

**The Postcolonial Framework and Reinterpretation of
Great Expectations and *Jane Eyre* in Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip*
and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*.**

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Abstract

In Postcolonial literature it is sometimes difficult to identify the author's intention behind the topic and location chosen. When analyzing a postcolonial environment, intertextuality appears to be the key element, since a postcolonial reading is also a work whose references are a combination of intertwined societies, manners and beliefs. The postcolonial writer focuses on the impact of European colonization in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, among other places. The postcolonial author also deals with identity, highlighting the colonists' impositions on the natives, threatening their lifestyle by oppressing their ideas and manners. Some authors use well-known novels as a starting point to their postcolonial writings; this is the case of Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip*. The former uses Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a reference for her prequel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which we learn about the life of the first Mrs. Rochester – Antoinette Cosway, and her white Creole life in the Caribbean, before she is considered mad by her English husband and forced to move to England. Jones' novel, on the contrary, uses Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* as a reference in a timeline where the characters of *Mister Pip* are in need of a tale, a saviour in literary form to fight against the reality of their society in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, in the early 1990s, when the civil war started.

In my paper, I want to analyze the postcolonial framework in which these four novels stand, comparing the postcolonial scene in the Caribbean and the South Pacific. My aim is to discuss both common and different traits in both settings, and how the authors deal with the matter of identity. To do so, I will also cover the critique against postcolonial rewritings, often attacked by the lack of creativity of the artist, whose story is focused solely on an already existent literary universe. I argue that the fact that intertextuality is present in these cases is not a synonym of a lack of imagination or talent on the part of the author, but a resource used by the postcolonial writer in order to approach the matter of imperialistic imposition on the colonies.

1. Introduction

Postcolonialism is not an easy term. For starters, should it be hyphenated or not? Does it refer to the period after colonialism? Or is it declaring its anger against the colonial times? What is it that we understand by colonialism? It is hard to create a timeline in this context, keeping in mind the global status of the word. All these questions needed to be addressed when I decided to write on this topic. I found myself in this situation thanks to Dr David Owen and his Literary Theory course, where we discussed different approaches regarding literary criticism. Postcolonial Criticism covered the thirst for empire of the ruling nations, the West's superciliousness towards the East, the North stronger than the South. Most common maps – and by common I mean Eurocentric, show the distribution of power simply by location. Once you learn about this imposition, it is hard to believe that there was a time when you were not able to see past the piece of paper, which placed you on the top, on the 'good' side of the map. Thanks to these courses I have become aware of the lack of knowledge on my part when it comes to non-Eurocentric countries or cultures. Another shocking fact I encountered during this project has been the reaction and answers of my fellow classmates when addressing the topic of postcolonialism: many thought that the term referred mainly to Africa and India. In a way, that pushed me towards spreading the word, giving the less well-known countries that were affected by colonisation the attention they deserved.

Mister Pip by Lloyd Jones was one of the books that made me realise the little I knew about 'the other' world. The connection between the postcolonial rewriting and Dickens' *Great Expectations* intrigued me from the very beginning. This led to the analysis of the postcolonial writer and the reasons for such rewriting. Jones' novel was published in 2006, which makes it a modern rewriting. After meeting with my

supervisor, Dr Felicity Hand, she suggested I compared another set of novels within the same parameters. Given that I was focusing on a modern novel, we agreed on not only comparing two postcolonial rewritings but also on making the similarities go full circle, therefore choosing *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, written in 1966 and considered one of the first postcolonial rewritings. Rhys' took Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre* and decided to add her part of the story, providing the reader with an alternative context and understanding of the novel.

This paper focuses on the postcolonial rewritings of the 'classics', on the similarities and differences when comparing two novels that share nothing but the fact that their authors decided to choose an already existing novel and use it as their starting point. Intertextuality and plagiarism are also relevant in the rewriters' world, which is why I have analysed whether these novels are to be criticised or disparaged due to their genre.

2. Background on Postcolonialism

The controversy when studying postcolonialism starts with the very same term that entitles the historical starting point for those cultures and people who were forced to accept the expansion of an empire because of colonialism. Thus, if referring to it as what follows colonialism, one must use the hyphenated version of the word; on the contrary, the term with no separation, *postcolonial*, implies a desire of resistance to colonialism. It is because of this matter that I choose the latter version of the two, as I will indicate in the following pages when referring to slightly controversial terms.

When studying the postcolonial world, one is almost forced to read and learn from Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*. He explains how 'the Orient' – anything non-Western, is a Western creation, for "the Orient was Orientalized not only because it was

discovered to be “Oriental” in all those ways considered common-place by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it *could be-* that is, submitted to being-*made* Oriental.” (Said, 1979: 6) In his introduction, Said comments on the need for the West to understand everything non-occidental, thus creating ‘the Orient’ as a comparative term, as opposed to ‘Occident’. However, East, West, Orient and Occident, are subjected to the geographical location of the one who is denoting the separations. Further on his acclaimed work, Said highlights the purpose of the creation of the Orient: “The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire.” (Said: 203) Therefore, *Orientalism* serves as a guide to follow the Western steps towards understanding and learning to deal with ‘the Other’, from imperialistic contexts to scholars studying a foreign –non-occidental- language.

As John McLeod suggests, postcolonialism involves “literatures in English produced by writers who either come from, or have an ancestral purchase upon, countries with a history of colonialism.” (McLeod, 2000: 1) For the purpose of this paper, I have chosen two novels that are considered postcolonial rewritings: *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys and *Mister Pip* (2006) by Lloyd Jones. I will focus on two different postcolonial contexts: the South Pacific and the Caribbean areas, since they are the scenarios where these rewritings take place. The canonical text that for its rare value is considered that, a canon, a model (McLeod, 140) is the one I will be referring to as a ‘classic’. Thus, the ‘classic’ equivalents to the two postcolonial novels are two English Victorian depictions of the past: Charlotte Brönte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1861). In the following chapters I will

analyse both sets of novels in detail, but for now I will move onto the topic of the postcolonial rewriting and intertextuality.

The matter of intertextuality brings up many questions, some of them regarding the authenticity of the intertextual work. In her exemplifying book, *The Ballistic Bard*, Judie Newman comments that “Intertextual rewritings may also give the impression that non-metropolitan culture can only rework, has no creativity of its own and is fundamentally dependent for its materials on the centre.” (Newman, 1995: 5) The postcolonial author, then, when choosing to rewrite a ‘classic’, has to deal with accusations of lack of authenticity, as well as parasitism. Parasitism, negative connotations aside, does not imply plagiarism, but it focuses on using an already existing book, story, idea, and working from it onwards. If the author were to copy the storyline and swap some names and places, then it would be plagiarism, but the method of choosing a starting point which has already been discussed or created is different. In the postcolonial context, the issue is somehow even more open to disagreement; the ‘classics’ usually being models of underlying imperialistic values masqueraded as mere tales of a young individual trying to survive in an unfortunate world. Therefore, the author of postcolonial rewritings has a vast range of options: to fill the gaps of such a mentioned ‘classic’, or perhaps to create an alternative version of it in a postcolonial context, or, as is the case of Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to critique the acclaimed ‘classic’. Another problem is, as McLeod highlights, that “a re-writing often imagines that the reader will be familiar with the source-text it utilises, and thus is addressed first and foremost to an educated reader versed in the literary works of the colonising culture. For some, this means re-writings are directed at a small privileged and educated elite.” (McLeod, 169) However, rather than creating a text for a specific group of readers who might be familiar with the ‘classic’, the intention of the postcolonial writer

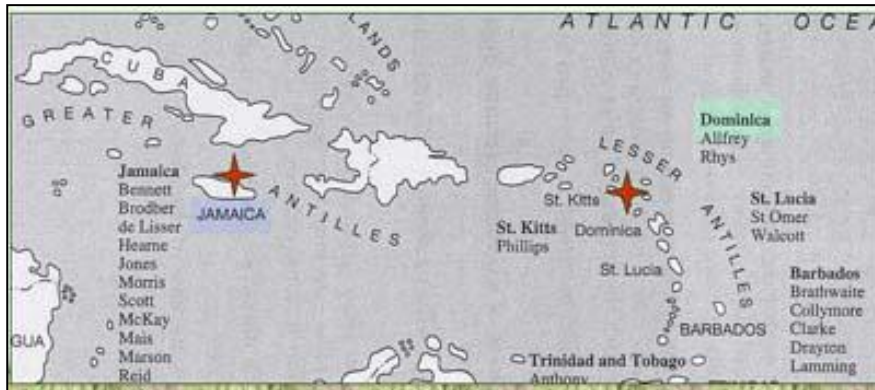
might be to provide an alternative to the original, that is, creating a parallel world, giving the reader who might not have read the source-text an option to choose from, and perhaps conditioning their thoughts on the original.

3. *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

There is no need to try to dismantle a great work like *Jane Eyre*; that is not how one should treat the ‘classics’. However, what Jean Rhys intended when writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* was to give a reply in the voice of the other, of the ‘subaltern’. As Spivak points out in her work ‘Can the Subaltern speak?’, Rhys’ critique serves as a prequel for the classic, inviting “future readers to envisage Victorian Britain as dependent upon her colonies, just as Brönte’s heroine depends upon a colonial inheritance to gain her own independence.” (Newman,15). Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic, is portrayed in *Jane Eyre* as a savage lunatic whose laughter in the night keeps Jane awake. However, in the postcolonial rewriting the reader is given the other side of the story, the life behind that creature held in the attic. It is because of my reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* that I will refer to the character as Antoinette, as Rhys’ names her in her novel.

Wide Sargasso Sea places Rochester in the West Indies, on a mission intended by his father, who wants to secure his son with a valuable marriage to Antoinette and therefore access her dowry. Rhys does not name the figure of the husband, despite being easily identified as Rochester by those familiar with *Jane Eyre*. The matter of identity through names is one that the author takes seriously: Rhys re-named Brönte’s Bertha to Antoinette. It is in part two of the novel that the husband, Rochester, starts seeing his wife as the enemy, as a creature of another world with different customs and traditions. It is then that he starts calling her Bertha against her will. The fact that Jean Rhys decided to use a new name and to deprive Rochester of one exemplifies how much

‘wrong’ she intended to ‘right’. “Bertha” symbolises the need of Rochester to Westernize the figure of Antoinette.



Map 1: The Caribbean Islands. Jamaica and Dominica are two of the settings of the novel. The Sargasso Sea is located in the North Atlantic Ocean, between Europe and the Caribbean.

The figure of Antoinette is that of a Creole in Jamaica, which directly fills her with a lack of identity that deprives her of the sense of belonging. On the history of Jamaica and creolization, Edward Brathwaite comments that what made Jamaica evolve was the interaction of white/black groups within a society, creating “a ‘new’ construct, made up of newcomers to the landscape and cultural strangers each to the other; one group dominant, the other legally and subordinately slaves.” (Brathwaite, 1995: 202) On the matter of creolization, he continues: “[It] was a cultural process that took place within a creole society – that is, within a tropical colonial plantation polity based on slavery.” (Brathwaite, 1995: 203) Being Creole makes Antoinette unable to belong to either blacks or whites of European descendant. The first part of the novel is right after the Emancipation Act in 1833, which ended slavery. Later on the first part, Antoinette, along with her family, are forced to leave Coulibri, the house where they live in Jamaica, after a mob formed by the black community sets fire to the house, killing in

the incident Antoinette's brother Pierre. On the matter of white Jamaicans as slave-owners: "Blinded by the need to justify slavery, white Jamaicans refused to recognize their black labourers as human beings, thus cutting themselves off from the one demographic alliance that might have contributed to the island's economic and (possibly) political independence." (Brathwaite: 204). This matter of mixed race can be referred to also as hybridity of cultures, as Homi K. Bhabba suggests in his article *Culture's in Between* (1993).

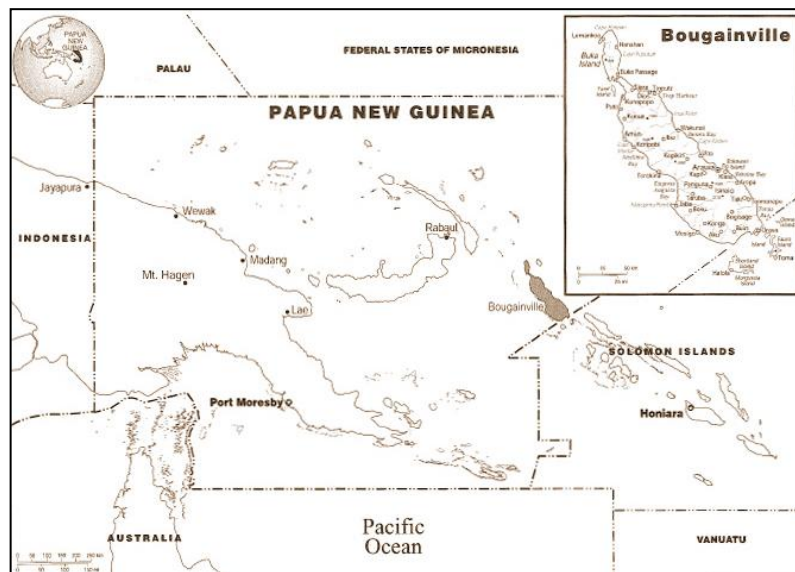
4. *Great Expectations* and *Mister Pip*

Lloyd Jones' use of *Great Expectations* is that of a literary saviour for his characters in *Mister Pip*. Using the character of Matilda, a young girl in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, Jones describes the historical episode of the Civil War in the 1990s. Despite the obvious presence of war in the novel, the author manages to bring this notion closer to the reader, connecting two different worlds by the lives of the main characters. The matter of identity is crucial to both novels; in *Great Expectations* we find the first lines to be quite descriptive regarding Pip: "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip." (Dickens, 1867:1). However, in *Mister Pip*, the narrator decides to focus on the character of Mr Watts: "Everyone called him Pop Eye." (Jones, 2007:1) Matilda, following Mr Watts' request, tells him her name, to which he replies "'Matilda is a nice name, too. Where did you get such a pretty one?' he asked. 'My father' (...) My dad worked with Australians up at the mine. They had given him the name Matilda." (Jones, 2007: 33) The postcolonial context is visible in this passage, where the sense of identity of the narrator loses character when revealing that her name had come from white

men's suggestions. Matilda's name, after the remark that Mr Watts gives to it, makes her own it again. It does not come as a surprise, then, towards the end of the novel when the encounter with the 'white doctor' leaves her speechless:

There, a white doctor inspected me. (...) I remember him saying, 'Matilda, that's a nice name,' and when I smiled he asked me what I was smiling at. I shook my head. I would have to tell him about Mr Watts and I wasn't ready to yet. I didn't want to mention Mr Watts just because another white man had commented on my name. (Jones, 2007: 220)

Regarding identity, this connection between the two scenes is one of the strongest. From that moment onwards, Matilda does not feel she needs her name to be approved by any other man. The decision on whether her name is nice or not is solely hers.



Map 2: Situation of the island of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, in the South Pacific, where *Mister Pip* takes place.

It is once the island is blockaded that the story begins. Mr Watts, being the last white man on the island, takes the role of the teacher and, by excusing himself for not knowing much about teaching, proceeds to read the village students *Great Expectations*,

“the greatest novel by the greatest English writer of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens.” (Jones, 2007: 21) Matilda feels connected to Pip from the very beginning, the lack of the parental figure on both sides working as common ground. She uses the figure of Pip as a friend to whom she can always run when in need of a break from the war context. In this case, intertextuality follows a less parasitical tone, since Jones creates this world of story-within-a-story, with a circular sense to it. Despite being a work of fiction, what the author intends is to portray a historical and brutal event with the help of the status of the ‘classic’.

5. Comparative Framework

5.1. Location

When reading a book, the notion of the location of the story is of great importance to some readers, who need to place the characters and actions in a recognizable environment in their heads – it does not matter if the place is fictional or not, as long as it is established from the beginning, described as somewhere ‘real’ and the reader is able to play the story within those descriptive limits.

However, readers on the ‘western’ side of society, not of the world, might not find it easy to locate certain places, perhaps due to their Eurocentric education. Not only is there a gap of knowledge about location, but also of tradition and culture. Both Jean Rhys and Lloyd Jones set their postcolonial rewritings of the ‘classics’ (both based in Victorian England) in a postcolonial environment, therefore making the representation of such locations more accessible to their readers.

Mister Pip is set in Bougainville, an island belonging to the Salomon Islands archipelago. Most of their territory forms the Solomon Islands Nation, in contrast with the islands in the northwest, which belong to the Autonomous Region of Bougainville,

Papua New Guinea. This choice of location comes from the author's background as a reporter: "Jones first saw [Bougainville] in the late 1980s when he reported for Australian media on the beginning of an internal conflict that had been simmering since the 1970s and exploded in a decade of civil war that left 20,000 dead and much of the island's cultural heritage ruined." (Cohen, 2010) It could be said, then, that Jones' intentions came from having experienced the damage caused by war in the island, therefore creating a fictional universe in which some light was shed on the cruelty surrounding the island and its people. The lack of awareness about the location and the size of the island are seen from the point of view of an islander in the book, Matilda's father. His reaction comes from a postcard sent to Matilda and her mother, once he has left for Townsville, Australia, to work in the mine:

For a while we treasured a postcard my father sent from Townsville. This is what he had to say. Up to the moment the plane entered the clouds he looked down and saw where we lived for the very first time. From out at sea the view is of a series of mountain peaks. From the air he was amazed to see our island look no bigger than a cow pat. (Jones, 2007: 7)

Perhaps the older inhabitants of the island are aware of the dimension of their land, but it is hard to compare it when they have never left their home. Lloyd Jones' decision to place such words in the mind of the man who left Bougainville seems somehow to carry a larger message. There is a silent understanding that Matilda's father is both surprised and disappointed, as if he had been a prisoner in a low-security jail with the gates wide open. The feeling he experiences is that of realization of his location in life.

Wide Sargasso Sea is very much focused on location, as its own title points out. As Angela Smith describes in the introduction to the novel, "the Sargasso Sea lies between Europe and the West Indies and is difficult to navigate, like the human situations in the novel" (Smith, 2000: vii). The 'West Indies' or 'the Caribbean' labels, despite being correct, go against the essence of the story of Jean Rhys. Each island of the archipelago

has its own individual characteristics, from the landscape to the language spoken by its inhabitants. Following the notes on the 2000 edition of the novel, the story is set in different locations: Jamaica, where ‘Coulibri’ is placed, Granbois, where the honeymoon takes place, and lastly, Thornfield Hall, England. Antoinette, who relates how she grew up full of doubts and hatred at not fitting in, narrates the first part of the novel. The second part is recounted by the husband, once he has married Antoinette and they are on their honeymoon. His views of the Granbois, which is near Jamaica, are filled with fear and resentment. On the very first page of part two, this narrator introduces the reader to his newly married status, referring to Antoinette and her servant, Amélie. Of her, he had to say: “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, 1966:39) The third part, narrated from England, is the only written link that connects both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette speaks from the attic of Thornfield Hall, where she automatically transforms into the woman in the attic from *Jane Eyre*.

5.2. Identity

As I have addressed earlier in this paper, Antoinette’s sense of identity is that of someone who fails to see to which groups she belongs. From the moment she was born, she lacked a sense of understanding of her persona. In part two, she talks about how Amélie sang a song:

It was a song about a white cockroach. That’s me. That’s what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I’ve heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all. (Rhys, 1966: 64)

This revelation does not affect her husband. If anything, it pushes him to go one step further in the early-stage abusive relationship he has with Antoinette. Being Creole, of European or African descent but born and raised in the Caribbean, Antoinette, whose family were slave-owners, fits between the former slave inhabitants of the island and the Englishman, that is, her husband. The alienation increases when the couple move to Granbois for their honeymoon and Rochester begins his trick of changing her name, inducing her into a confused state, making her wander between names and the identities attached to them:

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘of course, but will you come in and say goodnight to me?’
‘Certainly I will, my dear Bertha.’
‘Not Bertha tonight’, she said.
‘Of course, on this of all nights, you must be Bertha.’
‘As you wish,’ she said. (Rhys, 1966: 87)

The reply ‘as you wish’ conveys a hint of servitude towards Rochester, which, ironically, makes Antoinette the slave of this narrative. The moment the name ‘Bertha’ appears on the scene, one can clearly connect the dots, transporting the image of Antoinette, who is slowly losing her mind due to her loveless marriage and the circumstances surrounding her, into the character of Bertha Mason, the same one that Jane Eyre describes as follows: “What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane,” (Brontë, 1847: 290) Later on the novel, after her husband’s repetitive attempts to change her name, Antoinette, drunk and mad at him, talks back, “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that’s obeah¹ too.” (Rhys, 1966: 94) Despite

¹ “Obeah practitioners cast spells and used witchcraft against their victims, harming them through psychic powers and the use of the kinds of magical objects listed in the law.” (Smith, 2000: 136)

Antoinette's objections, she seems to transform into the beast Rochester believes her to be, and he takes her to England, where the narration starts in Part 3. It seems as if the author intended the reader to realize the lack of control Antoinette went through when they moved to Thornfield Hall, since the first pages are filled by the voice of Grace Poole, the servant who is in charge of Antoinette/Bertha Mason in the 'classic'.

It could be said that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, identity is seen as the key element that once it is taken away, is responsible for the outcome and destiny of our main character. Identity in *Mister Pip* works on a different level, mainly due to what is at stake, which is seen as a personal journey in search of what is considered to be the characters' true selves. As previously seen, Matilda's name comes from the comment of an Australian worker who gave it to her father when he worked in the mine. The name of Matilda, despite not being particularly popular, can be seen as a mocking choice on the part of the Australian. Known as the unofficial national anthem of Australia, *Waltzing Matilda* by A.B. Paterson seems to be of great importance in the choice that Lloyd Jones made when naming his leading character. This could be seen as a mere coincidence or as a carefully chosen decision, conveying a sense of mockery on the part of the worker, who decided to give the most Australian, nationalistic and whitest name he could think of to the black worker who came from a tiny island he had only just heard of, not actually being aware of the island's or its inhabitants' existence.

On a similar note, Mr Watts' sense of identity is at the centre of the novel. The opening lines of the novel label him as Pop Eye, describing him as "someone who had seen or known great suffering and hadn't been able to forget it. His large eyes in his large head stuck out further than anyone else's – like they wanted to leave the surface of his face" (Jones, 2007: 1). The explanation the narrator proposes, that his eyes stuck out because they wanted to leave his face, hides a deeper message, not easily recognizable

at first sight: they were not only his eyes, or his face; Pop Eye/Mr Watts felt he needed to escape his body, his identity, in order to be at peace with himself. In a way, readers can understand that despite leading Mr Watts to his brutal death, the events that push him to become the teacher of the island, and therefore connect with Matilda, are the ones who help him forgive himself and regain his purpose in life, apart from taking care of his mad wife, Grace. The fact that he is the only one white man with an English name in the island turns him into some sort of special creature, not to be treated as equal, and to be respected from a secure distance. “Although we knew him as Pop Eye we used to say ‘Mr Watts’ because it was the only name like it left in our district.” (Jones, 2007: 3) The islanders treasured his presence, as one treasures and admires a precious ‘exotic’ animal, with excitement and a hint of terror.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is at a loss regarding her race, her roots and skin colour working against her when fitting in. In *Mister Pip*, race is seen through the ideas of the thirteen-year-old who tells the story of how she and her fellow young islanders dealt with it: “We had grown up believing white to be the colour of all the important things, like ice-cream, aspiring, ribbon, the moon, the stars.” (Jones, 2007: 4) It is important to highlight the fact that they, the black islanders, positioned themselves below material things, ice-cream, ribbon, instead of thinking of themselves as equal to the whites.

5.3. The Postcolonial Writer’s Agenda

One might point out, when reading this paper, that Lloyd Jones is not a postcolonial writer. To some extent, this could be right. However, as I have pointed out at the very beginning of this project, postcolonialism embodies any trait showing resistance towards colonialism, therefore including, in Jones, a writer concerned about a

territory that was clearly affected by the imposition of colonialism and what followed. On the other hand, if by ‘postcolonial writer’ one expects the author to be brought up in a postcolonial environment, representing through their lives the reality of postcolonialism, then Jean Rhys is the example to bear in mind.

Rhys’ work (1966) is considered one of the first postcolonial rewritings, in contrast with Jones’ novel (2006), which is still considered very new. The choice of these novels was to present the contrast between the ‘first’ rewriting and the ‘modern-day’ one. Not only is the comparison visible based on the year of publication, but also in the writers’ agenda. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is filled with criticism towards the ‘classic’, and by that I mean not only *Jane Eyre*, but also what the novel represented. If one is unaware of the context in which Jean Rhys found herself, the intentions regarding her novel might seem easily labelled as mere criticism, without needing to explain where that criticism came from. In the introduction written by Angela Smith in 1997 (in the 2000 edition), she explains how Rhys was believed to be dead by many, from literary advisers to the BBC, who affirmed she had died in a sanatorium, or during war time. (Smith, 2000: vii) This is believed to be the consequence of her lack of writing during a period of years (1927-1939). She became familiar with Brönte’s novel and the response to *Jane Eyre* came to her mind, focusing especially on fixing the wrongs that represented the mad Creole she had discovered in those pages. From that point onwards, Rhys played a game of shadows, hiding herself and her experiences of growing up in Dominica, letting the reader see the anger towards the imposition of colonialism, clearly identifiable in the ‘classic’. Rhys was not alone in perceiving a bias against postcolonial literature. In 1993, Edward Said published *Culture and Imperialism*, the follow up to his recollections on the Western creations and impositions, *Orientalism* (1979). A critique of the canonical texts is found there, focusing on the lack of morality and humanity seen

as ‘necessary’ in order to conserve the peace and order in the Victorian Age. Said criticises colonial texts like Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, Dickens’ *Great Expectations* and Brönte’s *Jane Eyre*, among others. His criticism highlights the lack of explanation, or contextualization, regarding those characters or backgrounds that do not belong to the Eurocentric delimitations. The ‘classic’ writers seem to follow a pattern on writing about the immoralities suffered by non-Westerners as if they were socially and morally acceptable. Said gives an explanation why postcolonial literature has been treated as “non-important”:

This massive avoidance has sustained a canonical inclusion and exclusion; you include the Rousseaus, the Nietzsches, the Wordsworths, the Dickenses, Flauberts, and so on, and at the same you exclude their relationships with the protracted, complex, and striated work of empire. But why is this a matter of what to read and about where? Very simply, because critical discourse has taken no cognizance of the enormously exciting, varied post-colonial literature produced in resistance to the imperialist expansion of Europe and the United States in the past two centuries. (Said, 1993: 60)

On the matter of righting Brönte’s wrongs, Rhys decides to provide an explanation for Rochester’s blindness at the end of *Jane Eyre*. This is the moment in *Wide Sargasso Sea* where Rochester’s faith is darkened:

‘And you think that I wanted all this? I would give my life to undo it. I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place.’ She laughed. ‘And that’s the first damn word of truth you speak. You choose what you give, eh? Then you choose. You meddle in something and perhaps you don’t know what it is.’ She began to mutter to herself. Not in patois. I knew the sound of patois now. (Rhys, 1966: 104)

The passage shows an interaction between Christophine and Rochester, where he admits his dislike towards anything related to Antoinette. ‘She began to mutter to herself’ is the key to Richard’s faith. As Newman suggests: “What she [Christophine] does is to make the action of *Jane Eyre* the result of a West Indian obeah woman’s curse. It is poetic

justice for Rochester.” (Newman, 1995: 23) It is undeniable that Jean Rhys felt strongly against the character of Rochester, making sure to take part in his unfortunate destiny.

The work of Lloyd Jones is far less critical towards the classic. He shows, through Mr Watts, the admiration towards Dickens’ creations, turning *Great Expectations* into some sort of lucky charm for Matilda. Using the canon as a guide, the rewriting evolves into the story of self-discovery, learning to accept the bitterness caused by war. The parallels that Jones creates between both novels cover Matilda seeing herself in Pip, their fatherless background helping to unify their worlds. On a different level, one of the reasons why Jones chose Papua New Guinea and Australia as the setting of the novel might be related to *Great Expectations*’ exile destination for Magwitch. Australia works as a connector between both novels: working for Victorian England as a destination to send their convicts, and, in the case of *Mister Pip*, as an escape for Matilda’s father, who goes to Australia to work in the mine, unable to go back home to Bougainville once the deathly blockade was installed. The role of Australia in Jones’ novel is bittersweet, depending on the point in the timeline. At the beginning, Matilda blames the land that has stolen her father. Later on, though, once Matilda escapes from the island, she finds the beginning of her new life in Australia with her father. This new location serves as a trampoline towards Matilda’s education and discovery of England. Once again, Jones continues using the canon as a reference, for Matilda not to get lost in this new world she decides to step in. As Nakatsuma points out, “Matilda, who has once been attracted by white worlds such as London, made Pip alive in her mind and finally goes back to her own place.” (Nakatsuma, 2014: 116) *Mister Pip* combines the black reality of the island with the white fiction of the book, while a white male figure, very much needed by Matilda’s ‘fatherless’ condition,

inspires and invites the children to dream bigger, to believe they can achieve the impossible, to imagine there is more out there than what they know.

As previously mentioned, parasitism is on cue when regarding rewritings. However, I insist on highlighting the difference between using a text as a source model and plagiarizing it. Both novels, *Mister Pip* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, use the source texts to create new universes, one criticising the Western colonial imposition while the other acknowledges the ‘classic’ for what it is, an inspiration to be taken into consideration, leading the characters towards different destinies.

6. Conclusions

As shown in this paper, I referred to *Jane Eyre*’s character Bertha as Antoinette, which is the name given to her by Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. I could not take part in the manipulative naming perpetrated by her husband, which was crucial in her transformation from human being to savage beast. This serves as an example to validate my argument when pointing out that rewritings, in this case the postcolonial ones, are far too creative to be considered examples of plagiarism. I have analysed both novels and their contexts, their characters, their plots, in order to give them the attention and the validation they deserve as novels. Comparison between the ‘classic’ and the rewriting is one of the bases of my paper, hence my constant back and forth between the two; however, I would like to emphasize how hard it has been not to focus on just one of the postcolonial novels, given their depth, its real meaning hidden behind the face of a rewriting, the author’s goals and motifs. Each of the four works I have worked with in this project, both the rewritings and the canonical texts, could easily be the core text of a future study.

It has also been proved that despite the location of both postcolonial texts, the sense of identity and the importance of it to the characters is a key feature of the plots. Both Jones and Rhys have shown, through the search for - or loss of - identity, one of the less common topics regarding the impact of colonization: individuality. It is easier to refer to colonised and colonisers as groups of people, a set of human beings who are not really human from afar. However, the rewriters focused their attention on Matilda and Antoinette, two specific personalities with names and surnames, loves and fears, desires and ambitions, thus making the reader feel part of the postcolonial world, involving them with the realities of the victims and survivors of colonization.

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