



Facultade de Filoloxía

Traballo de fin
de grao

An Ecocritical Analysis
of Wide Sargasso Sea

Autora: Laura Limeres Otero

Director: César Pablo Domínguez Prieto

Xullo 2019

Traballo de Fin de Grao presentado na Facultade de Filoloxía da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela

para a obtención do Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas



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FACULDADE DE FILOLOXÍA



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Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

The main purpose of this study is to analyze, from an ecocritical point of view, how the different ecocultures of Antoinette and her husband, the main characters of Jean Rhys' 1996 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, affect their relationship. An ecocritical approach, specifically an ecofeminist one, will help us dig deeper into the relationships of power presented in the story, not only between man and woman, but also between the colony and the metropolis. For this purpose, it is necessary to consider also the post-colonial factors relevant in the novel that will be presented in the introduction and analyzed later on.

This work will be organized in three parts. First, a brief approximation of the ecocritic theory, most importantly, the ecofeminism branch, in relation to the post-colonial aspect will be provided due to its relevance for understanding *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Second, the connection between body and land in the story, as well as the embodiment of the different ecocultures in the characters and how does this relate to the colonization of women's bodies will be discussed. For this aim, issues of economical subjugation of both the colony and the women and the subversion of both in order to achieve freedom need to be taken into consideration. Third, the idea of belonging in connection to "the Other" and otherness, both in terms of gender and nature, will be further analyzed in the descriptions of the environment from different points of view, including trauma and the use of nature to heal the psyche.

An ecocritical approach to this canonical novel, as the one offered here, will help the readers see the relevance of aspects that have gone unnoticed so far. Furthermore, the analysis will provide further and new information for future ecofeminist readings of this or other post-colonial novels in order to understand more about the context and the power relationships.

Keywords: ecofeminism, Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, post-colonialism.

Santiago de Compostela, 6 de novembro de 2018.

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0. Introduction

Nature and women have been undeniable inseparable for centuries, not only in literary creations but even among the first religions and myths. And although the portrayal of nature as a woman, also known as “mother nature”, is old-fashioned and highly criticized it has continued to inspire artists through ages. After all, the nation is still personified and feminized in most cultures, and because of this, the colonization of territories will play a very important role that will help readers understand the double colonization of women through the acts of violence against the land.

In 1974 was published *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* by Françoise d'Eaubonne, which will mark the beginning of the ecofeminism. She creates a bond between the exploitation of the land and the domination of women under patriarchal regimes. This political statement will unleash more analysis around this subject.

A year later, Rosemary Radford Ruether published *New Woman/New Earth*, where she writes a wake-up call for all women which will resonate throughout the decades.

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society. (Ruether 204)

Up until that moment, ecocriticism was focused on the ecology movement, but the introduction of this variable forever changed the discipline by making it richer. Ecofeminism will seek for an alternative for this parallel oppression, a reality where both nature and women are not mistreated.

In *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*, Kate Warren distinguished eight different types of ecofeminism: (i) *historical and casual*, where the “connection between feminism and the environment discussed by ecological feminist philosophers is primarily historical” (11); (ii)

conceptual, “historical and causal links between the dominations of women and of nature are located in conceptual structures of domination and in the way women and nature have been conceptualized” (11), diving more deeply into this division, four different conceptual links can be found: one very common perspective, focused on dualisms regarding the, what Karren calls it, “twin dominations of women and nature” (11). Some of these dichotomies include the division of reason/emotion or man/women, and at the same time is related to the historically association of women and emotions and nature, whereas man is associated with the mind and the culture. The second one complements the first considering the dualistic value in “oppressive patriarchal conceptual frameworks” (12), she further explains:

A conceptual framework is a socially constructed set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions that shape and reflect how one views oneself and others. It is oppressive when it explains, justifies, and maintains relationships of domination and subordination. An oppressive conceptual framework is patriarchal when it explains, justifies, and maintains the subordination of women by men. Oppressive and patriarchal conceptual frameworks are characterized not only by value dualisms and value hierarchies, but also by “power-over” conceptions of power and relationships of domination and by a “logic of domination” i.e., a structure of argumentation which justifies subordination on the grounds that superiority justifies subordination.

The third one sets the conceptual basis in sex-gender differences, raising the issue of female biology and how this seems to be very important in women-nature connections, positioning women in a different perspective than men. This further perpetuates the idea of “mother-nature” that most ecofeminist theorists have tried to refute with their statements. Finally, the fourth is linked to the historical connections, because it locates the union of both feminism and environment during the Enlightened and pre-Enlightenment period and its metaphors of models of mechanistic science (13).

Continuing on, the third branch would be the (iii) *empirical and experiential*, where feminism and environment become closely related, whether it is due to the health risk factors affecting women or the First World policies that have affected the ability of women to

provide for themselves and their families (13). Next it would be the (iv) *epistemological*, “these emerging epistemologies build on scholarship currently underway in feminist philosophy which challenges mainstream views of reason, rationality, knowledge, and the nature of the knower” (14). Continuing on, the (v) *symbolic*, the exploration of the “symbolic association and devaluation of women and nature that appears in art, literature, religion and theology” (14), which also comprises the important factor of language, for example “language which inferiorizes women and nonhuman nature” (15). The (vi) *ethical* focuses on “the interconnections among the conceptualization and treatment of women, animals and (the rest of) nonhuman nature” (15). The (vii) *theoretical* explores the different approach to the primary theories and the new ones emerging. There are many, such as the consequentialists and non-consequentialists, but also nontraditional approaches, for example, deep ecology (16). Finally, the (viii) *political (praxis)* comprises different concerns, after all women’s bodies are a political issue as Kate Millet declared in *Sexual Politics*, and likewise, nature and environment is undeniably a raising preoccupation.

The ecofeminist theorists took different positions regarding the status and the nature of this so-called “connection”. In the article “A Critique of Ecofeminism”, Anne Archaumbalt declared that “the claim that women are biologically closer to nature reinforces the patriarchal ideology of domination and limits ecofeminism's effectiveness” (21), a critic also made by Kate Warren. Others such as Jane Bihel have spoken on this matter as well, saying that “if we are going to base an ethics on biologically fixed attributes of female behavior, then we are assuming that those attributes are necessarily eternal” (25).

Taking the pipe and branding the discipline with such claims instead of trying to revision it could be harmful for the ecofeminist philosophy itself. After all, the goal of the ecofeminism is the subversion of both women and nature, in order for them to escape such harmful and patriarchal systems, but “if women are to gain an understanding of their

relationship with nonhuman nature that is liberatory, it certainly cannot be done by advancing a myth of the eternal feminine” (Bihel 26). The ethics are constructed because of this female “nature” which does not leave any room for the consciousness, reason and freedom, and thus, confining women to their nurturing role leaves no hope of transcending (Bihel 26).

The publication of Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* took place during the postcolonial era in 1966 once Jamaica was free from the grasp of England. The 1960s were a great decade for Britain, it is remembered as a technicolor time, the free generation after World War II, filled with hopes for the future after the post-traumatic events. People were optimistic living in an era of rapid change such as the influential presence of feminism and good music, nevertheless, the story revolves around the time when the Caribbean was still under the wing of the great metropolis. Around the 1830s there were numerous rebellions and wars to regain the freedom of slaves, the novel opens up with a reference to the Act of Emancipation or the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 that ended slavery and slave trade, although it took a few years to settle in. Rhys drank from this source of inspiration, basing many things on her own experience as a colonized subject, which translates to the novel in the form of a very judgmental and ironic narrator, Antoinette.

It has been said for many decades that *Wide Sargasso Sea* was the prequel of *Jane Eyre* with autobiographical tones, but to which extent? Could it be that Jean Rhys was reflecting herself into the character of Antoinette?

Born as Ella Gwendollen Rees Williams in 1890 in the island of Dominica, daughter of a Welsh man and a Creole woman, she spent her childhood in that tropical paradise, or at least that is how she pictures it in her renowned novel. She had a difficult although privileged beginning in life as a white girl in a black community, something that will shape her for years to come. This is one of the main reasons why she was fascinated by them, as she confessed in an interview with Marcella Bernstein, where she said:

They used to go to dances every night and they had lovely dresses, high waisted with a belt to tuck the train through. They used to line the train with paper so it rustled and wear gorgeous turbans. When they went to Mass we used to peer through the windows to see them. (Jean Rhys qtd. in Thomas F. Staley 3)

Not only that but she identified herself with them, as an outsider into what was supposed to be her home, a home where white people did not belong since they were seen as slave owners, and as it is said in the novel “white cockroaches”. This is where the problems about belonging and identity started.

Later on in life, at the young age of 17, she went to England to study. But Rhys, as many others before her, was betrayed as she found herself in a hostile environment, one that, once again, refused to accept her and make her a part of it. The reality of England ended the dream and the illusion painted by the colonized people who idealized the metropolis. This is one of the main themes in her stories, such as “Let Them Call It Jazz”, that presents England as a dangerous place for people like her, people who were different. This was a common fear in the colonizers who viewed creoles as inferiors since they had “gone natives”.

Rhys underwent three relationships with men and different tumultuous marriages and became, like Antoinette, economically dependent of them. Her only way to cope with it was alcohol, and Rhys’ life spiraled out of control. As many writers did, she turned to writing to ease her solitude and find her way out.

Rhys was a tortured woman whose experiences resonate with the ones lived by the protagonist of her novel, she decided to tell part of her story, as well as many others women’s story, through the eyes of Antoinette. The same Rhys confessed in an interview the sympathy she had for her as “she seemed such a poor ghost, I thought I’d like to write her life” (Jean Rhys qtd. in Michael Torpe 99). Even at the very end of her life, she talked about happiness with a melancholic tone:

When I was excited about life, I didn't want to write at all. I've never written when I was happy. I didn't want to. But I've never had a long period of being happy. Do you think anyone has? I think you can be peaceful for a long time. When I think about it, if I had to choose, I'd rather be happy than write. You see, there's very little invention in my books. What came first with most of them was the wish to get rid of this awful sadness that weighed me down. I found when I was a child that if I could put the hurt into words, it would go. It leaves a sort of melancholy behind and then it goes. (Jean Rhys qtd. in Vreeland n.p.)

To this end, in order to understand Antoinette's choices as well as the author's choices, the reader must have a glance at the facts of Rhys' life, and what took her to write this anti-imperialist and postcolonial manifesto, a rebellious narrative against the Victorian strings that constricted this era as well as the confessions of the "other" woman.

The analysis presented would revolve around the conceptual branch introduced by Warren, and the different dualisms that have been dividing women and men from nature, nurture, culture, reason, etc. Apart from that, it will be very important the symbolic branch, specially the symbolic language used to undervalue women and nature and how the expressions used by the different voices in the story will prove to the readers of this analysis the hypothesis formulated about the embodiment of the ecocultures. For this, it must be taken into account the different critiques against traditional assumptions of ecofeminism and its theories, if not, an analysis based on the same patriarchal reinforcements could be potentially harmful.

Issues relevant for an ecocritical and especially ecofeminist analysis undoubtedly play an important role in this novel particularly. It is thanks to an interpretation based on these analytical perspectives that one will be able to judge the novel with a more critical eye and consider nature and landscape not as a mere background, but as a protagonist that deeply influences the upbringing and relationships between the characters. My aim in this study is to demonstrate and exemplify this importance in order to give a new reading, taking into account

the different branches of ecofeminism given by different authors without falling into an old-fashioned interpretation.

Chapter 1, especially 1.1, serves as a discussion of the importance of the body and the environment, as well as the different ecocultures to which the two main characters, Antoinette and her husband, belong to, and how this will affect their relationship. From an ecocritical point of view, it is fairly important to put in perspective how the origins of each character affect the power relationship between husband and wife. The struggle between metropolis and colony, colonizer and colonized lives now through the characters portraying them as personifications. This will forfeit the hopeless relationship foreshadowing the tragic end. Within this section, it is explored colonization of women's bodies in section 1.1.1, and what methods are used for this practice. Then, the economical subversion in section 1.1.2 comprises a discussion of how Victorian women were subjugated to their husbands and economically dependent, an aspect which resonates as it happens with the colonies controlled by the metropolis. Finally, the end of the chapter in section 1.1.3 presents the correlation of the dual freedom of both women and land, the ultimate goal for the ecofeminist. Many theorists made clear that it is impossible to have one without the other, especially under capitalist terms or in this case, an imperialist picture.

Chapter 2 of the analysis focuses on an examination of the notion of the "Other" in relation with women and nature and the act of "othering", explored in section 2.1, since both the protagonist and the writer were Creoles who were rejected in the own environments, in the metropolis and ultimately by their own significant others. For this, it is important to revise the devices used to draw the line between the "other" women and the "other" environment. Section 2.2 includes a comparison between the different voices and narrators of the novel, how they evolve throughout it and how the ecofeminism rhetoric and symbolic language is interwoven in the story. At the same time, the section tries to answer many questions, what

makes the two narrators different from one another? Is the husband stealing the voice of Antoinette? How does the heroine voice her preoccupations, with her silences or with her actions? The last point included in the chapter as 2.3, acts as a presentation of the traumatic events and how are they connected to the space along with the possibility of mental healing, following with the question in 2.3.1, is Antoinette a broken character or a “mad-woman” in the attic?

As for the methodology used, in order to closely examine the text, the most accurate process was close reading along with a bibliography revision of what has already been said about the novel, considering the most iconic and emerging theories of ecofeminism which will be the very basis while putting them in practice with the text itself. For the deep analysis that it is sought, and the various themes that made Jean Rhys a liminal writer, *Wide Sargasso Sea* was the best choice since it conveys key ideas from a brutally honest perspective that make Rhys a refreshing author.

1. Body and environment

1.1 EMBODIMENT OF ECOCULTURES

Having acknowledged that the assumption of an intrinsically related relationship between women and nature is dangerous for ecofeminist analysis, this notion must be observed and revalued. Let it part with the premise that the characters are a product of its environment, something that the Naturalists writers said in contraposition to the Romantics. In the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, characteristics from both branches can be found: first by the assumption that husband and wife are both related to their own ecosystem and this has shaped them, but also, from a Romantic point of view, that the rendering of nature in the novel is romanticized by Antoinette, who embodies the Caribbean landscape, and that she drinks from its source in order to bring her power to destroy what it harms her. In the story, the characters are not soulless elements, since they carry a piece of nature within, in. The rendering of the landscape in the novel is overpowering, especially using such descriptive narrative, for this reason the Caribbean ecosystem becomes its own characters and has its own part in the tragic story. It is undeniable the relation between the psyche of the characters and the beautiful although dangerous and strange nature.

Many theorists such as Cheryll Glofelty (qtd. in Cohen 14) claimed that “all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman”.

This statement would provide evidence for the hypothesis that *Wide Sargasso Sea* should also be categorized as an ecocritical work, due to the interrelations between the protagonists with nature. For this, it is also important to consider Lawrence Buell’s “checklist” or points that categorize an “environmental oriented work”, especially points one

and three are relevant for this ecofeminist reading, which affirm that: (1) “the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history” and (3) that “human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation” (qtd. in Cohen 15).

In many ways, the landscape and dynamics of the characters, their love story and affiliation with nature could remind the readers of *Wuthering Heights*, for how perfectly interwoven is the theme of the sublime and the subconscious with the repressed desires of the characters. The wild Caribbean nature will guide the couple and mold it, sometimes it will act as a confidant and other strike back with force, but it is important to have in mind that it is not a passive element, but an active participant in the events that will determine the outcome.

Antoinette, although taught in the conventions of the English, was raised long way from England, a place which had different customs, language, landscape, weather, animals, etc. As a Creole, she grew up surrounded by the beauty of the tropical nature, learning how to love her surroundings and learning how to discover her place in it. This is why the theme of identity is closely related to the connection with the ecocultures. Both English and Caribbean lore clash, since she is incapable to belong neither to the English culture nor to her beloved Caribbean. For Antoinette, Grandbois in particular, becomes a romanticized haven in contrast with the cruel Coulibri, where she had to witness the violence of neighbors and ex-slaves. The paradox of Antoinette’s discourse is overall disruptive with the message of the novel due to her racist behavior and comments. The protagonist’s idealization of the metropolis is discarded after her first encounter with her husband, after being in the presence of the face of the colonizer coming from what she thought to be her longed paradise, she realizes how wrong she was. His cold temper and manners could never satisfy her, interrupting the dream.

The husband, whose name will not be mentioned in the dissertation in order to pay respect to the author’s wishes, was brought up in the Victorian England, and thus his values

are adhered to his behavior. As one of the few colonizers left in the colony, feels threatened by the scenery, the excessive sexuality, the beliefs of the habitants, customs, but most importantly, their behavior towards nature, a sacred place for them. He experiences both attraction and repulse as his masculinity feels at stake and is judged by the women who worked in his wife's house. His detachment from nature, having come from an industrialized England which he constantly compares to the Caribbean, prevents him from understanding his own wife, and this feeling of lack of belonging quickly turns into direct hatred towards Antoinette and the place: "I was tired of these people. I disliked their laughter and their tears, their flattery and envy, conceit and deceit. And I hated the place. [...] Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness" (Rhys 103).

He is the first one to observe the figure of Antoinette as a representation of the Caribbean, projecting unto her his fears and anxieties. Jaclyn Mallan (9) illustrates this explanation with a passage of *The Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James saying that "the wilder scenery was constantly magnificent, but in the colonist who had seen the same domestic landscape from his earliest hour, it awakened little response. To the emigrant who was at first charmed and exhilarated, monotony bred indifference, which could develop into active dislike, and longing for the seasons returning with the year".

The husband first shows interested in the loveliness of the place, alien features of Antoinette and the secret that both held, attracted by the newness and exotic nature of it all, but his position as a privileged colonizer and perpetuator of this on-going violence, limits him to relate and understand it. The secret is never revealed, maybe it never existed, but assuming its presence in Antoinette somehow plants the seed of doubt in the reader. Was the secret just an excuse to write her as the guilty part of the story? He needed a reason to hate her and hate the threatening surrounding he was in, and the letter that arrives at Grandbois is the ultimate confirmation of the depravation of his wife and the Caribbean.

Having in mind the powerful presence of power relations between colonizer and colonized Z.S. Ismailinejad (151) evaluates the embodiments of ecocultures pointing out that “Mr. Rochester is so disconnected with nature that he sees only woman and nature as commodities. However, Bertha represents both nature and woman that is exploited and dominated by a man and Mr. Rochester embodies the western man that exploited nature and woman by virtue of the supposed superiority of his race and gender.”

This is the perfect example of how the backdrop of the characters shape their development and interactions. What could have happened if the two of them were from the same country or city? They both share the struggle of belonging and the readers are almost forced to feel sympathy for them, even the cruelest ones, given the circumstances.

1.1.1 Colonization of bodies

When talking about the homeland, one refers to it as “mother nature”, as always, nature is feminized and women naturalized. In the introduction it was discussed how this relationship and dualisms came to be, and why are they important for an ecofeminist analysis. One of the many arguments very popular among ecofeminists is that men’s wishes to rape, to carry physical abuse or impose statements through brute force, carries a deeper connotation, especially when the men are colonizers in a new land. Cortés Vieco exemplified this philosophy with a painting by Jan Van der Straet titled *América* (1600) and he argued that the andromorphic image of the New World, the man offers to a foreign and exotic woman who incarnates the virginal and beautiful nature, but in a wild state, the Civilization. The European conqueror desires to rape the young American to impose himself over the new corporeal and territorial conquered dominions (Cortés Vieco 34). Colonization was a violent process that was sugarcoated by many historians because of eurocentrism. Women from that period were subdued for what they represented, a new nation that they had to conquer, and rape and

physical abuse was just another method to prove their masculinity and power over the “others”. There are two elements at work with this interpretation: first, the dehumanization of women and second the personalization of nature, somehow inverting the roles. Women are seen as merely objects to possess or interchange, whereas nature is a menacing figure that attempts to hurt or expel the colonizers. For this it will be important Catherine M. Roach’s philosophy of Bad, Good and Hurt Mother Nature.

This view is shared by the husband, who is the first one to establish this connection. “It was a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I’d find myself thinking. ‘What I see is nothing – I want what it *hides* – that is not nothing” (Rhys 52). He experiences attraction towards this sensual place and alien woman who now stares at him, “Rochester finds himself in the grip of a struggle between the rational restraint he has learned in England and the sensual lure of both Antoinette and the West Indies, imagined as virgin territory” (Gilchrist 475). He is overcome by this sense of threat, and not being able to cope with it, he decides to repress and eradicate everything that he despises of Antoinette and for that mission takes upon his hand to impart the Victorian values he is deeply rooted in. Jennifer Gilchrist (475) continues her analysis with the same approach on the threat upon his fragile masculinity:

Overwhelmed by the dramatic physical features and sensuality of the West Indies, Rochester imagines his newfound powerlessness as enslavement by a woman he associates with the land. The West Indies sets masculinity standards for Rochester to which he is unaccustomed. Critics such as Todd Bender, and Isabel Carrera Suarez and Esther Alvarez Lopez have pointed out how Antoinette struggles and fails to meet metropolitan British requirements of proper womanhood.

He begins with the sexual oppression:

I tell you she loves no one, anyone. I could not touch her. Excepting as the hurricane will touch that tree – and break it. [...] She’ll not laugh in the sun again. She’ll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass. So pleased, so satisfied. Vain, silly creature. Made for loving? Yes, but she’ll have no lover, for I don’t want her and she’ll see no other. (Rhys 99)

She's denied of pleasure and human touch, precisely what Antoinette longs for the most, this psychological abuse contributing to her disassociation with reality and her own identity. He does this by what could have been the cruelest act for Antoinette, who was so dearly tied to her homeland, takes her to England, the dreadful nightmare that has eventually become and is now haunting her, dominating this way both of his torments, the women who lies beside him and the landscape that lures over him, ready to swallow him whole. Coming close to the end of their stay in the Caribbean, he realizes at the end of Part 2 that he must take her away immediately in order to restrain her wife. M.M. Adjarian (206) proposes "he controls what Antoinette comes to represent for him – the island, its inhabitants and the threat they pose to him and his self-conception as an all-powerful, all-knowing European". Antoinette's husband cannot allow himself to fail, that would mean his total emasculation and begging for his father's help, something that he would not tolerate, even if he has to tame Antoinette like a wild horse. Kübra Baysal (62) claims:

As he causes Antoinette's psychological breakdown, he has the guilty conscience and gets afraid of the things and the elements of nature around him, which recalls Antoinette's ecofeminist relation to nature as both are evaded and abhorred by Rochester. Because he is a man of culture, he wants to get rid of the natural and go back to England.

But Antoinette resist his intents to turn her into an Englishwoman and root her into a patriarchal system that seeks to oppress her, that is why she finds confidence in Christophine, one of the epitomes of freedom and rebellion that follows no conventions.

Antoinette, in contrast with the pure and virginal Jane Eyre, embraces her sexuality as it is seen through the different imagery and symbolism. For example, one of the most common readings has to do with the dresses and what they represent for her. There are three main kinds of dresses and readings in the novel: the white one that she wears trying to exude a sense of purity and virginity in order to gain the approval of her husband, the red dress which

is a representation of her power and desire and the grey dress that they make her wear at the end of the novel, as a ragged doll, a marionette.

I took the red dress down and put it against myself. ‘Does it make me look intemperate and unchaste?’ [...]

‘Oh put it away’, Grace Pool said, ‘come and eat your food. Here’s your grey wrapper. Why they can’t give you anything better is more than I can understand. They’re rich enough. [...]

I let the dress fall on the floor, and looked from the fire to the dress and from the dress to the fire. [...] I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember though. I will remember quite soon now. (Rhys 110)

The white and plain dress is associated with England, its customs and sterility, while on the other hand the red dress is an expression of the intoxicating sensuality and power of the West Indies (Gilchrist 485).

As with the case of the dresses, there are many other symbolic natural elements that are relevant to the analysis, for example the presence of the animals. Many ecofeminist critics postulate that violence against animals is a big red flag that correlates with the violence against women. Roach (30) comments on this and the metaphors and language used:

Even such common phrases as “rape of the earth” and “virgin forest” or “virgin land” convey a message that nature has something valuable that humans want, whether or not she is willing to bestow it. Here violence enters into the narrative, and the Good Mother becomes the Hurt Mother.

The ecofeminist book *Rape of the Wild* evokes this latter motif of the fertile but wounded earth by linking the violent treatment of women with violence against animals and the ecosphere.

There are three clear instances of domestic violence: the first one having to do with the poisoning of Anette’s horse, thus denying her of her mobility and freedom, later on the killing of the dog’s neighbour by his own hand after the frustration that came with the Emancipation Act and finally, divided into two moments, the allusion to the clipping of Coco’s wings and his violent death in the fire, which carries an enormous connotation for this analysis. The later one is the most notorious and it has been given many readings. Rhys made a clear statement

introducing this animal into the story, because the parrot is known to be the national bird of Jamaica but curiously enough in this case is linked to Anette, the protagonist's mother, another creole, whose wings were cut by her husband, Mr. Mason, just like Coco's. The parrot as it happens with Anette, is unable to fly away when the house is burning down, and Anette cannot escape her unfortunate future.

Although this could be only a symbolic representation, it is important to notice how both women and animals are gathered in the same group as the "other", since they are both oppressed, exploited and treated as inferiors. Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens (39) argue that:

Closely linked to the debates on dualism and overlapping oppressions are ecofeminist contributions to our understanding of human relations with non-human animals. In early works, some claimed that women's social practices of care mean they are more likely than men to oppose practices of harm against animals; or that women may empathize with the suffering of animals as they have some common experiences.

This event will become a bad omen that will foreshadow the ending of the novel, as Rhys (25) closes the paragraph "I heard someone say something about bad luck and remembered that it was very unlucky to kill a parrot, or even to see a parrot die. [...] They were not laughing any more". Through this symbolic reading, it could be said that the naturalization process of women turns into an animalization process, comparing them to animals and portraying them as such. An interesting reading of this comes from Gilchrist who portrays this apparition as a "divine intervention" (468):

Coco's death prefigures Antoinette's dream death: both parrot and heroine are controlled and reduced by a metropolitan Englishman who, ironically, espouses the doctrine of liberation. Although both the black rioters and their white targets interpret Coco's death as supernatural, Rhys suggests that the violence is stopped by a symbol of how the English have disastrously interfered with nature: Mason clipped Coco's wings to control and domesticate a Jamaican bird; likewise, the English have imposed the Law on post Emancipation West Indian society to restrain planters and civilize freed slaves. (Gilchrist 468)

1.1.2 Economical subversion

The Victorian era was a difficult one for women, not only because of their limited or total lack of rights, but because of the socioeconomical milestones. During a time when they were still considered properties and the only thing they aspired was to get married, women were “sold” to their husbands, who after the union, received the said dowry or price that was tagged on their new young wives. Married women had no properties, they could not sustain themselves unless they had male support. All of their money belonged to their significant others and could not make any operations that were not authorized by them. It is clearly stated that the economical advantage and power was possessed by men and was passed on through marriage.

At this point in time, the bourgeoisie was rising and social mobility was possible thanks to money, status and of course, the industrial revolution, which brought new technology and job offers. Still, we see Antoinette’s husband struggle for his place in the world and most importantly, his effort to survive economically, since he was the second child of the family and was not supposed to inherit anything from it, thus the reason of marrying Antoinette.

Given that women had not yet had “a room of one’s own”, it was difficult for them to achieve their economical independence and ultimate freedom. The issue of money caused a lot of insecurity to Antoinette, who did not enjoy the pleasures of a wealthy life, at least at the beginning, after her biological father’s death, Daniel Cosway. The only thing that passed as Antoinette’s property was the house of Grandbois and the slave, Christophine, which represents the epitome of economical independence. For her to have a safe place like Grandbois, means to finally possess something, in this case a haven detached from all the trauma from Coulibri, the history and bad memories that reside on the land.

With the previous statements, it can be affirmed that the subjugation of women resonates with the subjugation and exploitation of colonies, which did not obtain their freedom until later on, some of them not until the late twentieth century. The novel revolves around the time of the Act of Emancipation, which meant freedom for the slaves, and eventually, the protagonist. It is not until people from the colony start to gain their individuality that Antoinette is able to snap out of her bewitched and subjugated state. A clear example that is well represented in the choice of words by the author takes place at the end of the novel, Part 3, where Antoinette is now a full-time prisoner in England: "I was in the room but I didn't hear all he said except: 'I cannot interfere legally between yourself and your husband'. It was when he said "legally" that you flew at him and when he twisted the knife out of your hand you bit him. Do you mean to say that you don't remember any of this?" (Rhys 109). The mention of the word sparks Antoinette's meltdown when it is verbalized what she is for her brother and the world, a good to be trade, used and sell without free will.

As it was mentioned previously, there is only one exception to this rule of dominated women: Christophine, the black slave from Martinique. The fact that an ex-slave is freer than the privileged white protagonist seems unlikely, but this is the case in the novel. Rhys portrays Christophine as the mother figure of Antoinette, and eventually a role model to look up to and take up on her advices, but where does Christophine draw the power from? She is clearly capable of taking care of herself, she stands out for her individualist and rebellious ideas, which she voices without fear. The only thing that threatens her is the law, it appears that Christophine only answers to that. It can be argued that one of the main reasons why she acts as a true heroine is that she possesses the voodoo magic, that belonged to the black people and natives from the land. That is what Antoinette seeks, the ultimate power from the land possessed by an oppressed culture and what was once their only way to fight back, but when she does use it, it only has a negative outcome, for she is unable to understand or grasp

the meaning of a power which was not meant for her, who had all the advantages in the world unlike the slaves.

1.1.3 Dual freedom

For the analysis of the dual freedom present in the story, it is crucial to understand that one cannot be achieved without the other, women may only be free through the subversion of the land in order to end with its exploitation. Chaos rained upon the Caribbean and Antoinette's family after the Act of Emancipation, which meant the liberation of the slaves. It will not be possible for women, and in this case, native women, to achieve freedom until the colony itself is free. It could be interpreted that Antoinette possesses this knowledge, and in order to release her beloved Jamaica from the hands of the Empire, she burns down the center of evil, London.

In order to create connections between women, nature and the battle they have to go through, it must be considered one pinpointed theory formulated by Catherine Roach in her book *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics*, which is the concept of "Good", "Bad" and "Hurt" mother nature and how nature itself is portrayed and seen in Western culture. She explains "throughout Western history, the answer to the question What is nature? has been, not infrequently, some version of "like a female." This answer draws on cultural meanings of "nurturing" and "life-giving" (the Good Mother), but also "quixotic" and "dangerous" (the Bad Mother), as well as "frail" and "in need of male protection" (the Hurt Mother)" (Roach 27).

Roach is aware of the limitations of these dualisms and what the dangerous associations between woman and nature may bring to the table of ecofeminist theory, and so she asks herself:

What is the meaning of this link between nature and the female, especially in this form of the idealized Good Mother? To what degree is the association real, beneficial, and something that both

feminism and the environmental movement should embrace? If the imagery is problematic, how should we respond to it? Should we reclaim, rehabilitate, and embrace it as embodying a powerful feminine truth; or should we instead reject it outright as irremediably sexist? (Roach 27)

She then argues that “what we really need is to break down or ‘biodegrade’ the hierarchical dualism implied in this Mother Nature imagery” (Roach 27).

Given these arguments it would be possible to establish a connection with the main female character, Antoinette, and how she develops, fluctuates between them and passes through these three archetypes of Mother Nature. Antoinette starts as a Good Mother Nature, who cares for her mother, the slaves that they have in charge, the animals and her environment even though she is not given anything back, besides the rejection of her own biological mother and possibly her only friend, Tia. During the first part of the novel and her childhood, she is discriminated, rejected and physically, psychologically and verbally abused by many. These events will create a butterfly effect, and the domino pieces will fall, pushing Antoinette to her “madness” and desperation.

Later on, now on the second part of the novel and during Antoinette’s adulthood and marriage, she will become an alien person to her newlywed husband. They both move to Grandbois, where she reveals bits of her traumatic past to him, but the role of Hurt Mother is not fully achieved, although she is presented as a battered woman that has suffered for many years. There is no initiative whatsoever from the husband or anyone else to try and comfort her or try to “repair” his marionette. The only solution he presents is a violent and oppressive one, as an imperialist subject whose only desire is to conquer and control his properties, in this case, his wife. Finally, the novel closes up with Antoinette holding a candle and adventuring on Thornfield Hall with a purpose and the rest is told in Brönte’s version, *Jane Eyre*.

The ending is specially significant to support how Antoinette has developed into the Bad Mother Nature, a vengeful figure that seeks retribution after being imprisoned, not only

in the story but in the narrative itself, in a cardboard house that was already designed for her. It is a subversive and rebellious act, indeed, but it is nevertheless an act that needs to be put into perspective and closely examined. To which extent, ignoring the fact that this narrative was already enclosed in another fixed one, is Antoinette free from her actions? Is she truly a rebellious heroine or did she have to be punished to break the rules? It can be interpreted both ways, her destiny is already known, but as a vengeful Bad Mother who has imparted justice in the only way she could, by burning down the symbolic house and the heart of the Empire, death comes whether as a liberating event, a necessary sacrifice or a punishment for attempting to fight against what was already written for her.

In order to eradicate what has been subjugating her, she draws from nature's power as if she was in communion with it and it comes to aid her: "I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of the tablecloth and I saw the flames shoot up. As I ran or perhaps floated or flew I called Christophine help me and looking behind me I saw that I had been helped. There was a wall of fire protecting me but it was too hot, it scorched me and I went away from it" (Rhys 112). In the novel, the fire acts in a biblical sense as the same way water does, it is a purifying force. It first comes alive in the novel as the house of Antoinette is burned down by ex-slave when trying to erase or take revenge on the people that have exploited them for so long, so it is established in the first part how fire is related to Bad Mother Nature. It is her source of power, what protects her but also what awakens her from her dream-like state: "I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. 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" (Rhys 112).

Fire is extremely important in order to try to remember who she was, and the things that she desired, as well as to draw power from it in order to make the last sacrifice that will

end her suffering and a turbulent history of abuse. There lies the irony, everything that her husband has tried to repress comes back stronger to destroy him and Thornfield Hall.

2. The Nature of belonging

Identity plays one of the biggest roles in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, given the unescapable biographical tones. Jean Rhys herself “longed to be identified once and for all with the other” side which of course was impossible”, she confesses as she “couldn’t change the color of my skin” (qtd in Kadhim 590). Laura E. Ciolkowski (341) claims that “*Wide Sargasso Sea* is rocked by the disorienting textual motion between the colonial identification and disidentification with England”. The story is plagued with dualisms and dichotomies that, most of the times, perpetuate racist ideologies and situates the protagonist in the grey spectrum. For Antoinette and her mother, whose place was always “inbetween”, the two entities on each side are very clear. Karen Caplan (qtd in Adjarian 202) designates this label of “inbetweenness” to those who exist between centers and margins of (white male) power structures. It will always be the black against the white, the cold versus the warmth, the nightmare that is England against her beloved Caribbean, the disorder and the order of the garden that could almost reflect through the pathetic fallacy her mental state. As she arrives to the convent, she describes the scene: “everything was brightness or dark. The walls, the blazing colors of the flowers in the garden, the nuns’ habits were bright, but their veils, the crucifix hanging from their waists, the shadow of the trees, were black. That was how it was light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell, for one of the nuns knew all about Hell and who does not?” (Rhys 34).

Antoinette rules the story with these oppositions and contrasts. Even for her husband these contrasts are much clearer although they have come to carry a more racist undertones since he appears to suffer from “white savior complex”. For him, the black people are like demons, carriers of diseases, he would not touch “them” (Rhys 54). Even Antoinette is a carrier of this infectious disease, she must be saved through reeducation in the Victorian values or locked away.

In order to analyze the natural spaces in relation to the sense of belonging and the character's identities, Gifford's definitions of pastoral will be taken into account alongside Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's own perspective of this topic. One of the definitions given by Terry Gifford (2) involves "pastoral as a type of literature that renders the refers to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban". For the husband, who has experienced both settings by the end of the novel, this definition applies since he is constantly comparing and "othering" the alien nature and colony with England. The representation of Caribbean nature is politized, as any post-modernist novel should do, Gifford (82) declares that "the pastoral construct always reveals the preoccupations and tensions of its time". The conception and representation of pastoral changes from time to time, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* portrays the central problem of the nineteenth century, the plantation fields and slavery. For Huggan and Tiffin (84), the pastoral "is usually associate with nostalgic retreat into the past" which is exactly Antoinette's sentiment for nature. Nature provides her with a sense of security, one that possibly lacked all of her life. When the cruel reality turns her back on her, she relies on nature to retrieve in her mind simpler memories of her childhood.

On the other hand, Huggan and Tiffin (120) also proposed the anti-pastoral term, in which the natural place is not glorified in opposition to the pastoral view. The husband represents the anti-pastoral, less idealized and romanticized view of the Caribbean, whereas Antoinette is the pastoral side, she seeks comfort and tranquility in it. He does not feel safe, for him the Caribbean is a threatening place, which also adds to the impossibility to establish healthy connections with his wife. Although the sense of danger overcomes him, he has a home to return to, and constantly seeks refuge in the memory of his land, tamed, quiet, known, peaceful but at the same time, its memory torments him as he does not know when will he return. Antoinette, unfortunately, does not have an England of her own. She does not

have home, or country, nor family or friends. That is the main reason why she establishes her main connections with the only thing that seems to be static and ever-present, nature, as she confesses “I love it more than anywhere in the world. As if it were a person. More than a person” (Rhys 53). Antoinette is constantly giving human qualities to nature in order to remark its agency in the story. Huggan and Tiffin (83) also comment on postcolonial works that usually connect the lack of belonging and loss of land since dispossession and displacement were two problems of this colonial and post-colonial era. After the dispossession of Antoinette’s properties through the marriage and the destruction of her first home, her sense of security is shattered, probably alongside what was left of her identity. This aspect gives more complexity to the characters, while they are trying to create and assert their identity, they lose their anchors and so they reach for anything that will save them somehow and reconstitute their sense of belonging.

Both pastoral and anti-pastoral views fluctuate between the narrators. The richness of the story resides in the cultural clash between the idealization of nature and the reality of it. None of the depictions that the characters make are mistaken, but rather show how the pastoral evolved in different contexts. Rhys’s intent is not to overpower one side of the story but to let the voices speak for themselves. Antoinette’s feelings towards the alien and oppressive nation change throughout the novel, at the beginning England is a savior for her. It was Mr. Mason and what he represented who saved her and her mother from poverty, England acts as a big white umbrella, and as she grows up and the story progresses this evolves into fear and hatred towards this cold place.

Antoinette somehow seeks reassertion of her identity in her personal relationships. First, she looks for her Caribbean connection throughout her sexual relationship with Sandi and then, her marriage with her English husband possibly seeks to explore her English side.

Upon not being integrated into one or the other, she is defenseless without a strong identity which causes her to drift, causing her to spiral into suicide.

Concepts such as identity and belonging are unequivocally inherent to nature in this specific story. Were the experiences lived by the author different or the novel set perhaps on another time or place, maybe in the metropolis instead of the colony, it would change completely the meaning and purpose. It would not be *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it would not be a story about the search of a place to call home. This is one of the main reasons why the study of the landscape of literary works is so important, as one cannot analyze the novel separated from the context, nor the character's behavior and development separated from the setting.

2.1 OTHERING WOMEN AND NATURE

One of the main devices that moves the story is the notion of the other and the process of othering, as it should be in every postcolonial novel, since through these stories, the colonized subjects try to proclaim individuality separated from their colonizers. In order to analyze the process of othering, it is crucial to mention that in *Wide Sargasso Sea* it is not one-sided but a reciprocal action. Aura Pandelet (439) says that "while in Brontë's novel the Other is only Bertha, the counterpart to good-natured Jane, the former changes place in *Wide Sargasso Sea* with Rochester who becomes the unknown Other", but that does not mean that the female heroine is not at disadvantage. She is oppressed for her race, gender and social position and this is why she is categorized as "other", an argument backed up by Maria Olausson (21) in *Three Types of Feminist Criticism*.

In this case, the division between the two entities is very clear. The clash is most obvious upon reading the husband's feelings towards the Caribbean and his new wife. Elaine Showalter describes her as "the native, the heart of darkness, the Other" (24) and this is what

she represents for her husband. For him, there is the “other” because above all exists the “self”, he relies on his sense of identity as an Englishman and his fierce nationality sentiments in order to create a line between the colonized and him. He finishes his description of his new home with “and the woman is a stranger” (Showalter 41). As for Antoinette’s case and her own sense of self, Erika Pugh introduces the element of the looking-glass, since “it symbolizes Antoinette’s need to find her ‘other’ self – her identity. Her inability to reach to the other side of the mirror symbolizes her inability to find and grasp that other self” (qtd in Kadhim 593). M.P. Joseph also comments on this explaining Antoinette’s turning to mirrors which indicates her need for the assurance of being identity herself and having an identity (qt in Kadhim 601). Her husband takes advantage of her lack of character and sense of belonging.

As mentioned, the novel transmits a sense of danger for both characters in different environments, they cannot seem to find a safe place, the husband confesses “the feeling of security had left me” (Rhys 44). It is this lack of security what causes them to other, in the case of the husband, not only Antoinette but the Caribbean itself alongside its habitants. He is scared of the contact between cultures and becoming like them, also called “turning native”, which in *Wide Sargasso Sea* almost refers to an intoxication, described many times almost as if it were a disease. Laura Cilokowski (346) comments on this: “He imagines himself to be the unsuspecting victim of a highly infectious female carrier of disease”.

This alien environment causes him to voice his preoccupation and fears and at the same time to other this unique nature that is “not only wild but menacing. Those hills would close in on you” (Rhys 41). Although different from Antoinette’s relationship with her habitat, the little contact he has with it tells him that he is not welcome and is definitely not on his side. England is the big bad wolf for Antoinette, even though it started as an idealized savior. She senses the threat, as Christophine does, not because being women grants them more knowledge of the earth itself, but because the husband appears to have been desensitized

of his eco-culture. They somehow know that if they go there, they will die, separated from the reds, the blues and the greens. The harsh response of an alien landscape is what torments the heroine until her end and contributes to her death.

The way that Antoinette is othered is by animalizing her through the descriptions under the point of view of the husband and also through psychological abuse, as it was discussed on section 2. He describes Antoinette as Jane Eyre does when encountering her, a rabid animal, with hair uncombed, laughing hysterically and unable to articulate words: “Her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen” (Rhys 87). This is how it is usually represented the “madwoman”, as an animal, which turns out to be another subjugated group. This is how the story closes in *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins, the heroine’s “madness” causes her to act like a nocturnal animal, which only goes out at night and creeps around the room.

Antoinette is to be reeducated whether it is at the convent or by her husband in order to become more English, but when he discovers that it will not happen, Antoinette’s only possible destiny is to be relegated to the role of “madwoman” and being locked away. Psychological abuse contributes to this othering process, by renaming her Bertha Mason he tries to turn her into what she should be, an obedient woman, a marionette. Andrea Masset (45) comments on the process:

Rochester has succeeded in appropriating Antoinette’s subjectivity in various aspects. First, he takes all her property at their marriage due to an English law at the period. Then, he calls her at will, by a name suitable to his culture, Bertha. Finally, he takes most decisions for her, calls her “My lunatic” and even keeps her in one room as his possession. [...] In the role of the colonial, patriarchal oppressor, Rochester resorts to renaming Antoinette as a strategy to contain her threatening otherness.

Josephine Donovan (162) comments on the relationship between signifiers and signified in reference to its “thou-ness”:

Thus, as Carol Adams brilliantly recognized, in the cultural discourse of carnivorism, meat-eating is a text in which “meat” is the signifier, and “animal” is the absent referent. The animal is absent from the text; its being as a thou is elided and dominated by the signifier meat, which deadens the animal’s aliveness, turning her or him into an it. The process thus denigrates the ontological status of the animal, eliding its living subject-hood; in this way the sign (meat) dominates the referent (animal), reflecting the ontology of domination that supports carnivorism.

The same happens in the novel, when “Bertha” or the label “madwoman” stripes “Antoinette” of her “thou-ness”. Rhys tries to battle this in order to recover Antoinette’s “thou-ness”, but at the cost of her destiny and agency in the story since her end was already written for her.

The dual othering and self-assertation of identity are born due to the inability to understand and communicate because of the different origins that they both have, they are “incapable of reconciling their perspectives” (Masset 50). Pandeletti (441) concludes by saying that “both novels illustrate the impossibility to inhabit a land imagined in such strong opposition to a character’s homeland. The commonplace in their homelands suffered such alterations in the Other place that the two characters fought to regain a firm hold of it”.

2.2 COMPARISON OF VOICES

Wide Sargasso Sea’s complex narrative strategies are crucial for every ecofeminist analysis. When encountering such powerful rendering of nature and human relationships, it is of great importance to carefully observe the discourse used. In this case, the focus will be on gender: what type of rhetoric the male and female characters use when referring to natural spaces. Jean Rhys opted for a fragmented narration partially because of the desire to portray the voice of the colonizer at the cost of his own name. This adds to the dual othering, as he constantly

rejects the exotic land and his new alien wife. Rhys also wanted to portray both sides of the story, and possibly get revenge on the man who has locked a Creole woman like a wild animal.

Antoinette and her husband have different perspectives on their surroundings, and it is clearly voiced by them throughout the novel. The husband's own fear causes him to have a condescending and patronizing attitude, he describes nature and Caribbean people under these colonizing views. He is aware of his lack of safety, that is why he constantly mentions England to compare and remind himself of his true origins. He treats all slaves and even his wife with disgust, he expresses his racist ideologies and sees himself as a white savior who has come to cleanse the place. When referring to slaves and women in general, his descriptions dehumanize or animalize them, as it is the case of Amélie: "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" (Rhys 38). He also mentions her "savage appearance" (Rhys 43). Andrea Masset (46) declared that "in a blatant imperialist assumption of racial superiority, Rochester describes Antoinette as subhuman. Rochester frowns upon her lifestyle, the way she dresses and speaks, and the way he assumes she behaves with men". Masset (43) affirms that Antoinette must accommodate her message within the male code, which is an alien code. Because of this, her message loses clarity as she seems to speak hesitatingly since she is convinced she will not be listened to no matter how much she tries to adapt her meaning to a male sphere (43). That is why she "has to speak in a feminine style – quietly, pleasantly, never cry or shout – otherwise Rochester would not listen to her" (43). This contributes to the creation of a "madwoman", if a woman's discourse does not correspond to a feminine one, she is to be reeducated or punished. His discourse also turns obsessive by the end of Part 2, although many glimpses of this obsession are shown at his arrival to Grandbois, where he

insists on finding the secret of the land, one that is never revealed. He expresses before leaving for England “I’ll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She’s mad but mine, mine [...] My lunatic. My mad girl” (Rhys 99), it could be related to this “disease” that is the intoxicating essence of the Caribbean. For him, this atmosphere is excessive, he is not able to control it and that is why he does not feel at ease. He describes “‘what an extreme green’, was all I could say [...] Everything is too much, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near” (Rhys 41). Teresa Winterhalter (220) comments on his perception of the topography saying “Rochester must denigrate the topography when the exotic landscape does not fulfill his sensuous preconceptions. Where he wanted to lose himself in the substitute strangeness of Antoinette’s body, to possess the absolute otherness of this world, he finds only his desire for such occupation, not its rendition”.

Antoinette’s discourse is full of duality, as Nushrat Azam (237) points out, “Antoinette’s description of the two binary opposites sheds light on Antoinette’s dual thoughts and confusion. The narration of the atmosphere by Antoinette makes clear her struggles with being stuck between two things and not being able to belong to either”. Although Rhys’ intention was to give voice to Antoinette who had been silenced for so long under the label of “madwoman”, Azam (237) postulates that the novel “portrays different aspects the character of Antoinette as she chooses to use a combination of narrative voice, silence and gaps to deal with her situation and tell her story”. Neither of the narrators are reliable, since they are first person narrators and are obviously moved by their own desires and needs, thus portraying their perception of the world.

The settings have an ominous presence, she describes nature under two characteristics which will be developed in the next section, either a protector or a threatening and scary environment. For example, the scene at the garden at Coulibri. This garden shares resemblance with the garden of Eden:

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered – then not an inch of tentacle showed. It was a bellshaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. (Rhys 11)

This garden, which is supposed to be a proper English garden, has dead flowers and is twisted, almost like the metropolis. This description is very different from the one given by Milton, where there was no such feeling of threat and no presence of death. For Antoinette and other women like Christophine, England is a dream, one that turns being a nightmare: “‘Is it true’ she said, ‘that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up’” (Rhys 45). It is also presented as a “cold thief place” (Rhys 67). In Part 3, Antoinette loses her role as narrator as Grace Pool takes over a few pages. At the end of the novel, the natural elements turn into their protector like the wall of fire in her dream (Rhys 112).

Ecocritic analysis should focus on the language used by the authors and how it relates to the characters and the agency of nature in the story, especially given that human discourse is very anthropocentric. In addition, it is always interesting to see how gender affects these descriptions and if it influences somehow the plot or character development.

2.3 SPACE AND TRAUMA

It was presented in the introduction the hypothesis that the relationship forged in *Wide Sargasso Sea* was connected to the ecocultures that shaped the characters and at the same

time denied them the possibility of reconciliation and union. In order to analyze the settings that participated and witnessed the emotional and mental decay of the characters, it is interesting to review the title of this novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The name foreshadows the outcome of events and destiny of Antoinette and her husband. This particular place refers to the northern area of the Atlantic Ocean which bears its name due to the abundance of sargassum, a type of seaweed. It is said that many ships either get lost in this area because of the multitude of floating seaweed or get trapped in it, making it impossible to escape. Rhys chose this title to show how each character is trapped in its own Sargasso Sea, reinforcing the idea of an impossible escape.

That being said, the first introduction to nature is what it has been called “Bad Mother Nature” by Catherine Roach, it is threatening and imposing such as Antoinette’s husband describes. Nature can adopt either of its two roles: harmful or protector, but the second one is only seen in relationship with Antoinette, who interacts with it. Her husband on the other hand feels protected in England with the cold and the city, separated at last from the excessive colors of the Caribbean. Antoinette’s relationship to it fluctuates, as she associates it with a safe place at the beginning of Part 1: “there is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. The barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe” (16), but this safety is violated by the fire, which acts as a purifying force but nevertheless violent and abusive, destroying her home. The trauma appears to be different for her husband, Winterhalter (220) says that “Rochester’s trauma begins because he believes there is an island (feminine) paradise, yet Martinique does not afford him bliss. Even his attempts to cast his erotic desires onto the landscape and forge a union between Antoinette and her homeland frustrate his longings”.

Ben Heller (392) also comments on the feminization of nature, which ends being very problematic for the husband’s interactions and responses to Antoinette and the environment

that constitutes his new home: “a signal characteristic of Caribbean discourse has been the tendency to figure the shaping environment as female, or with qualities such as fluidity and relationality that have been associated with women, femininity, and the female body in both patriarchal and feminist discourses – and both positive and negative effects have been ascribed to this feminized landscape”.

While Antoinette feels at ease surrounded by nature and helps to overcome her post-traumatic syndrome, it is the evisceration from her haven and into the mouth of the wolf, or in other words the incarceration in England, what causes her to break. The cold jail that is the metropolis and the separation from the warmth of the Caribbean sun and the embrace of the tropical landscape instigate the deterioration of her mental state.

In Part 3 takes place the most powerful and foreshadowing dream plus the peak of the side effects of her trauma. Rhys represents the defining phenomena of trauma, all of which can be viewed as types of fragmentation: dissociation (fragmentation of the psyche), traumatic “memory” (fragmented, often incoherent images or intuitions), and a discomfiting sense of timelessness (fragmentation of one's experience of continuity) (Linett 440).

Antoinette is clearly dissociated from herself and reality, the traumatic memory takes place when encountering triggers that wake these memories, and finally she does not know how much time has passed at the end, she does not even remember how she looks like. Not only that, but Antoinette also experiences derealization where reality seems like a dream to her. This is something that the own author suffered as she confessed in her autobiography *Smile Please* during a conversation with a Frenchman: “‘I can abstract myself from my body.’ He looked so shocked that I asked if I was speaking bad French. He said, ‘Oh non, mais . . . c’est horrible.’ And yet for so long that was what I did” (Rhys qtd in Linnet 441).

Antoinette's husband own trauma mostly reflects on his language, as he adopts an obsessive and possessive tone. It was mentioned that he viewed the contact with this other culture as a disease and at the end he becomes intoxicated by it. He is repulsed by this new environment and ends going back to England to reconstitute his identity and control his wife once and for all.

But mental healing is a long process and given that they inhabit a place whose name (Massacre) is believed to be a cursed land due to the terrible events that must have taken place there, but nobody remembers (Rhys 38), it feels almost unachievable for her, and it actually is. Huggan and Tiffin (117) affirm that in fact, the idealized pastoral nature conception is impossible to uphold in a context of imperial genocide and slavery, and that is why the idea of return to the past is hard given the Caribbean origins, making it even more difficult to Antoinette who just lost her home to the fire and is trying to establish new connections to nature to repair herself. As it will be contemplated in the next section, this aspect of return could be connected to the idea of her suicide as a way of returning to the Caribbean through the fire and the cleansing of the root of evil (Olaussen 77).

The difficulty of this analysis resides in the duality and the old statements of women and nature. Antoinette is in tune with nature not because she is a woman, but because she has established a close relationship with it over the years and that is what grants her protection and security. This is the only thing capable of consoling her in a cruel place where every other character and even the story seems to not be on her side.

2.3.1 Broken character or madwoman?

For the longest time, the trope of the "madwoman" has been highly recurrent in literature and other forms of art, ever since mythology, the greatest Renaissance tragedies, up until the latest

films. This, although it could be argued, is a very problematic device. Female authors have related female madness to female rebellion, as writer Elizabeth J. Donaldson said “the figure of the madwoman as feminist rebel has had a sustained cultural currency” (90) since “in the face of such repression, ‘going mad’ might be considered the only sane response to an insane world” (100). But, is this effective? To which extent is madness an expression of rebellion or a justification for inconsistent character developments, choices and plotlines?

David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, directors of the proclaimed HBO TV series *Game of Thrones*, conclude the final season with the downfall of one of the main characters, Daenerys Targaryen, due to her madness. Many argued that this was a rushed development for her, but this should not be named madness, as she suffered from post-traumatic syndrome like Antoinette. This was a men’s portrayal of female madness or as Gilbert and Gubar coined, a “madwoman”. But what happens when the “madwoman” is born under the creation of another woman, such as Jean Rhys or Jane Eyre, the one who firstly introduced Antoinette?

Antoinette’s first encounter with “madness” is her own mother, Anette. Azam (237) explains:

The reader can also see Antoinette’s struggle to fill the gaps in the madness and silence of her mother in her childhood days. By showing Anette’s madness and coldness towards her daughter Antoinette, Rhys in a way tries to exemplify how the absence of a mother’s love and affection contributes greatly to Antoinette’s fractured identity and how she later inherits her mother’s madness in the novel.

The story, when it comes to these two women, follows a circular narrative, since it begins with the realization of an identity crisis and Anette’s madness slowly growing on her and ends with Antoinette being locked away fulfilling her role as the madwoman in the attic that Jane Eyre had already planned for her. Although Daniel Cosway, the long-lost half-brother of Antoinette claims that mental illness runs through the family, many factors contribute to this

evolution: her mother's absence, the constant psychological abuse of Rochester, her inability to create an identity as she is stuck between two groups, the final separation of her only safe place, the Caribbean, and the arrival to England, the expected nightmare.

As it was established in the previous section, mental stability is tied to the environment. Nature is able to either aggravate the character's traumas or take part on their recovery. Antoinette's separation from her sole protector, the tropical landscape, and into a dark jail means a point of no return.

One of the most important processes for the transformation into the madwoman is othering her, animalizing her and her behavior through descriptions, but above all, with names. Antoinette does not "become mad" until she receives the name Bertha Mason: "Antoinette becomes what she is named, but Rhys emphasizes that her madness exists only under the organizing principle of Bertha Mason" (Winterhalter 227). Winterhalter (227) argues further on:

When Antoinette is spoken of as "mad," her experience is transformed by the names she receives. In these most violent uses of language, Rhys suggests that if *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the tale of the madwoman, then conferring names is a particular kind of linguistic aggression, a hostile madness, equivalent to voodoo and obeah as Antoinette points out. But, it is "the madwoman," the person disempowered, or disoriented, by proclaimed difference, who becomes the victim of the process of definition, or as Christophine says of Antoinette's mother, "They tell her she is mad, and she act like she is mad".

Winterhalter concludes by saying that madness exists "at the moment of enunciation" (215) and especially in the vocabulary used to differentiate between the self and the other.

Furthermore, Jawad Kadhim incorporates the marital relationship factor to the equation alongside Barbara Langston's approach on "naming" madness:

By paralleling Antoinette's forced madness to Annette's imposed insanity, Rhys illustrates the anonymity of the act. In other words, White Englishmen do not only drive their Caribbean wives mad, but they "name" too. Both Antoinette and her mother experience the same fate when they try to save themselves in the form of a relationship with their mother country through marriages to Englishmen. (Langston qtd in Kadhim 596)

Both women look for sense of identity and security on their marital relationships, but what they find is psychological abuse and dismissal under patronizing and condescending tones, which ultimately "drives them mad".

All of this is related to the heroine's tragic end, her suicide. Here, there are two common positions: either Antoinette truly is mad and wanted death to be a release from reality or she was mad, but as a rebellion and acted out of revenge, committing suicide by fire, overcoming her fear of it and using it as a weapon for her own purpose. Paula Grace Anderson (59) abdicates for a "happier suicide", one not loaded with powerful subversive connotations, but rather "Antoinette's suicide is projected, then, not as desperate abdication from life but rather as a celebration of that life which she once knew in the Caribbean, in all its intensity, whether negative or positive".

Although many want to believe that women turn mad or kill themselves as a way to fight back, the truth is that it does not bring much closure, as at the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea* the Empire still wins, and she is dead. The story's objective was to give voice to those who were oppressed, but the problem comes when the narrative and the destiny of the heroine are forfeit from the start. *Wide Sargasso Sea* exist because of *Jane Eyre* and in order for Jane Eyre to be born, Antoinette Cosway had to die. For Jane, the epitome of a Victorian woman, to have a happy ending, Antoinette had to be turned into Bertha Mason, into the madwoman in the attic, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's words: "in this fictive England, she must play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, set fire to the house

and kill herself, so that Jane can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction [...] At least Rhys sees to it that the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister's consolidation" (251).

For this reason, Anderson's argument is inconsistent considering Winterhalter's approach, if Antoinette is pushed to madness and suicide comes mostly as a consequence of it, it cannot be read as "celebration", that would only erase the subversive nature to this action with its sugarcoating.

Madness is, not only unrealistically portrayed, but continues to fuel the stigma of mental illnesses or as Donaldson (102) wrote "diminishes the lived experience of many people disabled by mental illness". It ultimately fails to protect women, as it leaves them vulnerable at the hands to those who want to oppress them. "Mad" is another label that while intending to be liberating, it does the exact opposite and puts the female characters at risk. It is not an effective device, especially when, in order to gain attention and achieve her goals, the woman portraying this trope has to destroy herself, either physically or psychologically, which implies that somehow madness has a degree of choice, something far from the truth. This does not inspire but rather leave the reader hopeless upon finishing the novel. The only escape for women is to die or "turn themselves mad".

3. Concluding remarks

Wide Sargasso Sea's publication in 1966 marked future postcolonial works for years to come, as it also sparked the urge to write back and formulate a transversal discourse between literary creations. Jean Rhys introduced nature as an agent in the story, allowing it to regain power after the destitution of colonialism. She made this without realizing the great impact that this would have on future ecocritical analysis that would inspire many theorists. This dissertation has defended this analysis of the setting and the ecocultures in order to create and deepen a new reading.

That being said, the analysis that was carried on was focused on the necessary reevaluation of the relationships between women and nature, providing a fresh point of view, including other factors that were not gender based in order to explain the said connection in the novel. It was exemplified how nature held power that influenced the outcome and had two different renderings by the two main narrators, either an idealized or a contrastive view. The husband appeared to be detached from nature, especially from the tropical landscape, which threatened his masculinity. Ultimately, his position as a colonizer limited his capacity to understand his own wife. Furthermore, instances of power relationships were analyzed in terms of domestic abuse. The husband, as a possessor of the colonizer role, seeks to control his wife. This was part of the colonization of bodies that women suffered as white colonizers raped them and abused them because of what they represented, that is the "other" and a symbolic figure of a new, virgin land. Not only that, but symbolic animal reading was also crucial for the animalization of women, given that both of them are mistreated and treated as a subgroup. Antoinette is to be reeducated in the Victorian values in order to create a proper Englishwoman, and since the husband does not success in his task, she is locked away. The economical subversion was important for the creation of power relationships due to marriage laws and the dispossession of land, causing women to lose their possessions when they

married, which positions Antoinette in disadvantaged since she is economically dependent. The dual freedom explored the intricated union between freedom of women and freedom of land, as one cannot be achieved without the other. Antoinette's role was observed under Catherine Roach's theory of Mother Nature, exploring the three different archetypes but keeping in mind the problematic of dualisms based on gender which Roach condemns and this dissertation has tried to prove erroneous, limited and potentially harmful for any analysis.

As a somewhat autobiographical text, *Wide Sargasso Sea* brought the problem of identity and nature of belonging. Dichotomies were found in Antoinette's descriptions since she situates herself in the "inbetween" of two groups and two natural settings in relation to identity. For this, Terry Gifford's definition of pastoral and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's own thoughts about pastoral were the main source for understanding this contrast. Unlike Antoinette, her husband considers the Caribbean as a threatening place. Nevertheless he has somewhere to return to, England, which grants him comfort. Antoinette looks for the same comfort in nature and her sexual relationships as well as the reassertion of her identity. In connection to identity comes the othering process. Antoinette represents the "other" for his husband, who through language, tries to proclaim his own "self". That is how he creates identity, by differentiation. Because of this, he animalized and dehumanized his wife and other women in the story as well as the setting itself, but most importantly, he renames Antoinette as Bertha, an English name completely alien for her. The ecofeminist analysis also revolved around the languages used by both characters. The husband's view towards women turns out to be patronizing and condescending. In addition to this, his hatred and frustration towards the setting express the evolution of his trauma through the language used, whereas Antoinette describes nature as a protector most of the times. Space and trauma alongside psychological analysis is fairly important. In a story where the title itself express the impossible escape, the characters must live with their respective traumas. The husband's

trauma is related to the setting, as was already mentioned, and to his feminization of the land. A land that does not bring him any happiness whatsoever. Antoinette's peak of trauma appears during the evisceration from her hometown and into England, a dark, cold, and alien place. Many side effects of trauma were also analyzed such as derealization, dissociation and traumatic "memory". All of this culminates into the discussion of the "madwoman" trope and its supposed "effectiveness" as a rebellious method. The environment takes part in Antoinette's downfall as well as her restoration, since nature acts as her protector and source of power. She turns mad when is named mad but also treated as such. Suicide is viewed as an escape or an act of rebellion, and while some critics abdicate for the first option, that leaves the subversive tone of the novel behind. Antoinette's death was also necessary for the creation of *Jane Eyre*. This portrayal of madness in literary works entails a degree of choice which is a problematic and not at all realistic representation of mental illness. Not only that, but the ultimate suicide only comes to show how little power women had in fiction as well as in reality, where they had to die in order to change things and create a rebellious narrative.

The aim of the dissertation was to demonstrate the importance of an ecocritical, and especially, an ecofeminist analysis for a new and more in depth reading of the novel, and how the setting highly affects the outcome and relationships held under its gaze. The ecocultures of the characters modified their interactions and caused them to drift apart from each other. The upbringing in their respective ecocultures was one crucial factor that shaped the characters. As the analysis of many perspectives and factors influencing the proposed hypothesis has shown, the evaluation of these aspects is needed for an ecocritical reading.

Nevertheless, the contradictory perspectives have diffculted the task of a new analysis free from nature/women dualisms. It is the main reasons why many correlations of the female heroine and the landscape were subjected to a subversive reading, in order to achieve the goal of the dissertation.

After the information was gathered, many extensive themes arrived at the scene which could potentially be of interesting in further analysis. Regarding the sections, 2.2 proved to be one of the most complex and intriguing ones. Ecocriticism has been interested in language and especially anthropomorphic language and its own reinvention in order to refer to nature and animals, and in this case, the variant of gender was added. This point could be further explored not only in term of narrative voice, but in relation to the writer's own background and relation to nature, especially in contemporary authors facing other problems such as climate change and deforestation. Another section that would be of interest is 2.3.1, the creation of the madwoman in terms of ecofeminism, or in general terms, mental illnesses and healing through nature and how does it relate to it. Now, in terms of the corpus itself, this method could be applied for other literary works of Jean Rhys, especially her short stories which cover women of different eras, nationalities and social status.

4. Works Cited

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