclusions. The episode about the dead horse is an example:

Then one day, very early, I saw her horse lying down

under the frangipani tree. I went up to him but he was not sick, he was dead and his eyes were black with flies. I ran away and did not speak of it for I thought if I told no one it might not be true. (16; emphasis added)

Antoinette perceives the dead horse, showing once more that the story is followed through images that are in her eyes. Then, she thinks about the situation, notices the horror in it, and decides not to talk. The existence of the fact, for her, is conditioned to its transformation into words and consequent communication to other people. Antoinette recalls the episode with the dead horse when Mr. Mason comes to the Convent to tell her that she would live with him. Again, she does not want to talk about it hoping that by doing so "it may not be true" (49-50).

Silence is a recurrent feature of Antoinette as a child. She does not talk much; she generally focalizes other people's speeches and actions. In another passage Antoinette also perceives and conceptualizes without speaking: "My mother walked over to the window. ('Marooned,' said her straight narrow back, her carefully coiled hair. 'Marooned.')

The last paragraphs of this first section confirm the

tone of silence and loneliness of Antoinette's childhood:

I took another road, past the old sugar works and the water wheel that had not turned for years. I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would think 'It's better than people.' Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin--once I saw a snake. All better than people.

Better. Better, better than people. (24)

The first sentence of this quotation shows the abandonment and desolation of Coulibri Estate. The girl, without her mother and her friend Tia, goes to desert places full of hostile elements: no road, razor grass, ants, rain, and snakes. What she perceives in nature is loneliness and hostility, even though in her conception all those things are better than people. The only refuge she has is loneliness, transporting her to nowhere, away even from herself: "Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer" (24).

Although she does not talk about it to other characters, it is Antoinette who perceives the noise and the nasty atmosphere before the ex-slaves set fire to her house: "And I could hear the bamboos shiver and creak though there was no wind. It has been hot and still and dry for days" (29). "It was then I heard the bamboos creak again and a sound like whispering. I forced myself to look out of the window. There was a full moon but I saw nobody, nothing but shadows" (31). During the fire (28-38) Antoinette does not say a word to the other characters. As narrator, she retells what the adults do or say; as a

character, once more, she perceives and thinks, without verbalizing. Again, only the readers have access to her impressions. Her only reaction is to run at Tia, looking for a possibility of staying at Coulibri (38). Tia, however, throws a stone at her turning her desperate attempt to communication into rejection.

Some of the aspects that will be taken up later in the novel, such as Antoinette's being accused by Daniel of madness and unchastity, are already focalized in the narrative of Part I through other characters' opinions. The girl who follows Antoinette on her way to the Convent talks about madness:

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 stocking on her feet, she *sans culottes*. She try to kill her husband and she try to kill you too that day you go to see her. She have eyes like zombie and you have eyes like zombie too. (41-42)

Antoinette is too frightened to say anything, and her cousin Sandi Cosway comes to help her. The narrator introduces here another character that has importance in Daniel Cosway's accusations about Antoinette, and in her husband's doubts about her sexual behaviour. At this point in the narrative we only know that Sandi Cosway is Antoinette's cousin and that Mr. Mason has made the girl shy about her coloured relatives. Later Daniel will accuse Antoinette of having had a love affair with her cousin. The narrative, up to this point, limited to the character's focus of narration, does not give the reader enough information about the kind of relationship that occurred between Antoinette and her

cousin. We will discuss the relation between Antoinette and Sandi more deeply when analyzing Part III.

The English women also talk about Antoinette's family. She hears them commenting about her mother's marriage and about the reasons that probably lead Mr. Mason to marry her. They say that Antoinette's father had other children: "and all those women! She never did anything to stop him--she encouraged him. Presents and smiles for the bastards every Christmas" (24). They comment on the bad condition of the Estate, and on the children: "the boy an idiot kept out of sight and mind and the girl going the same way in my opinion--a *lowering* expression" (25; italics in the original). It is through the women's commentaries that the reader gets to know about old Cosway's other children. His children are mentioned in Antoinette's section and this information is not refuted by her as narrator, conferring more credibility to Daniel Cosway's letters to Antoinette's husband in the second part of the novel. Perhaps Daniel is not Antoinette's brother, but he could be.

If we are to consider not only who sees but also who speaks, or in other words, Antoinette's role as narrator, we come to the realm of voice. Genette considers three aspects when talking about voice: person, time of the narrating, and narrative level. In terms of person, Part I is a homodiegetic narrative; the narrator, Antoinette, is present in the story she tells, narrating her childhood up to the day when she leaves the Convent.

Time of narrating, however, is a particularly problematic aspect in *WSS*. Antoinette narrates Part I in the past

tense, which could show that she narrates from a point in time after the events recounted have happened. So, this would be a subsequent narrative. However, it is not possible to determine the temporal distance between the moment the events happen and the narrating of them. The fact that Antoinette's narrative is interrupted by her husband's complicates this question. Is she narrating Part I from the Convent where she is when it ends (before her husband's interruption) or from Thornfield Hall, where perhaps the whole narrative ends? Antoinette uses the present tense in a few passages in Part I. In fact, the first line of the novel is in the present: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (15). The present tense, however, does not indicate the position of the narrator. It just introduces a saying, a kind of proverb, which shows the situation of Blacks and Whites. The telling of the events related to Antoinette begins with "we were not in their ranks," which is in the past.

There are two passages in Part I, though, that may offer glimpses of the position of the narrator. During the fire, Antoinette narrates: "Just for a moment I shut my eyes and rested my head against her [Aunt Cora's] shoulder. She smelled of vanilla, I remember" (33; emphasis added). The second passage is her description of the Convent: "Quickly, while I can, I must remember the hot classroom" (44). For the next two pages the description continues in the present tense. After that, the narrative is again conducted in the past tense, reporting the life in the Convent. Antoinette's second dream is also told in the present (50) as well as the talk with Sister Marie Augustine:

"Now Sister Marie Augustine is leading me out of the dormitory . . . " (50). The last paragraph of Part I, the end of the conversation between Antoinette and Sister Marie Augustine, is narrated in the past: "She said, as if she was talking to herself, 'Now go quietly back to bed. Think of calm, peaceful things and try to sleep. Soon I will give the signal. Soon it will be tomorrow morning'" (51). As critic Kathy Mezei remarks about the time of the narrative, "Part I is Antoinette's narration and the narrating (present) self seems to be speaking from the perspective (place and time) with which her narration closes--the convent, in the early hours of the morning as she falls sleep again" (199). The present tense after the dream and in the description of the Convent, however, does not indicate that the narrator speaks from the Convent. Antoinette as narrator links her reports to the perceptions of the character, as we have already discussed in relation to focalization. So, the present tense here may suggest that the narrator is keeping herself to the character's thoughts at the moment the action happens. The two phrases "I remember" in the fire, and "Quickly, while I can, I must remember . . . " in the Convent, are disturbing. Mezei questions about the passage in the Convent: "Why the sense of urgency? Why must she remember? . . . Must [the narrative] be told quickly because soon her narrative will be taken over by another narrator and/or because she is in danger of forgetting (losing) her mind?" (200). There is still the possibility that she is telling her story from Thornfield Hall. If we think about the intertextuality between *Jane Eyre* and *WSS*, however, this would be a rather fantastic device, since we know that Antoinette

dies in the fire, so she could not tell her story. Kristien Hemmerechts says about the problem:

Both Antoinette and Rochester tell events that happen some time in the past, though it isn't possible to assess the exact time lapse between the experience and the moment of narration. At any rate, the time lapse cannot be conceived of realistically, because Antoinette dies before she can tell her story. The position of subsequent narration is thus merely a conventional stand. (427)

In the analysis of Part III we will discuss the textual evidences of the time of narrating at the end of the narrative, besides the intertextual relation with *Jane Eyre*. The difficulties in determining the narrator's position in time suggests, thus, another "silence" of *WSS*: the narrator does not say where she is.

There is another aspect of the time of the narrative to be discussed. Through the two dreams narrated in Part I Antoinette offers glimpses of what will happen to her. So, the narrative of her dreams may be considered a prior narrative:

I went to bed early and slept at once. I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying. The covering sheet was on the floor and my mother was looking down at me. (23)

At first sight the reader could consider this passage as the report of a child's nightmare, resulting from loneliness and helplessness. This dream, however, is the first one of a series of three dreams that can be considered as a synopsis of Antoinette's fate. The image of someone with her in the forest

and the feeling of hatred are premonitory evidences of her relationship with her husband. Such aspects are clarified in connection with the two other dreams and the two other parts of the novel. The second dream happens when Antoinette is at the Convent, soon after Mr. Mason's visit and his proposal to take her to live with him (49). This second dream is a kind of development of the first one. Now, she follows a man in the forest, unwillingly, but sure that this must be done. The anguish she feels and her white dress getting soiled are related to her conflicts between light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell (48), and to the idea of sin. She is forced to follow painfully a strange man through the mysterious forest in the same way that she has to submit to her husband, who builds for her an image of someone repulsive and crazy.

The reader learns about some events in Part I that are not directly narrated by Antoinette. She reports narratives that she has heard from other characters. Here we have evidences of a second narrative level. A talk between Antoinette and her mother, can be considered an example of this change into the second narrative level:

So I asked about Christophine. Was she very old?
Had she always been with us?

'She was your father's wedding present to me--one of his presents. He thought I would be pleased with a Martinique girl. I don't know how old she is now. Does it matter? Why do you pester and bother me about all these things that happened long ago? (18)

Antoinette's question introduces her mother's narrative about Christophine. The mother here is the narrator of something that

happened long ago. Antoinette is not present in the story time when Christophine was brought to Jamaica since she had not been born yet. Since Part I is focalized through Antoinette, the information about Christophine is transmitted to the reader through an "intermediary narrative," informing the narrator of the episodes "that took place out of the hero's presence" (Genette 241). Antoinette's mother continues her narrative, talking about Christophine's, Sass' and Godfrey's reasons for staying with them after the Emancipation Act (19), and the intradiegetic narrative merges into the extradiegetic narrative, with Antoinette taking hold of the role of the narrator again.

The effect this small incursion into the intradiegetic level brings to the reader is of an explanation of events that Antoinette could not tell without breaking the code of internal focalization. By hearing the mother's voice it is also possible for the reader to detect her feeling of helplessness and her lack of contact with the daughter. Another important aspect in this passage is the mother's affirmation about Christophine's reasons to stay: "Christophine stayed with me because she wanted to stay. She had her own very good reasons you may be sure" (19). This affirmation suggests that Christophine may have a special reason to stay besides any emotional relation with the family. Part II, in the section the husband narrates, will confirm that. Christophine has problems with the police and she has to hide (18; 131-33). The fact that Christophine's problem is suggested in the mother's narrative confers credibility to the husband's narrative.

2.2 PART II

Antoinette and her husband take turns while narrating Part II of *WSS*. The husband narrates the first section of it, telling about their marriage, their arrival at Grandbois, and the first week they spend there. Antoinette tells the second section, when she goes to ask Christophine for help, and the husband continues the narrative up to their departure from Grandbois. In the same way that Antoinette is the focal character in Part I her husband orients the narrative perspective in the first section of Part II. Here, the pronoun "I" is related to him. The image the reader has of Grandbois, the stories Antoinette tells, as well as the servants' appearance and what they say are perceived through the husband's eyes and ears. Following the same characteristics of Antoinette's focalization, there are no *paralepsis*, no information about what he has not seen or heard.

On the way to Grandbois the focalization of nature and the people is limited to the perceptions of the husband. He perceives what is around him feeling a sense of hostility coming from the place:

The girl Amélie said this morning, 'I hope you will be very happy, sir, in your sweet honeymoon house.' She was laughing at me I could see. A lovely little creature but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place. (55)

Amélie is presented in most episodes she takes part in involved in situations of irony, although, in his opinion, she is lovely. The husband remarks the contrast between the beautiful appearance

of Amélie and her spiteful character and compares this contrast to the place: he recognizes its beauty, but at the same time the place gives him a feeling of discomfort. In another passage he perceives the colours of the place, but their intensity is beyond his limits: "Everything is too much. I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near" (59). From the husband's perception of the nature that surrounds him it is possible for the reader to detect his inability to feel comfortable in an environment other than his own. There is a conflict between Antoinette's feeling of comfort and safety in relation to the island and her husband's opposite feeling of strangeness. Even before their arrival at Grandbois this difference is manifested:

Next time she spoke she said, 'The earth is red here, do you notice?'
'It's red in parts of England too.'
'Oh England, England, she called back mockingly, and the sound went on and on like a warning I did not choose to hear. (60)

Besides the conflict between the two characters, in this passage there is also the voice of the narrator commenting on what will happen. When Antoinette describes Coulibri in Part I she keeps her voice attached to the perceptions of the character. The husband's voice as narrator is more audible, though. He perceives and conceptualizes as character in the story, as he conveys his feelings at the moment things happen. At the same time, however, he comments on them as narrator, even if in a tenuous way, with

predictions of what will happen, as the warning he has decided not to hear.

In another passage Antoinette and her husband also discuss, each one from his/her own point of view, about England and the island. For Antoinette, England is like a "cold and dark dream." For her husband, the island is "quite unreal and like a dream" (67). They both go on looking at each other's place from the point of view of strangeness; there is no communication between the two worlds. Other elements in the nature of the island also bring to the husband a feeling of strangeness: the rain (75) and the forest when he gets lost (86-88). The same strangeness the husband manifests in relation to the place is extended to the people who work at Grandbois. Christophine brings coffee, "bull's blood," not "horse piss like the English madams drink" (71). The husband does not like her language, her dress trailing on the floor and getting dirty, and her lazy manners, even though Antoinette explains to him what such behaviour means to Christophine. The husband judges Christophine from his English point of view, creating a barrier between him and the old servant. He demonstrates strangeness when he asks Antoinette why she kisses and hugs Christophine, for he would not do it (76). As a character, the husband cannot understand the people, even though at the moment of the action he thinks he can. The knowledge of someone who has lived throughout the story show that he is mistaken in his first impressions. Here, the focus of the narrative is not limited to the character at the moment of the action, the narrator's voice can also be heard:

I grew to like these mountain people, silent, reserved, never servile, never curious (or so I thought), not knowing that their quick sideways looks saw everything they wished to see. (77; emphasis added)

The information emphasized in the passage above is given by the narrator. In this case, there is no paralipsis in the internal focalization.

The narrator's presence in this first section of Part II is also felt in the changes in narrative level. The husband's recollections about the wedding day and about the events that happened the day before form an intradiegetic narrative. According to Genette the second narrative may present itself, among other situations, as a kind of recollection that a character has (231). After having written a letter to his father in his room in Grandbois the husband thinks about his wedding (64-66). When the narrator retells the character's impressions about what has happened to him some time before, the narrative goes to the second level, the intradiegetic. The second narrative level here has the function of informing the reader of aspects s/he did not know before as well as of reporting the character's impressions when the events occurred in the story. The reader learns that, for the husband, his wedding was just a performance; the bride, the ceremony did not have anything to do with him. The reader also learns that, having at first refused to marry, Antoinette has given in to her future husband's promises of peace, happiness and safety. Like the wedding, the promises are just a part he is playing.

The reader knows more details about the circumstances of the wedding from the letters the husband writes to his father. The letters can also be considered second-level narrative since they represent a narrative within the extradiegetic level that tells events that have happened at another point of the story in terms of time or space. At the same time that they establish a communication between the sender and the receiver the letters provide the reader with information about the events that have happened in a time or space different from the one focalized in the story. The first letter from the husband is not actually written: he just imagines a letter where he says that he will not beg for money any more since he has received the thirty thousand pounds and that no provision has been made for Antoinette (59). According to the English law everything the woman has when she is single becomes the husband's property after marriage unless it is clearly stated otherwise. In Antoinette's case no provision was made for her, so after marriage she has nothing of her own. Here, the reader learns that he has married for the money he would receive. The letter he actually writes (63-64), however, contrasts with the one he has imagined. He blames his illness for not having written before, and his words addressing his father are much more reserved than the ones in the imagined letter. The reader gets from this letter the information that Antoinette's husband has dealt with Richard Mason about the money and that Mr. Mason has already died. Here, however, the narrator omits important aspects. It is not clear why Richard was interested in the marriage. The reader does not know whether he received some money, or whether he just wanted to be free from the

responsibility for a sister that would bring him trouble. The stories of madness in the family would perhaps make it difficult for Antoinette to get married. The reader does not know about the circumstances of Mr. Mason's death either.

The husband's letters have a double function in the narrative: they serve as a means of communication between the characters and provide the reader with information about the events and also about the characters' emotional involvement with the events. Contrasting the imagined and the actually written letters, it is also possible to detect the husband's insecurity in relation to his father and his inability to fight against situations that are adverse to his will. He plays the part he is expected to play.

Still in this first section there is a letter that influences considerably the events that will come. Daniel Cosway's letter (79-82) to the husband brings him information about his wife that causes him to change his behaviour in relation to her. Calling himself Cosway, Daniel talks about wickedness and madness in the family. The husband would have been deceived and led to marry a mad girl. Daniel, however, conceals the episode about the fire at Coulibri; he says that probably Richard Mason would tell lies about what has happened at Coulibri (82). Antoinette has not yet told the truth to her husband. On the contrary, she has been instructed to tell him that her mother had died when she was a child (105). Besides, it was not his wish to marry Antoinette; the idea has brought him a feeling of strangeness since the first time he saw her up to the honeymoon at Grandbois. So, the letter comes to fill some gaps of

information, increasing the credibility that it can receive from the husband. Besides, the husband has already stated that he does not love his wife:

Tears--nothing! Words--less than nothing. As for the happiness I gave her, that was worse than nothing. I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did. (78)

The husband's feelings in relation to his wife are consonant with Daniel's words in the letter:

But I hear too that the girl is beautiful like her mother was beautiful, and you bewitch with her. She is in your blood and in your bones. By night and by day. But you, an honorable man, know well that for marriage more is needed than all this. Which does not last. Old Mason bewitch so with her mother and look what happen to him. Sir I pray I am in time to warn you what to do. (81)

Daniel says here what the husband already knows--that he is thirsty for Antoinette but does not love her, and that consequently their marriage cannot last long. Linking the imminent rupture of the relationship between Antoinette and her husband to her possible madness, the husband finds a reason for a rupture that would happen anyway.

Following the same pattern of Part I in terms of time of the narrating, it is not possible to determine from which point in time the husband is speaking. In this section, he narrates in the past tense. There is only a small passage in the present tense: "As for my confused impressions they will never be

written. There are blanks in my mind that cannot be filled up" (64). This passage comes soon after the husband has written the letter to his father. The present tense here may relate to the flow of his thoughts at the moment the action happens. However, his commentaries as narrator are more audible in the narrative than Antoinette's. In this way, he may be evaluating the facts that have happened to him from a specific point after the narrative is concluded. However, it is not possible to assess from where he is speaking. In the same way that Antoinette's narrative in Part I was interrupted by his, his narrative will be interrupted by hers, before he returns to it for a last time, before leaving for England.

Antoinette's narrative in Part II shows that her husband indeed changes his behaviour in relation to her. In the middle of the two sections that the husband narrates, Antoinette's section discloses to the reader an important part of the story--her visit to Christophine. Her husband could not have reported this passage without breaking the narrative pattern in *WSS* in terms of focalization and narrative: the narrators only tell what they have somehow perceived in the story. Following Antoinette's narrative, the reader can have a more vivid and truthful account of her feelings and wishes. Antoinette tells Christophine that her husband does not talk to her any more and sleeps in his dressing-room (90). Besides, he calls her Bertha, denying the relation between Antoinette's name and her mother's:

[]When he passes my door he says. "Good night, Bertha." He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother's name. "I hope you will

sleep well, Bertha"--it cannot be worse," I said.
(94)

By Changing her name to an English one, he deprives her of her identity, trying to build up another woman that he would control completely.

The third section of Part II is once again the husband's narrative. In this section he narrates events he has not participated in. So, the focus of the narration is restricted to other characters who sometimes present conflicting points of view about the same event. Daniel Cosway, Antoinette, and Christophine are three characters who, talking to the husband, reveal aspects he did not know before. Daniel Cosway, after telling the husband about old Cosway and about how he had ill-treated Daniel (100-02), mentions Alexander Cosway, his half brother, Sandi's father. According to Daniel, Antoinette knows Sandi, her cousin, very well; he even suggests that Antoinette and Sandi have had an affair:

Your wife know Sandi since long time. Ask her and she tell you. But not everything I think.' He laughed. 'Oh no, not everything. I see them when they think nobody see them. I see her when she . . . (103; ellipsis in the original)

When the husband is leaving, Daniel adds that he is not the first one to kiss Antoinette's "pretty face" (104). Amélie has already told the husband about Sandi. She says that she once heard that Antoinette and her cousin had got married (100). So, for the husband it is easy to believe, as he says, that Antoinette is

thirsty for anyone, not only for him (135). The information he receives about Sandi comes to fulfill the gaps in his knowledge about his wife. He hears and concludes, he does not ask her anything. Another important information Daniel gives him is about Christophine having already been sent to jail for "obeah" (103). This information makes him write to Mr. Fraser, the magistrate, asking about Christophine (117). The husband uses the magistrate's confirmation about Christophine's problematic situation with the police to force her to leave Grandbois.

When Antoinette arrives home after having gone to Christophine's house to ask for obeah she talks to her husband about her childhood and about her mother. Antoinette has talked to her husband about such subjects before, but she has told him only the episodes of her childhood that had made her sad or unhappy. She has not told him about concrete facts. On the contrary, according to her husband, Antoinette was "undecided, uncertain about facts--any fact" (73). Again, there are gaps of information for the husband. He did not know his wife before, she had not told him facts about her life, and had lied about her mother's death. Antoinette tells her husband that Daniel does not have the right to the name Cosway, but that his name is Boyd (106). Linked to the fact that there were two pictures of Daniel's parents on the wall of his house, and that his father is pictured as a coloured man (99), as Amélie said, Antoinette's information makes sense. Her husband, however, does not believe her.

Antoinette tells her husband about her mother's life before marrying Mr. Mason and after the fire (105; 108), but her

husband, at first, refuses to listen to her, even after having asked her questions:

'We wont talk about it now,' I said. 'Rest tonight.'
'But we must talk about it.' Her [Antoinette's] voice was high and shrill.
'Only if you promise to be reasonable.' (106)

In this part, Antoinette is trying to speak, an attempt to break the silence that has been imposed to her since her childhood. The husband, however, does not listen to her. Even before listening to what she has to say he believes she will not be reasonable. What she had said or done up to now had made little sense to him. Once more, the feeling of strangeness prevents him from communicating with his wife, and he refuses to try to understand her:

'You have no right,' she said fiercely. 'You have no right to ask questions about my mother and then refuse to listen to my answer.'
'Of course I will listen, of course we can talk now, if that is what you wish.' But the feeling of something unknown and hostile was very strong. 'I feel very much a stranger here.' I said. 'I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side.' (107)

So, Antoinette tells him about the destruction of Coulibri (109) and about the miserable life her mother had in the house with the couple of Negroes (110-11). Everything she tells her husband here is coherent with what she has narrated in the first part of the novel. In this way, there are no discrepancies in the narrative of the events. For the husband, however, things are not clear: "I began to wonder how much of this was true, how much imagined,

distorted. Certainly many of the old estate houses were burned. You saw ruins all over the place" (109). When she finishes her talk, her husband calls her Bertha again (111), which shows that he still does not accept his wife. His reaction confirms Antoinette's remark: "I have said all I want to say. I have tried to make you understand. But nothing has changed" (111). In fact, her talk is useless. Her husband has known he does not love her since they first met, and has always felt a stranger, both in the marriage and in the place. So, nothing she says makes any difference to him.

Christophine also tells the husband about Annette's madness. She stresses what Antoinette has already said and gives her interpretations of what has happened to Antoinette's mother:

'They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husband he go off, he leave her. They won't let me see her. I try, but no. They won't let Antoinette see her. In the end--mad I don't know--she give up, she care for nothing". (129-30)

Again, the words about Annette's madness do not change his position. He does not trust Christophine. The oboeah Antoinette uses has provoked hatred in him. He believes his wife has poisoned him, in the same way that the slaves used to do to get rid of their masters' ill-treatment. Besides, Christophine talks about money. She suggests that he could return half of Antoinette's dowry and leave her. Christophine would take care of her. Perhaps, she adds, Antoinette would find someone else and

marry (130-31). The talk about money and the jealousy he feels force their discussion to come to a halt. He tells Christophine about Mr. Fraser's letter (131-32), compelling her to leave Grandbois.

Besides the expulsion of Christophine from Grandbois, the husband acts over the place in an increasingly confident way and imposes his will, taking Antoinette to England with him. Even nature seems to be on his side the day they leave Grandbois. There is a contrast between the way the husband perceives nature during his stay at Grandbois and the nature he focalizes in the last pages of Part II. During the honeymoon he feels the place is his enemy, full of secrets. When they are leaving the estate the day is cloudy, like an English day, as if he has conquered Grandbois: "It's cool today; cool, calm and cloudy, as an English summer" (135). It is on a grey day, like the English days, that he feels at ease to leave Grandbois. Antoinette is definitely separated from the West Indies. He has not adapted to the different place and culture. He has wished Antoinette to change in order to adapt to him in the same way that nature, for him, has done so, changing to an English weather. When they are leaving, he wants Antoinette to be like the bamboos that bend to the earth on a storm, "crying for mercy" (135) and not like the royal palms, which because they do not bend, are stripped of their branches, standing still, but leafless (135). The day is on his side, an English day to help her change into his pattern: "Here is a cloudy day to help you. No brazen sun. No sun . . . No sun. The weather's changed" (136; ellipsis in the original). She does not cry for mercy, though. So he strips her of her branches

and takes her from her place. Ironically, he reveals that he had meant to give Grandbois back to Antoinette (142).

In this last section of Part II the reader learns about the husband's conflicting feelings, like his intentions of giving Grandbois back to Antoinette.¹ However, she never learns about such intentions and conflicts. There is no communication between the two characters as Antoinette herself realizes:

'What right have you to make promises in my name? Or to speak for me at all?' [the husband asks,]
'No, I had no right, I am sorry. I don't understand you, I know nothing about you, and I cannot speak for you. . . .' (141; ellipsis in the original; emphasis added)

In this way we can conclude that Part II of *WSS* is a narrative with several foci of perception. Besides Antoinette and her husband, other characters also focalize events giving different interpretations to facts according to different points of view. In terms of voice, the changes of narrative level provide the reader with information about events that happened outside the narrators' perception in the story level. So, the reader knows about the circumstances of the wedding and the husband's real feelings through his letters. Such information is not available to Antoinette, though. At the same time that important information about her is silenced without reaching the

1. Originally, Jean Rhys wrote this section of *WSS* in poem form. In the poem, "Obeah Night," the husband expresses his confused feelings--love, hatred, jealousy--in relation to his wife. The poem was published in *Jean Rhys Letters*, edited by F. Wyndham and D. Melly, pages 264-66. See Appendix.

husband, there are gaps in the things she knows about her husband. The gaps of information between Antoinette and her husband are filled by other people as Daniel Cosway, for example, driving the husband even further away from his wife. Antoinette hardly speaks as a character and when she does she does not succeed in reaching her husband. As narrator, she only tells her story following the character's perception, without comments as a narrator who took part in the story and knows what is going to happen. She leaves gaps even for the reader and conceals important information as, for example, about her relationship with Sandi. In Parts I and II of *WSS* there are no contradictions in the events Antoinette and her husband narrate, although they stand for opposite sides of the problematic relations between metropolis and colony, husband and wife. The misunderstandings between them are caused by gaps in communication. In the same way, although the narrators are reliable, they leave gaps that may be filled by different interpretations. This aspect is particularly important in Antoinette's role as narrator and character, since she is the one who supposedly received a voice which had been denied to her before, in *Jane Eyre*.

2.3 PART III

Part III of *WSS* confirms that Antoinette is in fact taken to England and kept secluded. She narrates Part III with a short preface apparently narrated by Grace Poole, the woman who takes care of her. The narrator of the preface, however, is not clearly Grace Poole. The first sentence shows that she is the focal character, but does not show that she is the narrator:

"*They knew that he was in Jamaica when his father and his brother died,* Grace Poole said" (145; italics in the original). Then Grace Poole continues reporting a talk with Mrs. Eff about the arrangements for her work. Quotation marks are used for Grace Poole's speech. She addresses Leah, the other servant: "*Then all the servants were sent away and she [Mrs. Eff] engaged a cook, one maid and you, Leah*" (146; italics in the original). The last paragraph, however, is confused in terms of narrator. There are no quotation marks. The first sentence shows the presence of an extradiegetic narrator, following the same pattern of the preceding lines: "*The thick walls, she thought* (146; italics in the original). If "she" is Grace Poole there is an extradiegetic narrative in this section and Grace is the focal character. In the last lines, however, the pronouns "we" and "I" indicate that the narrator takes part in the story:

Yes, maybe that's why we all stay--Mrs Eff and Leah and me. All of us except that girl who lives in her own darkness. I'll say one thing for her, she hasn't lost her spirit. She's still fierce. I don't turn my back on her when her eyes have that look. I know it.
(146; italics in the original)

The remarks about the "girl" indicate that these are Grace's thoughts, since she is the one who is in touch with Antoinette. Grace here is not talking to Leah any more, her name is used in the third and not in the second person. The lack of quotation marks in the last paragraph, however, breaks the pattern that had been established in the beginning of the preface. Narrator and focal character, in this way, merge into each other. Hemmerechts

also recognizes that the focalization in the beginning of Part III is problematic. She says:

Grace Poole is an internal character-focalizer, whose private thoughts are quoted first in indirect discourse, next in direct discourse, by a narrator whose identity is not disclosed. The voice who says 'she thought,' probably belongs to an omniscient extradiegetic narrator, a technique Rhys rather disliked (416)

Antoinette's narrative is confused in terms of time. The first paragraphs are narrated in the present tense, which could bring to the reader the feeling that the hero has joined the narrator, as Genette says: sometimes this may happen in autobiographical narratives (226). Antoinette uses the present tense to describe the room where she is kept (146-48). Then, however, she changes to "One morning" (148), and the narrative goes on in the past tense up to the end. The exception is a statement in the last paragraph: "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (155-56). This sentence is followed by the last ones in the book, which are in the past tense: "There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage" (156). So the reader does not have the feeling that the hero has joined the narrator. Antoinette starts her section describing the place in the present tense. Then, she reports recollections in the past. The reader does not know whether her last lines are part of her recollections or if s/he is supposed to follow her through the house. The mixture of present and past tense in the narrator's

voice is coherent with Antoinette's confusion of time as a character. She has lost the idea of time sequency:

'When was last night?' I said.
'Yesterday.'
'I don't remember yesterday.' (148)

However, she knows that she has been kept secluded for a long time:

She looked at me and said, 'I don't believe you know how long you've been here, you poor creature.'
'On the contrary,' I said, 'only I know how long I've been here. Nights and days and days and nights, hundreds of them slipping through my fingers.[']
(151)

In terms of time of the narrative there is still an aspect to be considered. Antoinette's third dream resumes the series of dreams that can be considered a synopsis of her fate. It is the last of the premonitory dreams that constitute a prior narrative. While Antoinette walks in the house, in her dream, different aspects of her life come to her mind. The contrast between white and red is an example. White is the colour her husband wants her to wear, and red is the one she likes to dress in, the colour that, according to her husband, makes her look unchaste. She sees white and red in the hall of the house: "It was a large room with a red carpet and red curtains. Everything else was white" (153). Then, when she sets fire to the house, the red colour spreads all over. It is on an English weather that they leave Grandbois, but now, in her dream, Antoinette's colour

takes hold of the English house. Flashes from her life in the West Indies also come to her mind: Aunt Cora, Christophine, the parrot, her husband calling her Bertha, and Tia, beckoning her (154-55). This last dream summarizes Antoinette's story. By referring to the dreams, the reader knows what is going to happen to Antoinette even without relating to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

In her recollections Antoinette talks about Sandi. She says that she was wearing a red dress when Sandi came to see her for the last time (151-52), but she does not say when that happened. It may have been before her wedding or before her departure for England. Then, she says that Sandi often came to see her:

Sandi often came to see me when that man was away and when I went out driving I would meet him. I could go out driving then. The servants knew, but none of them told. (152)

If she mentions the servants and "that man," we can conclude that Antoinette and Sandi used to see each other after her marriage; this makes Daniel Cosway's words more probable (103). Then she talks about a kiss, "the life and death kiss" that has probably happened before her departure, for she mentions the ship whistle calling (152). Finally, she reports her husband's reaction in relation to Sandi:

I took the red dress down and put it against myself. 'Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?' I said. That man told me so. He has found out that Sandi had been to the house and that I went

to see him. I never knew who told. 'Infamous daughter of an infamous mother,' he said to me. (152)

We can conclude, in this way, that Antoinette really saw Sandi while married, and that Amélie's and Daniel's accusations are true. Another possibility could be considered, though. If we consider that this third part is narrated by Antoinette in seclusion, and her memories are not always clear, we could say that she is an unreliable narrator. So, her encounters with Sandi could have been just made up in her mind based on the accusations she has heard. In the same way that her husband has driven her to madness changing her name and alienating her from reality, he may have made her believe that she and Sandi have had an affair.

Critics of *WSS* in general seem to believe that the love relationship between Antoinette and Sandi indeed occurred. Charlotte H. Bruner, for example, relates the love affair to the unchastity Charlotte Brontë assigned Bertha:

Rhys sympathetically explains the vague charges of low life and degeneracy given by Brontë. Antoinette loves and wishes to marry her light-colored cousin, Sandi. Her passion has to be illicit because marrying across racial lines is forbidden to women of the white colonizer society. Thus Rhys explains the charge of unchastity. (238)

For Teresa O'Connor, besides the dialogue with *Jane Eyre*, Sandi suggests a "kindly alternative" to the "sodomasochistic relationship" between Antoinette and her husband. She also sees the relationship as the rejected young girl's search for a companion and sympathetic lover, and the husband responds to it as the "spiteful and possessive calumny of the 'cheated' male"

(192). Molly Hite says that the "unchastity" of Antoinette is the "consequence rather than the cause of her husband's callousness and infidelity" (37). Antoinette turns to her cousin, according to Hite, after her husband had had sexual intercourse with Amélie in the adjoining room (38). There is no textual evidence, however, proving that Antoinette and Sandi's sexual encounters, if they happened, occurred before or after the sexual relation between the husband and Amélie. Daniel Cosway, as well as Amélie, had already suggested the existence of the relationship before, and Antoinette herself, in Part III, talks about the encounters when the husband was away and when she went out driving. If we consider the information given by Daniel, Amélie, and Antoinette in Part III as reliable, the encounters occurred before the husband's infidelity. If the reports are not reliable, there is no possible conclusion based on textual evidences. The interpretations given above, in this way, are plausible while they rely on extra-textual references and inferences from the text. Louis James also says that it is not possible to conclude if the love affair occurred or not, but he gives a social interpretation for the impossibility of a relationship between Antoinette and Sandi:

We know very little about Sandi and his relations with Antoinette. We meet him first protecting Antoinette from the albino boy and the black girl who close in on her as she is going to school. Later she meets him 'often' when Rochester is away or while out riding, and Daniel intimates sexual intimacy. Whether this existed or not does not matter: the tragedy is that race and social constraints have prevented the natural relationship between Antoinette and the tall, genteel mulatto from culminating in marriage. (53)

So, we can conclude that the relationship between Sandi and Antoinette is not clearly determined in the text, giving way to diverse interpretations. Part III, in this way, is confused in terms of time and of the events narrated, which makes it coherent with the narrative of a woman prevented from contacting the world.

After discussing the aspects of focalization and voice in *WSS*, Hemmereichs raises the question of the reliability of the narrators. Since there are several reports about the events according to the different characters in the different narrative levels, she asks: "Which one of these versions is to be believed? Which one [of] these accounts is reliable?" (430). For her, the reliability of the main narrators cannot be taken for granted, since they interpret and judge events according to their points of view. Antoinette, Hemmereichs continues, cannot be considered reliable when she calls Thornfield Hall "a cardboard world." In the same way, the husband's reliability is questionable when he calls Antoinette "a lunatic" or accuses her of having betrayed and deceived him. Furthermore, Hemmereichs says that Antoinette and her husband "are not equipped to judge the other narrator's reliability" (432). Antoinette refuses to listen to her husband's narrative about England. Although claiming that he "scarcely listened to" Antoinette's stories, her husband does listen to her and to the other characters. However, their versions confuse him. He lacks the means to judge the other narrative's reliability. Yet, Hemmereichs continues, all the versions, even if conflicting, are told (434). She concludes that the truth, in

this way, resides in the sum of each individual account, not in a particular one:

No matter how many lies are spun, each version contains a grain of truth, and deserves being considered. *WSS*'s very structure communicates [in] this sense a respect for each version and each voice incorporating them all on a more or less equal basis, i. e. by quotating them in direct speech. They are juxtaposed as valid and possible alternatives. (435)

In this way, this seems to be a kind of "structural silence" of *WSS*. Rhys does not give the reader enough means to judge the reliability of the narrators. The narrative does not say which is the true version of the events. It may not be possible to affirm that the narrators are reliable, but it does not mean that they are unreliable either.

* * *

The structural analysis of *WSS* has tried to answer the questions proposed in the first part of this chapter. In terms of focalization *WSS* is a narrative with internal, variable focalization. Due to this kind of focalization it is possible to follow the two protagonists through their perceptions in the story they narrate. Antoinette focalizes events that show her loneliness, in special during her childhood. She does not talk much as a girl so it is possible to conclude that silence is a characteristic feature of hers in her relations with the other characters. As a focal character, she perceives events related to her feeling of unhappiness and loneliness. The husband perceives events that show a kind of victimization. He does not conceal

from the reader information about his real intentions when he marries, or the fact that he does not love his wife. He attributes his behaviour, however, to his father and brother's pressures. The decision was made when he was ill, so it was easier to give in to his father's wishes, and mainly, to the amount of money he would receive. The strangeness he feels in relation to the place he is in and to its people is also insistently focalized, as if he were doomed, from the beginning, to nonadaptation to the different culture. In terms of narration, their reports do not conflict. In general, since each narrator retells different events, there are no discrepancies in the events narrated. In the aspect of discrepancies, the diegetic levels have an important role. Since there are gaps of information between the two characters--as character, the husband does not know important information about his wife--the events retold by other characters in the intradiegetic narratives reveal different conceptions about the same event. In other words, the narrators do not tell aspects of events that are contradictory, but the interpretations given to the events are different according to different situations and different characters. As narrators, Antoinette and her husband do not comment on the story significantly. If they did so they would be closer to unreliability. Their comments are character's conceptualizations about the story at the moment the events happen.

So, after the considerations about focalization and narrative, we can conclude that both narrators are reliable, even Antoinette in Part III. Although her memory and rationalization are altered, her descriptions of the place she is in, the things

that happen to her are reliable. The only exception may be Sandi, but this aspect gives way to different interpretations that may be influenced by the reliability of information given by characters. This aspect is not enough, though, to term Antoinette an unreliable narrator. The structural analysis shows that there are gaps of communication between Antoinette and her husband that lead to the impossibility of a relationship between them. The two aspects that cause the gaps are, on the husband's side, his strangeness, and on Antoinette's side, her silence.

The question of Antoinette's silence as character is relevant in the view of the criticism of *WSS* in general. Although different critical analyses affirm that one of the most significant aspects of Jean Rhys' novel is to give voice to the mad woman of *Jane Eyre*, the structural analysis shows that, as a character, she is prevented from speaking. When she tries to do so, silence is imposed. Her husband, as a character, still has the strongest voice. The reader knows about her story, though, even if s/he is invited to fill some of the silences, leading perhaps to different conclusions about the truth in the story of Antoinette/Bertha and her husband (Rochester).

CONCLUSION

Jean Rhys has suggested difficulties of communication in *Wide Sargasso Sea* since its title. The adjective *wide* to the Sargasso Sea--the sea that separates Europe from the West Indies--suggests that the contact between the two portions of land is not an easy one. The Sargasso Sea itself pictures difficulties and destruction. Seaweed and streams make its crossing problematic,--giving way to legends about terrible shipwrecks. The wideness of the Sea represents the void that separates the West Indies from Europe, and by extension Antoinette from her husband. In a less specific sense, there is already an enormous gap between metropolis and colonies, as between men and women. The communication is frequently marked by silence.

Difficulties in communication are also a characteristic feature of Rhys's previous work. Her heroines are marked by an inability to relate to the place where they live and to the people, men in particular, they associate with. So, female victimization and the sense of belonging nowhere are constant themes of Rhys's novels. Rhys's subject matter, in this way, leads critics to taking up feminist and colonial stances before her work. However, she is also criticised for writing about her

personal experiences, and not about the problems of women in general or of the West Indies. According to some critics, the treatment of her heroines lacks consistency. Yet, it is a common sense that *WSS* is her best novel. Even if we consider that Rhys was too autobiographical, that her heroines are not consistent, and that she does not treat political matters with the necessary depth, we have to acknowledge Rhys's accomplishment in overcoming all these problems in *WSS*.

Rhys's motivation to write the novel came from Charlotte Brontë's treatment of Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and from her apparent prejudice against the West Indies. So, the setting of *WSS* is Jamaica, with its complicated political and cultural aspects. The geographical characteristics of the West Indies are not merely described by Jean Rhys: they have a direct influence in the behaviour of the two protagonists. Antoinette is identified with the colourful life of the place; her husband, on the contrary, does not feel at ease in the exuberance of nature. The historical-political aspects of the West Indies, though, play a more important role in the novel. The conflicts between French and English is felt in the French names of some characters, like Antoinette and her mother Annette. Rochester, changing his wife's name to Bertha, imposes an English identity to her. The ruins of the French road and of the French priest's house also show that the English have conquered the place. Even more stressed in the novel are the relations between English, Creole and Black people. Rhys shown the hatred of the ex-slaves in the frustrated friendship of Antoinette and Tia, in the stories the Blacks tell about Annette, in the fire of Coulibri. The Europeans' lack of

comprehension about the place and its people is represented in the characters of Mr. Mason and Rochester. Annette and Antoinette, as women who do not belong to any of these groups--Black or European--suffer rejection from both. This situation is representative of the plight of Creoles particularly women in the West Indies during colonization. They belong to no group, they have no right to an identity. Finally, Rhys also shows in her novel the exploitation of the metropolis over the colony: the former subjects the latter by appropriating its wealth. In *WSS* the same pattern for the relation metropolis-colony functions for the relation men-women. Rochester, the English man, appropriates the colonial woman's wealth, making her financially dependent on him since after marriage he legally owns everything that belonged to her. All these voices speak back to *Jane Eyre*. In terms of social voices, therefore, Rhys talks back to Brontë exposing the complicated speeches of the people from a colony, especially women.

Rhys has decided to give Bertha a life; it is said that she has given voice to the woman who was silent in *Jane Eyre*. At the same time, however, critics also say that *WSS* is marked by silences. In this way, this analysis has proposed an investigation of the silences in *WSS*, particularly in relation to Antoinette, based on Genette's theories of focalization and voice. The study of focalization has shown that the events are mostly focalized by the two character-narrators, Antoinette and her husband.

In Part I Antoinette is the focal character, and as narrator she tells only what she has seen or heard. There are no

paralepsis, or extra information of something that she has not perceived. There are paralipsis, showing that omissions are more frequent than extra information. Antoinette restricts the information she gives to her perceptions as character at the moment of the action. In this way, she does not give information about what is going to happen. Keeping to the eyes and ears of Antoinette as a character enables the reader to follow her emotions during the action. Silence is a predominant feature of Antoinette as a girl. She does not talk to her mother; Annette refuses to listen to her, and when she does she rejects her daughter. Antoinette's attempt to have a black girl as a friend is also frustrated. When money comes between their friendship, the hatred between Blacks and Whites is stronger than the friendly relation between two girls. As a girl Antoinette rarely speaks. She has learned not to speak about the sad or difficult moments as an attempt to deny reality: "Say nothing and it may not be true." As narrator, Antoinette does not report words that she has verbalized, dialogues between her and other characters are rare. Besides Christophine, no one talks to her.

After Antoinette leaves the Convent, the narrative is held by her husband. She is going to narrate only a small portion of Part II. In the second section of Part II, narrated by Antoinette, she is the focal character of an encounter between her and Christophine. Here the reader learns that the husband is ill-treating her and that she asks for a love potion to make him come to her again. Christophine's reluctance shows the conflicts between Black and White culture. At the same time, following Antoinette's perceptions as a character it is possible for the

reader to detect her desperation in trying to regain the moments of happiness of the first days of her marriage.

After Rochester takes hold of the narrative once more, Antoinette comes back as narrator in Part III. The beginning of this part, written in italics, shows a probable omniscient narration, where Grace Poole, as focal character, talks about Antoinette's seclusion. Through Mrs. Eff's focalization the reader also has glimpses of Rochester's life before going to the West Indies. The reader also learns that his father and brother have died. Antoinette's focalization in Part III is confusing. She talks about the trip to England and describes the room in which she is secluded. Because now she is prevented from contacting the world, her impressions are confusing, reality is mixed with imagination and the reader cannot detect the boundaries between the two. Now the only person she can speak to is Grace Poole. Again, most of the narration of Part III is focalized on confusing recollections, her voice is not heard by other characters.

The husband narrates most of Part II, and he is the focal character in most of the narrative. There are no paralepsis in the focalization of the narrative through him. The reader does not learn events or thoughts of other characters that were not somehow told to him. Paralipsis of the narrator is less evident than in the sections narrated by Antoinette. Rochester comments as narrator about how things will turn out, although in a very subtle way. Through his focalization the reader can follow his conflicting feelings since the wedding, and his sense of strangeness in the West Indies. He also focalizes the talk with

Antoinette before the obeh night, when she tries to explain about her mother and the kind of life she and her family have had before Annette's marriage to Mr. Mason. Once more, her attempt at communication is frustrated. He listens to her but does not believe her. The controversial information he has received from different people prevents him from accepting her version. The information she gives him about the life in Coulibri and about her mother's madness, however, is coherent with her narrative in Part I.

The study of voice has shown that it is not possible to determine the temporal point from which the narrators tell the story. Both Antoinette and Rochester do not say from where they are speaking. In Antoinette's case the effect of her telling her own story is quite fantastic since the reader who relates to *Jane Eyre* knows that she dies at the end. Even if we do not recall the previous novel, Antoinette's dreams are evidence enough of her death. Considered a previous narrative, the sequence of Antoinette's three premonitory dreams presents a summary of her life before the facts happen. The last dream is the most powerful argument that *WSS* can stand by itself, for the dream contains its ending in relation to Antoinette's death, and the reader does not have to know *Jane Eyre* to understand what is going to happen to Antoinette. The previous novel, though, gives a deterministic effect to *WSS*. The reader who takes *Jane Eyre* into account known since the beginning that Antoinette dies in the fire at Thornfield Hall.

The second narrative level plays an important role in *WSS*. In Antoinette's narrative the reader learns about facts that

happened in a period of time in which Antoinette was not present. Other characters, like her mother, retell the events that have happened before. In the husband's narrative, the letters he writes and receives give information about facts that happened in a different time or space. Through the letter the reader knows about the conditions of the marriage and about Daniel's stories. Having a double function, the letters Rochester receive give him information about things he did not know before, filling the silences about his wife and leading him to take decisions against her. At the same time, the letters give the reader the possibility of following Daniel's ideas.

Part III is confusing in terms of focalization and narration. The information Antoinette gives is confusing, and the reader does not know whether she really had a love affair with her cousin Sandi or not. At the same time that Antoinette is losing her sanity the narrative is also losing its coherence, coming to Antoinette's death and the ending of the narrative.

In this way it is possible to conclude that silence is present in *WSS* in Antoinette's communication with other characters. All her attempts at communication, as a character, are frustrated. However, she does tell her story and the reader learns something about Antoinette (Bertha Rochester) and her husband (Edward Rochester). The silence between the two protagonists has led to the impossibility of communication, the void of the wide Sargasso Sea could not be crossed. Antoinette's silence has also the aspect of resistance. When her husband forces her to leave Grandbois he wants her to speak submitting to him. Antoinette, however, keeps silent. Even for the reader there

are blanks that "cannot be filled up", recalling Rochester confused impressions. Making Antoinette's story full of silences, Jean Rhys has suggested that the truth, especially the truth of a colonial woman, is made of omissions.

APPENDIX

Obeah Night

A night I seldom remember

(If it can be helped)

The night I saw Love's dark face

Was Love's dark face

"And cruel as he is"? I've never known that

I tried my best you may be certain (whoever asks)

My human best

If the next morning as I looked at what I'd done

(He was watching us mockingly, used to these games)

If I'd stared back at him

If I'd said

"I was a god myself last night

I've tamed and changed a wild girl"

Or taken my hurt darling in my arms

(Conquered at last. And silent. Mine)

Perhaps Love would have smiled then

Shown us the way

Across that sea. They say it's strewn with wrecks
And weed-infested
Few dare it, fewer still escape
But we, led by smiling Love
We could have sailed
 Reached a safe harbour
Found a sweet, brief heaven
 Lived our short lives

But I was both sick and sad
 (Night always ends)
She was a stranger
Wearing the mask of pain
Bearing the marks of pain -
I turned away - Traitor
Too sane to face my madness (or despair)
 Far, far too cold and sane

Then Love, relenting
Sent clouds and soft rain
Sent sun, light and shadow
 To show me again
Her young face waiting
Waiting for comfort and a gentler lover?
 You'll not find him)
A kinder loving? *Love is not kind*
I would not look at her
(Once is enough)

Over my dead love
Over a sleeping girl
I drew a sheet
Cover the stains of tears
Cover the marks of blood
(You can say nothing
That I have not said a thousand times and one
Excepting this - That night was Something Else
I was Angry Love Himself
Blind fierce avenging Love - no other that night)

"It's too strong for Béké"

The black woman said
Love, hate or jealousy
Which had she seen?
She knew well - the *Devil!*
- What it could mean

How can I forget you Antoinette

When the spring is here?
Where did you hide yourself

After that shameless, shameful night?
And why come back? Hating and hated?
Was it Love, Fear, Hoping?
Or (as always) Pain?
(Did you come back I wonder

Did I ever see you again?)

No. I'll lock that door

Forget it.-

The motto was "Locked Hearts I open

I have the heavy key"

Written in black letters

Under a Royal Palm Tree

On a slave owner's gravestone

"Look! And look again, hypocrite" he says

"Before *you* judge *me*"

I'm no damn slave owner

I have no slave

Didn't she (forgiven) betray me

Once more - and then again

Unrepentant - laughing?

I can soon show her

Who hates the best

Always she answers me

I will hate last

Lost, lovely Antoinette

How can I forget you

When the spring comes?

(Spring is cold and furtive here

There's a different rain)

Where did you hide yourself

After the obeah nights?

(*What* did you send instead?

Hating and hated?)

Where did you go?

I'll never see you now

I'll never know

For you left me - my truest Love

Long ago

Edward Rochester or Raworth

Written in Spring 1842

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