

*Intertextuality, narrators and other voices
in Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea*

Intertextualidade, narradores e outras vozes
em *Wide Sargasso Sea*, de Jean Rhys

Rosalia Angelita Neumann Garcia

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil

Mariana Lessa de Oliveira

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil

RESUMO: O romance *Wide Sargasso Sea*, de Jean Rhys, é geralmente considerado uma resposta pós-colonial à obra *Jane Eyre*, de Charlotte Brontë. Embora ambos os romances apresentem conexões intertextuais, a estrutura narrativa de Rhys distancia sua obra da narrativa de Brontë, mas também a complementa. Assim, é o objetivo deste artigo estudar o nível de intertextualidade presente em *Wide Sargasso Sea* em comparação a *Jane Eyre*, além de apresentar análises sobre os tipos de narrador e focalização observados nas três unidades narrativas distintas da obra por meio de teorias sobre narradores homodieéticos com base em Bal e Nieragden.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Wide Sargasso Sea*; *Jane Eyre*; Intertextualidade; Narradores homodieéticos.

ABSTRACT: Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is often perceived as a postcolonial response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Although the two novels present intertextual relations, Rhys' narrative structure both distances itself from Brontë's narrative as well as complements it. It is the objective of this article to study the level of intertextuality *Wide Sargasso Sea* presents in relation to its 19th century counterpart as well as carry out an analysis on the types of narrators and focalization noticeable in the three separate units of the novel through the theories of homodiegetic narrators presented by Bal and Nieragden.

KEYWORDS: *Wide Sargasso Sea*; *Jane Eyre*; Intertextuality; Homodiegetic Narrators.

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1. Introduction

However critics perceived *Wide Sargasso Sea* (WSS) as a response to *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys' 1966 novel presents a narrative structure that distances itself from the world created by Charlotte Brontë in 1847, while complementing the story for both future and past readers of *Jane Eyre*. Set in Jamaica and Dominica during the 1830s, WSS is a postcolonial novel that recounts the life story of Antoinette Mason, or Bertha — Rochester's wife, who is locked in the attic of Thornfield Hall and only sees Grace Poole, her carer. Haunted by the figure of Mrs. Rochester (WYNDHAM, 1999, p. 6), Rhys set out to write her version of the story of the ill-fated woman, from childhood (when she is Antoinette Cosway, then Mason) to early adulthood, first married to young Rochester, then, haunting the halls of Thornfield Hall. Despite her earlier novels, which had urban and modern settings presenting little trace, if none, of the West Indies, Rhys' takes her fiction back to the place where she grew up as a child in order to present a "Creole" point of view of Bertha's story. In a letter sent to Diana Athill in 1966, Rhys writes about the impression she had when reading *Jane Eyre*: "That's only one side – the English side", wrote Rhys (RHYS, 1999, p. 144). Moreover, her letters show what the reader feels upon reading WSS — that the novel was to atone not only for the "wrong creole scenes" in *Jane Eyre* but also for the unquestioned cruelty of Rochester (RHYS, 1999, p. 139). This sense of justice in Rhys' intent can be found in a letter to Selma Vaz Dias from 1958,

She [Bertha] must be at least plausible with a past, the *reason* why Mr Rochester treats her so abominably and feels justified, the *reason* why he thinks she is mad and why of course she goes mad, even the *reason* why she tries to set everything on fire, and eventually succeeds. (RHYS, 1999, pp. 136 – 137)

This wish to atone for Antoinette/Bertha's story, to give her the voice she does not have in *Jane Eyre*, and to present a view of the West Indies by someone who actually lived there (as opposed to an English writer who had only heard legends about it in the 19th century) was orchestrated in a novel divided into three parts: the first and the third parts narrated in first person by Antoinette; and the second part also narrated in first person by an unnamed Englishman who we take to be young Rochester because of the experiences being reported, from his

marriage to a young attractive Creole woman to his renaming her Bertha. Each part presents its own set of narrative features, for instance, the first part is linear whereas the second part is blurry and dream-like. However, this particular characteristic pertaining to each part in the novel has the function of enhancing or raising questions associated with the narrator's reliability, leading the reader to a specific interpretation of the facts being read. Besides that, unlike Brontë's open world¹ of *Jane Eyre*, WSS presents a very limited world, one that traps its characters, even though it is narrated in first person and the "trap" may be only a result of the characters' perception. Therefore, it is the purpose of this article to analyze *Wide Sargasso Sea's* intertextual relation to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, how this intertextuality is structured in the Rhys novel and to study the narrators and other voices that are present in the three parts of the novel. First, we will provide a revision of the most influential theories on intertextuality and an analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* according to Gerard Genette's categorization of levels of intertextuality; later, we will move forward to the analysis of the type of narrators in homodiegetic texts and the different type of focalization these texts can present. Each part of Rhys' novel will be analyzed separately so as to strictly define the narrative voice that commands each narrative unit in the novel.

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2. Notes on Intertextuality

Although intertextuality is widely used nowadays to refer to a series of practices both in literature and other media, the term was first coined by Julia Kristeva in 1969 in an essay entitled *Word, Dialogue, and Novel*. However, the very idea of a text containing many other texts has existed as far back in history as the Ancient Greeks with Plato and Aristotle. For Plato, the "poet" (artist) copies an earlier creation which is itself a copy, thus never being "original" per se. For Aristotle, dramatic art is composed of texts (from oral tradition to written ones) known to the poet and probably to his audience as well. In the Middle Ages, with the study of mainly sacred texts, the belief that most creations are not original gained a Biblical resonance, especially due to the belief that the

¹ Jane in Brontë's novel seems to have more freedom to come and go as she pleases. For instance, when finding trouble with Rochester's newfound secret, Jane decides to seek her fortune elsewhere. In this sense, she has a world of possibilities as a character, whereas Antoinette's world seems to lack possibilities and seems to be closing in on her.

“author” of all creation was God, and thus everything else was a copy of something God himself had already created². According to María Jesus Martínez Alfaro in an article published in 1996,

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church fathers and medieval theologians made current the view that the created world in its radiant order and hierarchy should be regarded as God’s symbolic book. If this was true, the objects which composed the world were a kind of dictionary of God’s meanings. (ALFARO, 1996, p. 269)

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In this sense, God had two books: the verbal book (Bible) and the Book of Nature. This led most literary works to be read in the light of the Bible, which is a practice of intertextuality in itself. Nonetheless, it was in the Renaissance that the text started to be viewed as open and unfinished so as to hold an infinite number of interpretations, each subjected to a reader’s background, both social and cultural. Nevertheless, this rather modern view on originality and intertextuality hit a plateau in the 18th century, turning back to what became known as “the anxiety of influence”. During this period, it was believed that artists and authors should try to distance themselves as much as possible from the influence of past works, and only through this practice could they flourish originally with their art. It was also during the Romantic period that a number of poems and accounts of dreams as the starting point of a work of literature gained a momentum³. T.S. Eliot innovated in his view of influence by stating that “when studying a work one must consider what has come before it, but one must equally be aware of the fact that the work of the dead poets changes and enriches its meaning in the light of what has been written by later authors.” (ALFARO, 1996, p. 270) Nonetheless, the 20th century still saw an attempt to give the text full independence from any external source with the New Criticism in the 1920s. New Critics believed that the text was self-sufficient and

2 Even the birth of humanity may be perceived as a matter of original/copy - God made Adam reflecting his own image and Eve to keep him company, and thus humanity descended from these two creations. In this biblical sense, we descend from several “copies” that, to an extent, reflect God’s image; on a scientific level, we are made of genes and DNA, features that may go back a long time in a family’s lineage.

3 Mostly opium-induced dreams inspired artists to write verses. Also, the age-old idea of there being a “muse”, an entity that whispered the verses of a poem into the poet’s ear have been used as an explanation to how a poet came about his art.

often distanced the study of a literary work from its author, excluding biographical notes as well as the cultural and historical contexts surrounding it. The theory of intertextuality undermines this practice and in the late 20th century a rush of new readings started to come up not only in literature, but in music and the visual arts. From then on, we have experienced a series of rewritings of famous and not-so-famous works; to illustrate the rewriting of famous works we have Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that are often and extensively adapted, rewritten for new media and new forms of communication, and probably gain more new forms than one can keep track of.⁴ Nonetheless, even works that do not hold world-famous titles, but are rather local, have also been subject to modern adaptations, such as *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, or simply *The Táin*, an Old Irish epic that has been adapted by indie band The Decemberists on an EP titled *The Táin*. There is no literary genre more prone to adaptation to another media: Wordsworth's poem *Lucy* was beautifully adapted by Neil Hannon - who also has a song that references Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* - in a song with the same title. The list could go on for pages and this rightfully illustrates how infinite intertextuality can be.

Critics often enough do not have the opportunity of peeking into the lives of writers as readers. There are writers, however, who have written about the art that motivated them, such as the impact of other writers' works, which can be seen in *The Books in my Life* by Henry Miller, Andy Miller with *The Year of Reading Dangerously*, as well as the influence of music, for instance, in Nick Hornby's *39 songs*. In any case, knowing what a writer has used to produce a particular book or what he has read is not the only way to analyze a text in intertextual terms. Intertextuality knows no boundaries for scrutinizing a text and, as long as the analysis is coherent, it can hold its thesis on almost anything. Nonetheless, sometimes reading a writer's letters and journals may offer unique insight into what has moved her as a reader or, simply, as a human being. In her letters, Rhys states that for a very long time she had been haunted by Mrs. Rochester locked in a room, to the point that

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4 Other questions may arise from this, such as, for a reader, what is the "original": Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* or Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary*? Despite the chicken and the egg paradox, the most logical answer would be whichever the reader came into contact with first. The same works for adaptations on the screen, translations, etc. When it comes to the individual reading baggage, it is impossible to enforce a chronology of "writings" and "rewritings".

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Wide Sargasso Sea's first title was *The First Mrs. Rochester* (though first titles usually don't stick). Moreover, it is in her letters that we understand how Rhys felt as a reader of *Jane Eyre*, her disquietness with the fact that there was a woman, a Creole⁵ from the West Indies, locked in a room in Thornfield Hall. Still, it was not until many years later that the idea of how to build her story clicked in Rhys' mind and the task immediately became her new obsession. In various letters, Rhys writes about her anxiety with this story, how she did not know how to start, which narrator to use and how, for her, writing this story would be an attempt to amend things for Mrs. Rochester (or for Rhys herself, as a reader). In the following section, we will take a look at Kristeva's developments on the subject of intertextuality, and will also present theories by other scholars as well, such as Genette, to try to pragmatically place *Wide Sargasso Sea* within a scope of intertextuality in relation to *Jane Eyre*, analyzing the technique Rhys used to incorporate aspects from Brontë's novel.

2.1 Intertextuality from Bakhtin and Kristeva to Genette

The word "intertextuality" first featured in a theoretical text in 1969 in Julia Kristeva's *Word, Dialogue, and Novel*, in which she takes the discussion from where Bakhtin left off and proposes new modes of analysis based on Saussure's linguistics, semiology and formal logic. Bakhtin was the first scholar to admit that a "literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure" (KRISTEVA, 1980, pp. 64-65). What allows this dynamics is the fact that the literary word/work does not have a fixed meaning, but rather is composed of a dialogue among different texts (writings); moreover, the text not only converses with others, but also with history and society. Bakhtin calls the different levels of intersection of texts *dialogue* and *ambivalence*, terms that Kristeva will further develop in the theory of intertextuality. Kristeva sees poetic language as *double*, thus, the writer's interlocutor is the writer himself, though as the reader of another text (1980, p. 69). Therefore, the text produced is ambivalent in regards to another text. These theories were eventually assimilated by other literary scholars and gained new approaches and developments. Since it is not this article's intent to provide a revision of theories on intertextuality, we will leave Kristeva's

5 Creole at the time of Rhys' novel was the term used in the British Caribbean to refer to those of English or European descent born on the islands.

and Bakhtin's approach here and proceed to review Gérard Genette's contributions to intertextuality. The gap between Kristeva and Genette's theory is filled with contributions from scholars such as Barthes, Culler and others; nonetheless, the theories offered by these scholars present somewhat the same complexities as Kristeva's and Bakhtin's approach when it comes to putting it into practice in the analysis of a literary text. Moreover, Genette's approach concentrates strictly on the literary work, whereas Kristeva's and Bakhtin's theories, for instance, were also driven by interests in politics, sociology and philosophy. Genette is also known for important contributions to narratology, therefore reviewing his contribution to intertextuality will also set the tone for the following section of this article. As Alfaro rightly points out, although Genette concentrates on the literary word, he does acknowledge that studying literature in isolation is no longer possible. He then offers five subcategories under which a literary text may be analyzed:

- 1) *Intertextuality*: the relation of co-presence between two or more texts, that is, the effective presence of one text in another which takes place by means of plagiarism, quotation or allusion.
- 2) *Paratextuality*: the relations between the body of a text and its title, subtitle, epigraphs, illustrations, notes, first drafts, and other kinds of accessory signals which surround the text and sometimes comment on it.
- 3) *Metatextuality*: the relation, usually called "commentary", which links one text with another that comments on it without quoting it or, even, without mentioning it at all. It is the critical relation *par excellence*.
- 4) *Archtextuality*: the generic category a text belongs to. The text may not recognize its generic quality, which should be decided by its readers, critics... However, this generic perception determines to a great extent the reader's "horizons of expectation", and, therefore, the work's reception.
- 5) *Hypertextuality*: the relation between the latecome text (*hypertext*) and its pre-text (*hypotext*). He defines *hypertext* as every text derived from a previous one by means of direct or indirect transformation (imitation), but not through commentary. In the former, direct or simple transformation, a text B may make no explicit reference to a previous one A, but it couldn't exist without A. For instance, *The Eneyd* and *Ulysses* are, in different degrees,

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two hypertexts of the same hypotext, *The Odyssey*. Imitation is a more complex kind of transformation, since it requires the constitution of a *generic* model.

(apud ALFARO, 1996, pp. 280-281)

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In the same way it may be difficult to approach an intertextual analysis of a text through only one theory (in regards to Bakhtin and Kristeva's contributions), we can also see that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a text existing in opposition to, at least, two other texts: one literary and explicit, which is *Jane Eyre*; the other, historical and cultural and which is depicted in every page of the novel, in other words, that of the historical white Creoles of Dominica and Jamaica, especially regarding the mad heiresses of former slave owners who were often the target of set up marriages because of their legacy of wealth. Rhys converges these two texts into one in her novel. This is an example of how the intertextuality offered by Bakhtin and Kristeva works in practice; the literary work is not analyzed in isolation (nor can it be) and is linked to various "dialogues", either literary or social, since when we read, we are conversing with the book and with ourselves and - as admitted by critical theory - we are also conversing with our world. On the other hand, it is also useful to approach the literary work on its own, as suggested by Genette; thus *Wide Sargasso Sea*, first of all, fits exceptionally well in the first category proposed. However, it is important to state that most literary novels might belong to more than one category. For instance, the difference between Genette's Hypertextuality and Intertextuality is a bit blurry, and one category may easily lead to another. In this sense, we may say that WSS both belongs to Hypertextuality and Intertextuality. We will analyze some instances that may support these two categorizations.

First, *Wide Sargasso Sea* in no way quotes *Jane Eyre* nor plagiarizes the novel. It does, however, allude to certain scenes that are found in Brontë's novel. This link between the two novels, besides being bridged by the characters in play, is achieved through the description of dreams Antoinette has, namely three dreams that refer to a scene that does not exist in *Wide Sargasso Sea* nor properly exists (meaning, it is not described but only mentioned in the novel) in *Jane Eyre*, but refers to Antoinette's situation in Brontë's novel and Bertha's final destiny as a character in *Jane Eyre*. Each dream brings more details of what is happening and what is about to happen:

I went to bed early and slept at once. I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying. The covering sheet was on the floor and my mother was looking down at me. (RHYS, 1999, p. 15)

This was the second time I had my dream. Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest. I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try save me, I would refuse. This must happen. Now we have reached the forest. We are under the tall dark and there is no wind. 'Here?' He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. He smiles slyly. 'Not here, not yet,' he says, and I follow him, weeping. Now I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dirt, my beautiful dress. We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees. I do not know them. There are steps leading upwards. It is too dark to see the wall or the steps, but know they are there and I think, 'It will be when I go up these steps. At the top.' I stumble over my dress and cannot get up. I touch a tree and my arms hold on to it. 'Here, here.' But I think I will not go any further. The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off. Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years. 'Here, in here,' a strange voice said, and the tree stopped swaying and jerking. (RHYS, 1999, p. 36)

The third dream described in the closing paragraphs of the third part of the novel is a much more descriptive dream. In it, Antoinette sees herself both at Thornfield Hall and at Aunt Cora's house, in England and in Jamaica; her dream connects her past and her future. Although this dream describes very well what Antoinette will do, because it enlightens the character, Rhys leaves a cliffhanger, one that the reader will only read about in *Jane Eyre*. In this sense, we may place WSS in three different categories offered by Genette:

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- 1) Intertextuality: WSS alludes to many scenes and situations in *Jane Eyre* and sometimes even quotes scenes and names of characters in Brontë's novel, such as naming Grace Poole in the third part, but not choosing to name the man in the second part. This is obviously a choice Rhys made; nonetheless, it is clear that *Jane Eyre* does exist inside *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and the reverse effect will also occur since a reader cannot ignore his literary baggage. This type of relation can be perceived throughout the whole novel;
- 2) Metatextuality: although Genette refers this type of relation especially to critical texts, WSS' starting point was to criticize the poorly depicted Creole scenes in *Jane Eyre* as well as the unquestioned cruelty between husband and wife (RHYS, 1999, p. 139; p. 144). This may account as a reason why many critics refers to Rhys' novel as a "response" to *Jane Eyre*; Rhys is not only rewriting Bertha's story, but she is also humanizing what was once dehumanized in a former novel;
- 3) Hypertextuality: *Wide Sargasso Sea's* hypotext is *Jane Eyre*, which is transformed directly when Rhys uses three of its characters to recount the life story of a lesser character in that novel. In this sense, *Wide Sargasso Sea* could not and would have not existed without *Jane Eyre*, without Brontë's novel having caused some indignation in Rhys.

This concludes our analysis of the intertextuality present in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the next section, we will analyze how Rhys worked on her narrators in such a way to direct the reader's attention to certain aspects which favors one of the sides.

4. The Narrators in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Analyzing the narrators in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not a simple task. Namely, we have two narrators, which we will call "active narrators" and we have frequent interruptions from other characters who tell their side of the story; we will call these "other voices", as they do not properly constitute a narrator, but a voice that interrupts or interferes with the active narrators' stories. In the opening pages of Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck' *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, a common problem is presented when working with narrators, especially in prose. There are many ways to tell a story, many narrators, and we cannot assume (most of the

time) that one narrator is telling the whole story, especially when there are pauses in the continuity of the story. In this sense, it is important to limit a narrative unit and analyze the narrator of that unit alone. Hence *Wide Sargasso Sea* may be divided as follows:

NARRATIVE UNIT	NARRATOR	OTHER VOICES
Part I	A	Yes
Part II	B <-> A	Yes
Part III	C <-> A	No

Table 1. Narrators in each narrative unit

Each part of the novel is a narrative unit and throughout these narrative units we have the presence of the most prominent narrator of the story, the active narrator, and other voices. However, most of the time, these other voices do not constitute a narrator, for their moment of narration is so brief and fades out in such a fog of other voices that it is difficult to precisely account for who is speaking. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore their impact on the narrative and how these voices affect the narrators themselves. In *WSS*, there are moments in which Antoinette overhears conversations of other characters who speak poorly of her mother, for example. (RHYS, 1999. p. 16-17). However, we cannot forget that this is a homodiegetic narration (the narrator participates in the actions), and not a heterodiegetic one (the narrator does not participate in the events told), thus we must consider the filter that is established through first person narration when reporting what others have said. Bearing in mind that each part functions in its own particular way, it is interesting to take a look at each separately, naming the active narrator and what the other voices may or may not contribute to the story he/she is telling.

4.1 Part I: Antoinette sets the foundation of her story

As stated in the introduction, Part I is narrated by young Antoinette who focuses on her own life and upbringing thus constituting a homodiegetic narrator. However, this is not enough to analyze a story told in the first person. This gap in the study of the narrator has been filled, amongst others, by Susan Lauser in *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* in which she classifies various levels of homodiegetic narration according to the narrator's involvement in the story. Namely, we

have autodiegetic narration, which may be a sole protagonist, as is the case, for instance, of Holden Caulfield in Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*; a co-protagonist such as Nick Carraway in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; in the case of minor characters there is Celia Brady in Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*, or witness-participant in the case of Emilio Renzi in Ricardo Piglia's *Alvo Nocturno*; as well as the uninvolved eyewitness such as Capote's *In Cold Blood*, for which the term alterodiegetic is suggested in an article by Goran Nieragden.

HOMODIEGETIC NARRATION				
autodiegetic				alterodiegetic
sole protagonist	co-protagonist	minor character	witness-participant	uninvolved eyewitness
high	high-medium	medium	medium-low	low
degree of autodiegeticity				

Figure 1. Table of classification of homodiegetic narration. See Nieragden, 2002.

Homodiegetic narrators often present their point of view and their own experiences of things; autodiegetic narrators, the heroes of the story, are usually sole protagonists and thus everything is based on their perspective. This is the case of Antoinette Cosway, though there is an interesting aspect regarding her narrative. In a homodiegetic narrative, it is common to confuse narrator and focalizer, in other words, the question of who relates, who sees and who does the action. Bal suggests a relation between narrator, focalizer and agency:

Narr-SUBJ	Foc-SUBJ	Agency-SUBJ	Identity Relations
	(Narr-OBJ)	(Foc-OBJ)	
1. X relates that	Y sees that	Z does	(N ≠ F; N ≠ A; F ≠ A)
2. X relates that	X' sees that	Y does	(N = F; F ≠ A)
3. X relates that	X' sees that	X'' does	(N = F; F = A)
4. X relates that	Y sees that	Y' does	(N ≠ F; N ≠ A; F = A)
5. X relates that	Y sees that	X' does	(N ≠ F; N = A; F ≠ A)

Bal's suggested chart as adapted by Nieragden, 2002, p. 689.

According to this chart, WSS' Part 1 falls into the fifth category in which Antoinette narrates the way former slavers see her and her family, the white Creoles. In this sense, although Antoinette is the hero

of the story, we do not see her point of view of things. Right in the opening pages of Part 1, we see that Antoinette's knowledge of herself, her family and the world around her come from other people:

The Jamaican ladies never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self' Christophine said.

She was my father's second wife, far too young for him they thought, and, worse still, a Martinique girl.

(RHYS, 1966, p. 9)

Antoinette's narrative is full of "Christophine said", "Tia said", "I heard (...) say", "they said" or "they thought", which creates an interesting effect in the story since, although Antoinette is the narrator, she is reporting the way the people around her see things, especially people like her, and not properly narrating facts or actions. Antoinette often suppresses words she wants to say, as if these words died in her mind, either because she is afraid or because she does not see herself as an agent that should take action.

While the repairs were being done and they were in Trinidad, Pierre and I stayed with Aunt Cora in Spanish Town.

Mr. Mason did not approve of Aunt Cora, an ex-slave-owner who had escaped misery, a flier in the face of Providence.

'Why did she do nothing to help you?'

I told him that her husband was English and didn't like us and he said, 'Nonsense.'

'It isn't nonsense, they lived in England and he was angry if she wrote to us. He hated the West Indies. When he died not long ago she came home, before that what could she do? *She* wasn't rich.'

'That's her story. I don't believe it. A frivolous woman. In your mother's place I'd resent her behaviour.'

'None of you understand about us,' I thought.

(RHYS, 1966, p. 18)

Thus, when trying to explain her situation, and upon encountering resistance from others in believing her, Antoinette gives up on expecting understanding or accreditation. A story is only true when it is ac-

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credited by those who hear it or read it, *i.e.* the reader is the only one who can acknowledge a story as being true or false by either trusting the narrator or not believing in him. In this sense, in the way the story is built, one could say Antoinette is not expecting accreditation from the characters or the fictional world around her, but is requesting this accreditation from the reader. This first part of the novel sets the basis for the rest of the narrative and the perceptions to come; once Antoinette narrates the focalization of others on her and her family, a certain type of reception is elicited from the reader. In this lies the main difference between a mimetic narration and a diegetic one. A mimetic narration basically acts out the events, while a diegetic narration summarizes events and conversations. In a diegetic narration, which is the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is the reader's job to make sense and connect the dots, in other words, "the sequence of events is always the work of the reader, who makes links between the story's several incidents." (HERMAN; VERVAECK, 2005, p. 12). Later on in the narrative, when Antoinette's house is burnt down, her brother dies and she is sent to live with her aunt, we learn by others that her mother might have gone mad; however, we do not know for sure. Although Antoinette sees her mother in person, she describes her as being strange and having a fit. This is one of the few moments in which we have Antoinette's perception of things, but it is still infected with information people have told her, such as "when we reached the tidy pretty little house where she lived now (they said) I jumped out of the carriage (...)" (RHYS, 1966, p. 28). This occurs some other times during the novel as well; Antoinette often overhears people's conversations and comes to her own conclusions. For instance, she knows her mother is not liked, but she knows this through Christophine and not because she has witnessed it: "The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self' Christophine said." (RHYS, 1966, p. 9)

In this sense, it might be difficult at times to know for certain if we are reading a fact, a story someone told a child, either to omit the truth or to make her feel better, or Antoinette's own perception of her experiences. Nonetheless, this feeling still favors Antoinette for, at this point in the narrative, she is still a child who has suffered a great deal in her short life. These moments in the narrative, in which she inserts indicators such as "they said", are what I call "other voices". These other voices at times get mixed with Antoinette's own narrating voice; hence, we see the many stories and voices vying for space in the narrative.

4.2 Part 2: Unnamed co-protagonist and the delirious narrative

The second part of the novel starts with an unnamed narrator we assume to be young Edward Rochester. This voice represents a co-protagonist autodiegetic narrator, since his perspective will be very important for the rest of the story. However, this is not the only difference between Part 1 and Part 2. In Part 1, we have the narrative of a young girl who is constantly telling the reader what others think of her and her family. The information she has, and thus passes on to the reader, is often filtered by others around her. The second part is narrated by an adult, and thus his view on how things happen are taken to be his own. This nonetheless does not mean he is more *reliable* than Part 1's narrator. In fact, Part 2's narrative is much more doubtful than Part 1's, and there is a reason for this. There is no objective way to ascertain a narrator's reliability; this is a judgment that the reader might have to make on his own, but there are some signs the reader can look out for to establish a narrator's (un)reliability. For instance, there are contradictory statements: the narrator says he feels something but acts out differently; or the narrator confesses he is confused; or, still, he is caught in a lie – when, for instance, another character tells a different story from the one the character has told and therefore we need to decide which one is telling the truth.

In the second part of WSS, the narrator, who we will call Rochester, has a difficult time dealing with a number of elements in the fictional world. First, he can't clearly distinguish between identities, i.e., who is English or European: "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either." (RHYS, 1999, p. 39). Later we find out he has had a fever which has left him feeling odd, not like himself at all (RHYS, 1999, p. 40); the narrator also often feels suffocated by the Jamaican air, which he feels to be thick and enveloping, and overwhelmed by everything in the place, "Those hills would close in on you" (RHYS, 1999, p. 41), "Everything is too much." (ibid.). There is a great deal of uncertainty in his narrative, as seen in his words: "As for my confused impressions they will never be written. There are blanks in my mind that cannot be filled up" (p. 45). From the start we know the marriage between this narrator and Antoinette is problematic. The second part of the novel contains some interruptions in the narrative – it does not flow like the first part. For example, the second part starts with Antoinette and her husband on the way to their honeymoon. Then,

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there is an interruption in the narrative and the reader is taken back to the wedding ceremony and to the day before the ceremony in which we learn that Antoinette did not want to go through with the wedding. The narrator and Antoinette talk, and he asks her if he should tell Richard (her stepbrother) it was a mistake. Antoinette does not answer, only nods. Right after this part there is yet another interruption in the narrative: “thinking of all this, of Richard’s angry face, her voice saying, ‘Can you give me peace?’, I must have slept. I woke to the sound of voices in the next room, laughter and water being poured out.” (RHYS, 1999, p. 47). However, because of the way it is structured, this part of the past being a separate part in the narrative and followed by the assertion that he had been sleeping, we are not sure whether this encounter and conversation actually took place or was only in his dreams. This is very unlike Antoinette’s dreams, in which the reader is told beforehand what to expect: the first dream happens in part 1, page 15: “I went to bed early and slept at once. I dreamed that I was walking in the forest.”; the second dream happens in part 1, page 35: “This was the second time I had my dream. Again I have left the house at Coulibri.”; and the third dream is in part 3, page 111: “This was the third time I had my dream and it ended.”. Rochester’s dreams are not announced nor made certain and in this sense Antoinette’s narration seems more in control of its senses and perceptions. The narrator of the second part is much subtler, never clearly stating that what he is telling is a dream. There is simply a shift in the narrative and then a statement saying “I must’ve been asleep”. Besides this, the narrative is not as linear as it is in Part 1, presenting many cuts. Part 2 starts with Antoinette and her husband on their way to their honeymoon; there is one cut which we later find out is the narrator’s dream; and then another that takes us back to the ceremony, of which the narrator says he remembers little (p. 45). Thus, by manipulating these different strategies in the narration, Rhys does not allow the reader to fully rely on the narrator of the second part.

On the other hand, unlike Part 1, Part 2’s other voices are more prominent, especially that of Daniel Cosway who plays a central role in defining Antoinette’s fate in the eyes of her husband. Part 2 is filled with excerpts from letters the narrator has written and received. One letter in particular is sent by Daniel Cosway (RHYS, 1966, pp. 56-59), who wishes to tell the narrator that he has been fooled and that Antoinette is part of a mentally ill family; that her mother had gone mad

and that surely Antoinette would follow her steps and go mad herself. Moreover, Cosway states that Antoinette's real surname is not Mason, but Cosway, a family of former slave owners. In this manner, Cosway assumes the narrative of the story for three pages and, although he may not be considered a major narrator, his focalization of Antoinette and her family play a dangerous and important role. It sets the racial division between white and colored Creoles that Antoinette has ostensibly narrated⁶, especially through the view of others; hence, though this letter comes as no surprise to the reader, it certainly does to the unnamed narrator. Furthermore, Cosway reinforces his reliability by telling Rochester to talk to Amélie (one of Rochester's servants with whom he has an affair) because "she knows, and she knows me. She belongs to this island." (RHYS, 1966, p. 59). This letter, and his encounter with Daniel, lead Rochester to believe his story due to all the details that had not been mentioned by Richard nor by Antoinette. This is reflected on Rochester's focalization of Antoinette as being deranged, unstable, and not as someone who is actually reacting to her husband's abuse. Though Antoinette seeks Christophine's help to try to make Rochester love her, it is of no use. Little by little, the situation starts to grow worse, as neither Rochester nor Antoinette want to let go of the marriage since each of them has a particular reason: Rochester has his pride and Antoinette is obsessed with being loved. Rochester's view of Antoinette as a madwoman leads Antoinette, who has often relied on what other people have said of her and her position, to see herself differently as well. This part of the novel reveals a shifting narration between B (Rochester) and A (Antoinette). Daniel Cosway is a very prominent voice in the narrative, but one could not see him as a narrator per se.

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4.3 Part 3: The Link Between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*

The third part of the novel is also the shortest; it is as if, at this point, Rhys were passing the baton on to Brontë. There is a major shift in this section because it starts with a heterodiegetic narration: "They knew that he was in Jamaica when his father and his brother died.' Grace Po-

⁶ In part I, Antoinette is bullied by two children on her way to the convent. She is helped by Sandi Cosway, her colored cousin, but Antoinette only mutters thank you to him and does not actually acknowledge him as one of her relatives. The character of Mr. Cosway and Antoinette's colored half-brothers (Alexander and probably Daniel Cosway) were added by Rhys to make more explicit the racial tension that existed in Dominica at the time.

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ole said.” (RHYS, 1996, p. 105). This narrator, which we will call narrator C, might be an allusion to the homodiegetic narrator in Brontë’s novel. By using the third person at this point, Rhys is establishing a distance and a link between the two novels as if to state that there is another story going on as well. Thus, Grace Poole’s account of how she attained the job of caring for Bertha in Thornfield Hall is given priority and links the novel to its counterpart, *Jane Eyre*. At first, the reader might be under the impression that what is told is given to him or her through Antoinette overhearing Grace’s talk to Leah, however, as a narrator, Antoinette could hardly know Grace’s thoughts as they are described by this external narrator on page 106. This narrator places the reader not in Jamaica, but in England now, in a room in Thornfield Hall where Antoinette, now called Bertha, is kept and cared for by Grace Poole. After this short intervention by narrator C, the narrative shifts back to Antoinette’s (narrator A) own perception of things (*i.e.*, the narrative shifts back to being autodiegetic). At this point, Antoinette is more aware of her bearings than ever in the narrative. There are no other voices interfering now and it is noticeable that every description given by Antoinette is her own view of where she is and how she feels. She is so aware of her situation that she knows she is no longer Antoinette in this place; she is Bertha – however, she does not know what Bertha looks like since there is no mirror in the room. Moreover, there is a passage in Antoinette’s account that gives ample support to the fact that the narrator at the beginning of this part is not her:

The door of the tapestry room is kept locked. It leads, I know, into a passage. That is where Grace stands and talks to another woman whom I have never seen. Her name is Leah. I listen but I cannot understand what they say. (RHYS, 1996, p. 107).

There is an important aspect in this passage in the use of “I know”, “I have never seen” – in other words, this time, unlike Part 1, Antoinette is taking responsibility as a narrator for the facts she is presenting. As a reader of her own life, in this part everything she has suffered and experienced, both through her own knowledge or the perception of others, comes together in a dream she has, the last dream that completes the other two and fulfills her destiny as a character in Brontë’s novel.

Grace Poole was sitting at the table but she had heard the scream too, for she said, 'What was that?' She got up, came over and looked at me. I lay still, breathing evenly with my eyes shut. 'I must have been dreaming,' she said. Then she went back, not to the table but to her bed. I waited a long time after I heard her snore, then I got up, took the keys and unlocked the door. 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, 1999, p. 112)

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Final Considerations

Wide Sargasso Sea presents an interesting and rich narrative structure. In the letters Rhys wrote while working on the novel, she comments on the narrative type she wished the novel to have; thus, she states that the story should be implied and never told directly, and this is reflected in the structure Rhys chose: we find out about the white Creole's situation and the emancipation act, for example, through dialogues between the characters and there is never a direct explanation of what is happening. Also, we learn about Antoinette's mother's madness through others: through Daniel Cosway, or the girl who chases Antoinette on the way to convent and tells her of her mother's illness, or still, through other comments that Antoinette overhears or is attacked with directly. In this sense, the story is implied because no narrator actually tells the story to appear to readers as it was, but rather reveals the story through impressions, dreams and hearsay, leaving the reader to come to their own conclusions. In another letter, about narrators, Rhys says "Another 'I' must talk, two others perhaps. Then the Creole's 'I' will come to life." (RHYS, 1966, p. 137), and in another letter she states that the *others* (characters, narrators, perhaps?) would explain the Creole (Antoinette). This reflects the analysis carried out in this essay and Rhys' success in structuring the narrative in such a way as to bring out more questions than answers. As readers, we are left reflecting on the source of Antoinette's madness – was she mad from the start or was she driven to it? In any case, this question, which gained little if no attention from readers of *Jane Eyre*, caught the eye of one particular reader who thought it was enough to set off the production of a narrative

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that would fill the gap felt, gaining through the reading of her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, more adepts of that same perception and turning a minor character in *Jane Eyre* into a main character in another novel. This is intertextuality *par excellence* and a significant example of how it is impossible to deem a novel as a whole narrative unit. In this sense, supporting Herman and Varvaeck's claims, it is extremely important to restrict the narrative unit in each part so as to accurately analyze how the story is being built and where it is leading the reader. In the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by the structure and the choices in the narrative, we see that it favors Antoinette as a more reliable narrator while the other 2 narrators are a product of the stories told by other voices. Nonetheless, as any story told in the first person, the narrator might embellish, add and omit details – thus, it becomes the reader's responsibility to be aware of the stories being told and how each narrative directs our responses to the story.

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