

GENDER AND POWER in Jean Rhys's 'WIDE SARGASSO SEA'

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"Lo propio de la significación, por lo tanto, sería su inagotabilidad, que descansa en la imposibilidad de capturar con palabras eso que se denomina las 'cosas'. Entonces, toda pretensión de agotar, mediante lectura o crítica ... la significación de un texto, aunque el texto hubiera sido producido en una pretensión semejante, es vana y, por lo tanto, se sitúa en un no lugar. La lectura, entonces, al igual que la escritura, puesta en la inagotabilidad pero tentada por ella, puede siempre recomenzar y siempre, por lo mismo, es insatisfactoria; está siempre 'a punto de' asir algo que, de inmediato, se evade."

La Escritura en el Hueco del Deseo
Noé Jitrik

In the course of the XXth century the world has gone through a shrinking process. The fantastic progress experimented by modern means of communication is making the world smaller each day. Distances are also shortened by the tight financial and commercial web that connects the furthest confines of the earth. The political consequence of this situation is to be perceived in the disappearance of frontiers and the loss of centrality of each particular nation for the benefit of the community. The United Kingdom has had to adapt to these changes to which we must add its loss of centrality in the West due to the powerful emergence of the United States plus the gradual though thorough loss of the Empire. Such major issues experienced in what is historically speaking a very short period of time had a profound impact on every aspect of English culture. Power is no longer in the hands of the English, it is disseminated in other centres, out of control. Language, central to cultural questions has also been deeply affected. New Englishes have arisen, and other literatures in English are born. The English can no longer pretend that the literatures from former possessions are marginal or subsidiary to the central culture of the island. Dissemination of political power has led to a more evenly distributed cultural influence. In this context, post-colonial literatures emerge as the resurgence of the suppressed. Through the contribution of writers such as Salman Rushdie, Ishiguro, or Jean Rhys, the formerly suppressed margins come to have a place and a voice they had been denied in the past. The emergence of these voices may be read as a symptom of the crumbling down of the white male middle-class establishment whose ideology directed and permeated

the realist novel. Most of XXth century writing can be seen as a struggle with the text to dethrone the father embedded in language, to turn writing into **text**: a piece of writing that struggles with the rules of its own making and disowns its author-father-God. More than ever in the history of literature, writing has become a struggle with the predecessor, a wrestling match with father, God, tradition in search of a new name, a new self, a new kind of power.

The artistic possibilities of mingling different cultures as a means to avoiding a narrow, intolerant vision of life are now explored to show that the universalized white middle-class male experience is not the truth against which we can measure our reactions but only a partial viewpoint enforced by power constructions. Ethnocentric viewpoints are then deconstructed with the aim of re-establishing a sense of proportion.

It is in this framework that we can read Jean Rhys (1890-1979), a fiction writer who was successful at making the experience of his childhood home, the West Indies, accessible to the English-speaking world. Her writings depict the struggle of the dominated to make their voices heard in a hostile context against which they find themselves powerless. In her masterpiece, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) she dramatizes a central issue: that the ethics that direct politics of state can be observed to prevail at the level of the personal life of the individual. Imperial policies prevalent in the colonial West Indies find a correlate in the patriarchal assumptions that underlie the behavior of the characters in their pri-

vate lives. With the purpose of explaining by which means the narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea* achieves this particular aim, the present work will concentrate on a detailed linguistic and technical analysis of Part II of the novel where the power struggle has its development and resolution.

The story is told by the central characters: Antoinette and Edward. The male protagonist, who is not identified by name¹, takes up most of the narrative space. Other, intradiegetic voices are also heard such as that of Daniel Cosway (Esau? Daniel Boyd?) through his letter to Edward and their talk reported in Edward's narration of events, or that of Christophine and other servants who are included in both central focalizations. Relatives and neighbours make their secondary appearance as they become pertinent to Antoinette's and Edward's stories. These varied voices engage in an enriching, sense-producing dialogue. The presence of the author can be perceived at the point of intersection of these different languages where a higher structure is woven. Here the chronotope (Bakhtin 1934) plays a fundamental role giving shape to the text through the concretization of the dimensions of time and space.

The spatial dimension is present in this piece at the political, socio-economic and geographic level though the scene is concretized exclusively through its manifestation in the private life of the protagonists. It is thus that we come to learn of the natural environment and of the social and economic forces at play in the Post-slavery West Indies (1830-1840). We see, for instance, how resentment, still alive in the former slaves and their sons and daughters expresses itself in insults (white nigger) hurled at Antoinette, a descendant of slave-owners. At the same time, the difficult position of the Creole, placed at the crossroads between two cultures and races is seen in references to the precarious quality of the social insertion of Antoinette's family in the course of her childhood as well as in the gulf that separates Edward and Antoinette.

The geographic representation is probably the most powerful in this part of the novel. It is a lively, vigorous element whose influence prevails throughout. The location of the protagonists' honeymoon in the West Indies, south of the Sargasso Sea has a

defining influence upon their story. The Sargasso Sea is a still tract in the central North Atlantic Ocean strewn with floating sea weed of the genus *Sargassum*. Legends used to be common about ships helplessly trapped in its still weed-plagued waters.² Like those mythical sailors, immobilized by the hot oppressive climate, the still waters and the monstrous weeds, the protagonists of Rhys's novel are trapped by their tragic destiny. The plot of Part II provides little movement forward, the stasis of analogy taking precedence over the logic of difference.

The time dimension, indissolubly linked to space in the chronotope, is guided by the same principles. The profusion of analepses (Genette 1972) results in a complex structure which suggests that successive generations are beset by similar life occurrences. By this dramatic device the reader is made to feel the shaping influence of the past. Paradigmatic representations of the spatial and the temporal dimensions define the overall shape of this narrative and the language that constitutes the protagonists' subjectivity, like the Sargassum weeds, limits and obstructs free development.

Why is this so? How can we understand the plight of the young lovers? What ideological principles underlie and sustain the logic of events? What is the basis on which the chronotopic model is built? It can be argued that the ideological system that gives consistency to the social organization of this fictional piece is founded on patriarchal assumptions. Rhys confronts us with a world where the male dominates, establishes the rules and has the power to enforce them. This ideological construction permeates all levels of experience. At the macro level of analysis (Van Dijk 1998), the patriarchal spirit is expressed in the politics of imperialism with its inherent use of power and the creation of inequality between social groups in the context of the West Indies, a territory that suffered both English and French domination. In the economic sphere patriarchy manifests itself through the appropriation of the individual and the suppression of his right to freedom in the system of slavery which, although over by the time of the novel, still lets its effect be felt in the relationship between the Creoles and the coloured population of African origin. In the private sphere, the power struggle is enacted through the appropriation of the woman by the dominant

male³. In fact the influence of the political and economic macro structures over the private life of the individual is so great that the story in *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be read as the tragic consequence of the imperial policies enforced in the West Indies. As Spivak (1985) sustains, in this novel "Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism." In all cases there is oppression and an attempt at silencing the others' culture. All interpersonal relations in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Part II bear witness to social inequality based on prejudice and stereotypical representations of the others, excluded and disparaged by the ideology of superiority on the grounds of sexual, social, economic or cultural difference. The power struggle develops against the background of a natural setting which, both enchanting and threatening, symbolically embodies the hidden, essentially unconquerable core of the oppressed (land/woman). The pressure of the dominant group may or may not produce a reaction with the inevitable struggle for power. As Van Dijk (1998) says "the dominant groups may more or less resist, accept, condone, comply with or legitimate such power, and even find it natural". In the work under scrutiny here, different characters will produce different reactions but in every case the note sounded will be of tragic bitterness.

A close analysis of the linguistic properties of *Wide Sargasso Sea* Part II will reveal the images of the others created by the patriarchal ideology that sustains its fictional world. As Mikhail Bakhtin sustains in *Discourse in the Novel*, it is not possible to separate the ideological from the formal in the study of verbal art since both aspects function jointly and at every linguistic level "from the sound image, to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning". In the analytical work that follows both form and content, structural and semantic elements will be taken into account to propose an interpretation of the text.

Chapters 1 and 2 of Part II of the novel⁴ are revealing as to the themes that prevail in the whole piece as well as to the character of its setting and atmosphere. A detailed look will constitute a good introduction to our analysis.

It is surely indicative of the tragic character of the relationship of Antoinette and Edward that we

should learn about their wedding in his voice and in such terms as "*So it was all over...*" and "*Everything finished...*" (65)⁵. The note of hopelessness is set by these, the initial words of the first two sentences in the section. Marriage, which in normal circumstances would be felt to be a beginning is here referred to as an end, closing expectations of forward movement and positive development. The very shape of the two sentences, with the use of the device of isocolon, point to a stasis, an arrest of movement, a focus on the paradigm in preference over the mobility of the syntagm. The same effect is produced by the inclusion of verbless sentences for the description of an environment with which the character does not interact⁶.

It is also of interest to notice that the subjects of the sentences quoted above are impersonal since both the themes of immobility and impersonality in the sense of lack of positive feelings predominate in this section focalized by Edward. The classification of the verbal processes in Edward's narrative (chapter 1), allows us to define the main traits of the narrator's mental picture of his reality, the way in which he makes sense of what happens around him and what role he assumes in the circumstances. Together with frequent instances of verbless sentences we find a large proportion of relational, behavioural and mental process clauses (Halliday 1985)⁷. Considering that the characters in this scene are involved in a journey from Massacre to Granbois, the proportion of material process clauses is small (136 out of a total of 361). Besides Edward is an actor in only 38 of them. He is not concerned with action but rather with thinking, feeling and perceiving (mental, behavioural process). He observes and describes the environment (existential and relational process) as well as the actions and reactions of other characters (material process). The kind of verbs used helps to build the figure of Edward as that of a passive observer of the actions that take place in his environment. This attitude of non-committal and detachment is summarized in the sentences "*It had been arranged that...*", "*I had agreed. As I had agreed to everything else.*" (66). We should notice here how the use of the passive voice in the first example highlights the character's estrangement from the circumstances in which he finds himself involved. The same effect is achieved with the use of the modal **was to** (obligation, com-

mand) in the expression "*the girl I was to marry*" and of the passive voice in "*I played the part I was expected to play*" (76). The narrator does not take an active role, he limits himself to reacting to the environment.

Edward's attitude to his married condition as well as to his new environment is shown by the careful choice of lexical and structural elements in these initial pages. Lexical items with negative connotation predominate starting with the very name of the village described: "*Massacre*", a "*wild*" and "*menacing*" place (69) where the coconut palms are "*sad*" (65), the whistle of the mountain bird sounds "*lonely*", the people are "*sombre*" (68) and "*Everything is too much*" (70). This last expression shows the character as frankly overwhelmed by the environment. In these circumstances he has a "*feeling of discomfort and melancholy*" (67) and cannot sustain the stare of either Amelie or Christophine (68, 73). Even when he makes the effort of smiling, he seems to get a negative reaction from the local people as when he smiles at a little boy and "*he began to cry*" (66). An analysis of the form of the sentences also shows a strong inclination to the negative as in polarity with the use of **nor** (twice), and **not** and in modality with the inclusion of mood adjuncts of degree such as **hardly** and **little**, and of usuality: **never**. (Halliday 1985). This effect is reinforced by the use of negative indefinite pronouns **no one**, **nothing** in subject/compliment position.⁸

The lack of rapport between the narrator and his environment is highlighted by the use of contrast. It is as if Edward could not think of a positive quality without having to add a negative one.⁹ Or if at any time the environment produced an agreeable impression on him, he felt that this positive quality was of very restricted application or could not last very long.¹⁰ When Edward sees their honeymoon house for the first time, he expresses the same sense of transience: "*Perched on wooden stilts the house seemed to shrink from the forest behind it and crane eagerly out to the distant sea. It was more awkward than ugly, a little sad as if it knew it could not last*" (71-72). This pathetic fallacy displaces the narrator's own feelings and expectations about his future married life on to the house described.

In this context attention should be drawn to the

use of the key lexical item "honeymoon", mentioned three times on the first two pages of the piece. In every case, the noun phrase which contains the compound word is in focal position at the end of the respective sentence. This fact would lead us to expect an enhancing of the usual positive connotation of the word. This expectation, though is frustrated by the environment created around it. The phrase "*honeymoon house*" is first mentioned by the narrator to be immediately taken up and uttered sarcastically as "*sweet honeymoon house*" by the "*sly, spiteful, malignant...*" Amelie (65). The next time the expression appears on page 66, it is in a short paragraph which shows a number of linguistic peculiarities all pointing in the direction of reinforcing the negative effects of immobility in the sense of paralysis of the emotions. The paragraph is made up of three sentences including only two verbs neither of which denotes action. The first is a copula and the semantic weight falls on the word *Massacre* with its heavy connotation of violence ("*So this is Massacre*"). The effect of this sentence with the initial "*So*" is of resigned acceptance of a fact whose existence is independent of the narrator and cannot in any way be affected by him. The second sentence in the paragraph is verbless, contributing to the effect of stasis. At the same time, it includes the negative sequence "*Not... only...*" which places "*sweet honeymoon*" in focal position. The last sentence in the paragraph is initiated by the coordinating conjunction "*And*". This deviant use of a conjunction in place of a conjunctive adjunct (Halliday 1985) to cross sentence boundaries may be interpreted as indicating a subtle semantic twist. We could think of the sentence introduced by "*and*" as an afterthought, an enlargement of the positive connotations of the key phrase "*sweet honeymoon*" since this is the last noun phrase in the previous sentence. In fact the rule for the use of the conjunction **and** would indicate that this is the right interpretation¹¹. We suggest, though, that the effect on the reader is not one of positive reinforcement. Think of what the effect would be if **BUT** were used in place of "*And*". After the profusion of lexical items with negative connotation in the previous lines ("*rain*", "*hail*", "*stealthily*", "*Massacre*", "*interminable journey*"), the use of the adversative conjunctive adjunct would be read as a natural relief from the burden of the present sadness and hopelessness. On the contrary, with the choice of

"And", contrast is avoided and then the final effect is of "more of the same". It is as if subconsciously, Edward was expecting no real change from his present state of mind to be magically produced by their "sweet honeymoon". At the same time, the environment where the conflict evolves is perceived as a trap: "We rode on again, silent in the slanting afternoon sun, the wall of trees on one side, a drop on the other." The trap is set, and as readers we can have no illusions of a happy ending.

In contraposition to Edward's sombre attitude¹², Antoinette is pictured as active. (She waves, runs, talks and smiles) and at ease with the environment with which she engages in warm interaction (She greets the locals and is greeted and welcomed by them) "This is my place" she says "and everything is on our side" (74). The characters' reactions to each other are also different. Wide-eyed, Antoinette gave and received love. Notice that in the example on page 74 quoted above she included him in her feelings of belonging by using the first person plural of the possessive pronoun. Edward on the other hand, "watched her critically" (67), was disconcerted by her emotional response and could not sustain her gaze. Sensing his indifference, she hesitated and he took the opportunity to reassert himself through a rebuff which included both her and the environment as he was asked to shelter from the rain in the house of one of her friends.¹³ As the narrator openly expresses in this section (70), his reason for marriage was the need to gain self-esteem in the eyes of the male members of his family (father and brother) who underestimated him for his financial dependence. Marrying a well-to-do girl would stop the "begging", "And yet...". The solution did not seem satisfactory, the hollow inside could not be filled and resentment resulted in aggression towards the figure who appeared as immediately responsible for the situation. "Her pleading expression annoys me". Antoinette on her side made efforts to bridge the gap and build a liason: she invited him to share her friendly relationship with the local people (67), advised him to protect himself from the cold (70), offered him a drink of water (71), held his hand and toasted to their happiness (73), praised him on his looks (73), and tenderly wiped his forehead (74). In the last two instances mentioned it is of interest to analyse the choice of words and their syntagmatic relationships.

Antoinette's praise provoked in Edward an immediate and abrupt rejection with the result that he dropped the wreath of scented flowers and stepped on it. The syntagmatic contiguity between "flowers" and "her reflection" suggests an association on the paradigmatic level, the traditional cultural analogy: pretty girl\flower. The fact that the flowers were crushed under his shoe triggers another relation of similarity. The fate of the flowers stimulates the reader to anticipate that of the tender Antoinette crushed by his insensitive, prejudiced ways¹⁴.

The analepsis (Genette 1974) in Chapter 2 presents the reader with Edward's memories of his wedding day. The analysis of Theme and Mood (Halliday 1985) in this piece confirms the character's alienation and depersonalization as seen in the preceding Chapter. Only five interpersonal elements are found, two in the reported voice of "one of them" (the aunts, who are evidently more interested in socializing than Edward) and the others in the narrator's own voice but which do not imply actual exchanges since they refer to his wonderings (mental process). The environment is topicalized in the first sentence of the Chapter. The narrator and his reaction to it appear as rheme of the second clause. His bride is introduced in the second sentence, preceded by the negative coordinating conjunction **Not** and called "the girl". The negative is a formal manifestation of his emotional attitude to her and his refusal to give her a name predicts his later insistence on re-naming her Bertha. He refused to accept her for what she was. She was either nobody (a girl\any girl) or someone else. We can perceive the same attitude in his reference to the aunts: "they all look alike", and he addressed "one of them" without identifying her. It is precisely one of them who first referred to the bride by name. Focus on the environment in preference over the people present at the wedding party is also seen in the choice of marked theme. There is only one instance of marked theme, an adjunct realized by a prepositional phrase referring to place. This is significant since the narrator's actions are guided by the demands of the environment rather than by his inner feelings, wishes or intentions.

At this point we could ask ourselves how we can account for the protagonist's alienation from his environment. Why such a negative reaction against

his wife and the world he came in contact with through marriage?

Tzvetan Todorov (1982) distinguishes between three different axes in his study of alterity in the context of racial and cultural difference. On the axiological level, the individual can think of the other as good or bad. If good, he is the same as me and then I love him. On the praxeological level (referred to degree of closeness) the individual can adopt the other's values (identification), impose his values on the other (assimilation), or remain indifferent, neutral. On the epistemic level the individual either knows or does not know the other with a wide range of intermediate states. Where should we place Edward given this taxonomy?¹⁵

The first person connected with his wife's environment that Edward mentions at the opening of Part II of the novel is the half-cast Amelie, one of Antoinette's servants. This girl is described as "*sly, spiteful and malignant, like much else in this place*" (65). This initial attitude towards the local people is sustained throughout. Racial prejudice is a very strong component in this feeling. It is significant that he should use the qualifier "*half-cast*" to describe Amelie in presenting the character. Van Dijk (1998) in his study of racism sustains that the "dominant images of Africans and African Americans were adapted to the socio-economics of slavery, segregation, resistance and affirmative action, respectively, namely as being lazy, ostentatious, rebellious, violent, criminal..."¹⁶ Similar images prevail in the mind of Edward in his assessment of the local people. None of them is seen as submissive, Amelie is malignant and he is afraid of Christophine (74). He also thinks that his wife's former nurse is lazy (86) although this fact is disconfirmed by evidence from the story line. Antoinette had to dismiss her former nurse and the breakfast tray twice before Edward woke up (85-86). On the axiological plane, then, the locals are seen as characterized by negative qualities, hence considered inferior and unworthy of trust or love as we see in the extracts below:

"*She trusted them and I did not*" (89)

"*Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?*" I'd say.

"*Why not?*"

"*I wouldn't hug and kiss them,*" I'd say, '*I couldn't.*' (91)

Racial prejudice also marks Edward's relation with Antoinette. He suspected her of being racially impure as we see in his report of their argument in Chapter 6: "*For a moment she looked very much like Amelie. Perhaps they were related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place*". (127) or later "*You frightened?, she said, imitating a negro's voice, singing and insolent*"¹⁷. (129) Cultural discrimination has also a large part to play in this tragic tale. Edward was confused by Antoinette because she was "*not English or European either*" (67) Although she was "*Creole of pure descent*", she was still "*alien*". It was only when he could see her as a "*pretty English girl*" (71) that he condescended to please her. He thought: "*...her eyes... can be disconcerting...*" (67) In fact it was her cultural background that **dis-concerted** him. From the start of their relationship, both cultural difference and the suspicion that she could be tainted by vestiges of black blood denied the possibility of his concerting a harmonious connection with his newly-wed wife. Preconceptions conditioned his view of Antoinette and the West-indians with whom he came into contact and tinged his judgements of them with an unfavourable hue whatever they did (as evidence see the case of Christophine's laziness). No real knowledge could result from such a biased approach. On the epistemic plane then we can say that Edward could hardly claim to know those around him. As he says of Antoinette "*...she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did.*" (93)

On the praxeological level there is diversity in Edward's reactions. His passivity, as seen in the passages analysed above, is easily assimilated to indifference to the locals and their ways. He was not interested in either learning about their culture or in assimilating them to his own. In the case of Antoinette, though, he used power to exercise control over her ending up in her being shut up in the attic of Rochester's home in England (Part III of the novel consists of her account of this experience). The analysis of the mechanisms used by Edward to dominate his wife will show that this illegitimate use of power responds to still another case of discrimination on the basis of difference interpreted

as deficiency. Antoinette was a Creole, she might have mixed blood and what could be even more determinant in her cruel fate, she was a woman.

As already mentioned, the world created by the language of "Wide Sargasso Sea" is marked by patriarchal conceptions, it is a world created by men, ruled by men and guided by the principles of reason and dual thinking. As Dale Spender says (1980) "While men have had the monopoly of the production of meaning it has not been inordinately difficult to sustain the belief that there is but one, single, reality". And this is the reality women have been under pressure to accept or otherwise threatened with suppression. In the novel we are studying, the consequences of dissidence are downright brutal. Men exercise both physical and psychological violence on female characters to impose their hegemonic power as exemplified by Christophine's stories on men's brutal use of the machete on their wives (151) and by Edward's rough dealings with Antoinette (151).

It should be noticed that the character of Edward is paradoxically presented in this novel as simultaneously a victimizer and a victim of the patriarchal order. Relying on the custom of primogeniture, Edward's father left all his property to his eldest son, and sent the youngest to the West Indies to make his fortune by marrying a rich heiress. The letter to his father that Edward framed in his mind as they rode to Granbois gives plain expression to the young man's feelings about the transaction: "Dear father. The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to). I have a modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother, the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it..." (70). Not without resentment, he accepted his destiny as younger son. In fact his passivity suggests that he felt manipulated by circumstances. In spite of being placed at a disadvantage, though, he did not question the law which deprived him of the rights of his name.¹⁸ On the contrary he easily fitted in the role assigned to him by patriarchal society and reenacted the power game in the relationship with his own wife. He had been raised under this ideology and responded

blindly to the deadly mechanism.

The workings of power in the relation Antoinette-Edward are reflected in the imposition of a unique, masculine way of symbolizing the real. Edward seems to believe there is only one reality to which he has privileged access. No other view is valid. In reference to his wife, he says: "She often questioned me about England and listened attentively to my answers, but I was certain that nothing I said made much difference. Her mind was already made up... Reality might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her but it would not be reality. It would only be a mistake, a misfortune, a wrong path taken, her fixed ideas would never change." (94) It is surprising how easy it would be to apply this judgement to himself in view of his prejudiced conception of the West Indies and its people. His view of femininity is equally marked by prejudice. "All day she'd be like any other girl, smile at herself in her looking-glass (do you like this scent?)...". "She'd be silent, or angry for no reason and chatter to Christophine in patois." (91) The first sentence implies that all girls are naturally vain and sensuous and the second that Antoinette is fickle. In the ideology of patriarchy all women are childish, vain, frivolous and capricious. The use of a generalization ("like any other girl") helps to create the idea that the opinion expressed is of universal validity. The logic then runs that, if the woman is immature, it is the male's duty to rule her for her own benefit and his prerogative to use her for his pleasure: "One afternoon the sight of a dress... made me breathless and savage with desire. When I was exhausted I turned away from her and slept, still without a word or a caress." (93). The woman is an object that serves a purpose: to provide man with the money he is incapable of earning by himself "...she has bought me..." "I have sold my soul..." (71) or to satisfy his baser instincts. According to Hélène Cixous (1991) the masculine libidinal economy is based on appropriation, taking possession of the other with the consequent deprivation for the woman.

Stereotypical and sexist representations of the female protagonist come to light in the analysis of Edward's descriptions of his wife and of their interactions in this part of the novel. At the micro level of analysis the basic assumption that conditions the tragic development of their relationship is that

women are deficient: that they cannot judge people and situations appropriately, that they are faulty because they cannot be objective. When Antoinette tried to tell Edward about the destruction of Coulibri, his reaction was mistrust: "*I began to wonder how much of all this was true, how much imagined, distorted. Certainly many of the old estate houses were burned. You saw ruins all over the place.*" (133) As with his assessment of Christophine, prejudice prevailed and in spite of clear evidence he preferred to think of her as unworthy of trust. Apparently she did not see what she said she saw or her mind was unreliable, too easily influenced by emotion or imagination and could not differentiate between the real and the unreal. Reason, as the basis for science and philosophical thought has been a highly valued possession of man in the course of the history of western culture. The woman, on the other hand has been traditionally "graced" with the privilege of imagination, a quality which has been ranked as less important or significant for the advancement of humanity. This has naturally led to a devaluation of the woman's contribution. Men, even if it is somebody as morally repulsive as Daniel, will receive Edward's attention and be given credit for his words. Neither Antoinette nor Christophine received such treatment. As Edward told Christophine: "*I have listened to all you had to say and I don't believe you.*" (159) As he returned from his visit to Daniel, he met Antoinette on the veranda. He reports the first words they exchanged as follows: "*'Will you listen to me for God's sake?' ...She had said this before and I had not answered, now I told her, 'Of course. I'd be the brute you doubtless think me if I did not do that'.*" (127) He was not really willing or ready to listen, but he did so to avoid being judged a brute. Later when she heard that he had seen Daniel she said: "*'He tells lies about us and he is sure that you will believe him and not listen to the other side.' 'Is there another side?' I said*" (128).

Antoinette, in spite of her husband's doubts on her capacity for clear judgement, was very perceptive and assessed both Edward and her situation accurately. In this scene, Edward's abusive use of power is seen in his attempt to control the context of discourse (Van Dijk 1998)¹⁹. He insisted (three times) that she should wait to the following day to talk about her past life and he imposed conditions on his willingness to listen: "*Only if you promise*

to be reasonable" (129). This last utterance is especially poignant if we think that "to be reasonable" implies acting and behaving, adopting a way of thinking and feeling which is essentially male since in the course of history it has been man who has dictated what is or is not reasonable in accordance with a particular logic of his own. She was only allowed to speak if she conformed to the norm, if she respected the supremacy of the logos. In the hierarchical organization set up by patriarchy Origin, God, Being, Truth and Reason reign supreme over their opposite, subordinate terms.²⁰ This leads to the privilege of a unique reality for which man is the norm and from which women are excluded, not having had the possibility of encoding their meanings in culture²¹. In this context the woman takes refuge in silence or duplicity as we see in Antoinette: "*Then people came to see us again and though I still hated them and was afraid of their cool, teasing eyes, I learned to hide it.*" (132) An alternative evasive strategy to the imposition of the strongly metonymic mode of expression (Jakobson 1956) of the male, is woman's choice of paratactic structures.²² This stylistic feature implies sparse use of subordination and the avoidance of temporal or causal explanations. The use of a looser syntax may be interpreted as a subconscious policy to escape the shackles of a logical way of structuring reality experienced as alien. In Antoinette's speech it is possible to detect the use of polysyndeton, a paratactic device that consists in the connection of ideas with a series of "and" phrases. "*'And very poor,' she said. 'Don't forget that. For five years. Isn't it quick to say. And isn't it long to live. And lonely. She was so lonely that she grew away from other people. That happens. It happened to me too but it was easier for me because I hardly remembered anything else. For her it was strange and frightening. And then she was so lovely'*" (130) The effect of such a speech is of sameness, items are not classified hierarchically, there is no explanation, events just happen. The rhetorical figure of metaphor corresponds to this analogical form of discourse organization.

Women's attempt to create an alternative logical mode to define and give expression to reality can only be experienced as a threat by the patriarchal order. Since knowledge, traditionally under man's control, could thus change hands. We should

remember here that as Dale Spender (1980) says "Reality is constructed and sustained primarily through talk". At Antoinette's insistence Edward is forced to give in in spite of fear: "'Of course I will listen, of course we can talk now, if that's what you wish.' But the feeling of something unknown and hostile was very strong." (129) Confronted with this situation, men feel insecure and develop defence mechanisms which include the effacement of the dangerous other. Antoinette's brave attempt to make herself heard was a cry in the dark and she would meet the same fate as her mother. Both would be confined, shut up, their voices muffled into inaudibility. Antoinette would suffer actual physical confinement in Part III of the novel but Edward tried to silence her before through other means. He encouraged her to drink to drown her voice, or ordered her to sleep (137) (94), or to rest (94) (129) so as to lull her mind into oblivion. Edward made frequent use of the imperative in these scenes in which he went so far as to entreat her to die. (92) (94) If his wish came true, this would remove the menace she represented.

To name is a powerful means to exercise control over reality. It is by naming that we classify and give order to the otherwise formless mass of experience. Edward used this power abusively when he imposed the name Bertha on his wife. His was an act of de-personalization and of appropriation of the other. Such acts of violence found only weak resistance in Antoinette who eventually yielded to what she felt to be her fate.

"'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'" (136)

It is poignant to see how childish her reaction could be on such occasions. She wished her father were there to defend her (147) or she asked Edward to come to her bed to bid her good-night (136) like a child who hopes to dispel the night fears with a parental kiss. She thus re-enacted ancient ways of behaviour related to her childhood and to the learnt patriarchal ideology. She could not give ears to Christophine's words "...pack up and go" (109). The alternative pattern of behaviour she represented (the independent woman) was dismissed with con-

tempt: "... 'but how can she know the best thing for me to do, this ignorant, obstinate old negro woman, who is not certain if there is such a place as England?'" (112) Antoinette's naïveté contrasts here with Christophine's natural wisdom. In their exchange on the question of England,²³ the former took the latter's words at face value. But Christophine was wiser than her protégée could recognize. She knew of the gap between sign and referent. She intuitively recognized that the sign is cultural, that it involves ideology and implies interpretation. Christophine may have been uneducated but she was clever and more sophisticated in her knowledge of the world than Antoinette who was trapped like a butterfly in the net patriarchy wove around her. In her struggle with Edward, she was drained of her liveliness and gaiety and became a doll (149), a marionette (150) or a body "...I drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl." (138) As Antoinette said: "There are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about." (128) Edward crushed her inner self as he crushed the fragipani wreath.

As we have seen, the relation between Antoinette and nature in the development of this text is significant and sustained. As Christophine said: "She is Creole girl, and she have the sun in her." (158) She was one with her environment and her focalization of nature, intensely meaningful to her, is characterized by vivid sensory imagery connected with organic life. The metonymies of life in her speech contrast with those of death in his. For Edward both the West Indian setting and his own wife represent a mystery and a threat.

"I was lost and afraid among these enemy trees, so certain of danger that when I heard footsteps and a shout I did not answer." (105)

"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.'" (87)

In Edward's eyes mystery also pervaded the beautiful Antoinette.

"(Is she trying to tell me that is the secret of this place? That there is no other way? She knows. She

knows)" (92).

Fear arose from his difficulty in grasping and making sense of his surroundings. And as she resisted his probings, he accused her of duplicity and tried to impose himself on her. Christophine gave expression to the logic of his behaviour. When he called his wife Marionette, she commented:

"That word mean doll, eh? Because she don't speak. You want to force her to cry and to speak" (154)

Edward could not tolerate "otherness", he could only accept the logic of the same and unless she was ready to "adjust", her behaviour would be named deficient, illogical, mad and she would be marginalized. When he asked Christophine about Annette's (Antoinette's mother) madness, she described the situation with great lucidity: "They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad. Question, question. But no kind word, no friends, and her husband he go off, he leave her..." (157)

Christophine understood how powerful the word could be, how language could create an event. "They tell her she is mad", and language conjures up the reality.

Simultaneously, all those natural and cultural

aspects of the environment which did not fit Edward's logic were experienced as alien (88) and disturbing (103). The easiest and simplest response to this predicament was to class those manifestations as unreal: "that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream" (80) Such impressions cannot be probed by reason and as a consequence they deserve little or no attention. Reason can in this way become an instrument of subjection or "a scheme to capture and master,... metaphorically rape the woman" (Felman). It should be added that this strategy, seen here in process at the level of micro structure, can also be detected in imperial policies as countries set out to conquer foreign lands and peoples.

The beautiful island where the story evolves was too alien to allow for even a minimum of recognition in Edward. "The magic and the loveliness" (172) he came in contact with concealed the promise of paradise but he only saw a "false heaven". (170) He preferred the safe, well-trodden path of reason to the freedom offered by the magic of self-forgetting passion. He would not understand the gift she offered: a world of feeling and jouissance, of milk and honey (Cixous 1991). Hatred, equated to sanity in the last pages of this text, was chosen over love and the long-sought "treasure" (169) was for ever lost in him. The reality that the new land/woman represented would remain undiscovered. The secret would be kept intact.

NOTES

1. We know, though, through the author's own specifications and through intertextual references in the novel, that he is Edward Rochester from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.
2. Information extracted from Encyclopaedia Britannica de 1973.
3. This paper will concentrate on this level of analysis.
4. Although the novel is not divided into chapters, the pieces separated by the stylized drawing of a flower in the Norton edition have been numbered here for the purpose of easy reference.
5. Unless otherwise specified, italicized texts and numbers between brackets refer to the Norton Edition of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1982).
6. For examples of this clearly recurrent device see pages 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, and 71.
7. The classification of all finite verbs in Chapter I with the exclusion of those in the direct speech of other characters results in the following figures:

relational process (including intensive, circumstantial and possessive)	85
behavioural process	18
mental process	75
verbal process	38
existential process	9
material process	136

8. "Nor did she,..." (76), "It was on a black face, not a white one" (77), "...Antoinette does not like Spanish Town." (77).. "I remember little...", "I hardly remember..." (77) (mood adjunct of degree), "She never had anything to do with me at all" (76) (mood adjunct of usuality).
9. "He spoke good English, but...", "The dress was spotless but her uncovered hair..." (72), "This place is very beautiful but..." (75)
10. "Standing on the veranda I breathed the sweetness of the air.... I went with her unwillingly for the rest of the place seemed neglected and deserted." (73). " 'It's all very comfortable,' I said.... But the feeling of security had left me. "
11. "The conjunctions in this group suggest addition The addition introduced by *and* is generally something that would naturally be expected" Eckersley (1960) In the case we are studying the positive value of honeymoon would lead us to expect a different and positive attitude of the narrator towards the material conditions of his environment, which, at the moment of speaking, are seen as adverse.
12. He says that «*by far the gayest member of the wedding party*» was the half-witted Emile.
13. *She spoke hesitatingly as if she expected me to refuse, so it was easy to do so* (67)
14. The same symbolical association is established by Edward further on in the section after he narrates his reception of Daniel's letter: "Then I passed an orchid with long sprays of golden brown flowers. One of them touched my cheek and I remembered picking some for her one day. 'They are like you', I told her. Now I stopped, broke a spray off and trampled it into the mud." (99) The difference between the two instances lies in the fact that while in the first we are dealing with a textual relation, in the second it is the character who consciously establishes the semantic connection.
15. The thorough application of this complex taxonomy to Edward's relationship to all the characters in the piece would overreach the extension of this work. Only the most salient and relevant elements will be considered here.
16. Van Dijk is referring to the European imaginary in the course of the last centuries.
17. The underlining is ours.
18. It is interesting here to notice that Rhys deliberately avoids giving the male protagonist a name. This semiotic gesture is very significant since the right to the patronymic is a central issue in patriarchy. By this device Rhys points to Edward's role as a victim.
19. Van Dijk includes the following elements in the context of discourse: setting, ongoing actions, participants, roles and participants' mental representations.
20. Shoshana Felman "Women and Madness: The Critical Fallacy" in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (de), *The Feminist Reader*.
21. "...the knowledge which we have inherited has been constructed mostly by males in their attempt to provide meaning for their existence, with the result that the possibly vast repertoire of women's meanings - which could explain and order their view of the world - are missing from the language and from areas of codified experience, such as history or art or political science. (Spender 1980)
22. Josephine Donovan, "Style and Power" in Dale Bauer et al ed. 1991.
23. " 'England, said Christophine, who was watching me. 'You think there is such a place?' 'How can you ask that? You know there is.' 'I never see the damn place, how I know? 'You do not believe that there is a country called England?' She blinked and answered quickly, 'I don't say I don't believe, I say I don't know, I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it. Besides I ask myself is this place like they tell us? Some say one thing, some different...' " (111-112).

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