Wide Sargasso Sea

a novel by Jean Rhys
Jean Rhys

- Born August 24, 1890 in Roseau, Dominica.
- Daughter of a Welsh doctor and white Creole mother.
- Young white girl in a predominantly black community.
- Came to England in 1907, drifted into a series of jobs—chorus girl, mannequin, artist's model—after the death of her father.
- She began to write when the first of her three marriages broke up.
- In 1966 she made a sensational reappearance with Wide Sargasso Sea.
- Died in 1979
Inspiration for *Sargasso*

- Wanted to personify the symbol of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*
- "I thought I'd try to write her a life."
- Wanted to restore the voice of Bertha Mason
- Challenge to *Jane Eyre* rather than a true prequel.
Antoinette Cosway

- 1st and 3rd parts are told in her perspective
- Grows up feeling isolated
- Rejection throughout life
- Ultimately goes mad
Annette Cosway

- Mother of Antoinette

- Burning down of her house and death of her son drive Annette into madness

- Sent away to live in the country

- Died year before Antoinette visits the convent
Mr. Rochester

- 2\textsuperscript{nd} part told in his perspective
- Never named in the book
- Selfish and dishonest
- Married Antoinette for money
- Controlling of Antoinette
Tia

• Daughter of Christophine’s friend

• Friendly with Antoinette until their fight

• Throws rock at Antoinette (in Part 1)

• In Antoinette’s imagination (end of Part 3)
Richard Mason

• Stepbrother of Antoinette

• Arranges financial settlement between Antoinette and Mr. Rochester

• Visits Antoinette in England and she attacks him
Christophine

- Servant for the Cosway family
- Loyal and independent
- Practices magic
- Caregiver for Antoinette
Identity Struggle

- Antoinette associates her identity with three things:
  • Racial Identity
  • Name
  • Place
Racial Identity

• Racial Identity
• Too light for Jamaica and too dark for England
• Pg. 25,
• “As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on her. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass” (27).
Name

• She associates herself with the name Antoinette
• However, Mr. Rochester imposes the name Bertha on her to further break down her identity and how she views herself
• Bertha is the maiden name of her mother and therefore it makes Antoinette feel uncomfortable seeing as her mother goes mad----- does not want the same outcome for herself
• “He hates me now. I hear him every night walking up and down the veranda. Up and down. When he passes my door he says, ‘Good-night, Bertha.’ He never calls me Antoinette now. He has found out it was my mother’s name. ‘I hope you will sleep well, Bertha’—it cannot be worse”(68).
Place

• When Antoinette’s mother, Anette, is taken from Coulibri, Antoinette immediately links this with her mother’s madness.

• “She was part of Coulibri, that had gone, so she had gone, I was certain of it” (28).

• Mr. Rochester takes her away from the honeymoon house. It kills Antoinette’s mentality.

• “I was tired of these people. I disliked their laughter and their tears, their flattery and envy, conceit and deceit. And I hated the place... Above all I hated her” (103).