

Tragic Causes of the Heroine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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Abstract: As a descendant of a former slave owner, the female protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Public Security Towanet, lives between white and black people, but suffers from the dual exclusion of black and white society. She has been unable to integrate with either party and deeply troubled by her racial orientation. As a woman, she lives in a patriarchal society and is deeply oppressed by racism and patriarchy. It can be said that Antoinette's life was lonely and tragic. This article interprets Antoinette's tragic experience and analyzes how colonial women are marginalized under the dual oppression of patriarchy and colonialism, losing their voice but unwilling to resist fate and pursue the power of happiness and freedom. At the same time, reveal the true cause of his tragic life: the dual oppression under colonial hegemony and patriarchal society.

Keywords: *Wide Sargasso Sea*; Patriarchy; Class consciousness; Female discourse power

1. Introduction

Jean Rhys is an English writer. One of the most famous fan novels of the 20th century, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, made Jane Rees famous. From this work, which is known as the "prequel of *Jane Eyre*", Jane Reese's Antoinette and Rochester are fully suited to the personality characteristics and character Settings in *Jane Eyre*. Jean Rhys's masterful writing and relentless exposure of colonialism make *Wide Sargasso Sea* an intellectual and artistic masterpiece.

Jean Rhys is one of the first British female writers to use stream-of-consciousness techniques to express the psychological activities of characters. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the use of symbols and metaphors is everywhere. The subtle associations and endless meanings brought by them make ordinary things contain enormous artistic power, fully demonstrating the organic combination of things and psychology, surface and inner, individual and group, nature and society.^[1] Like *Jane Eyre*, they all depict women's efforts to pursue equality and happiness under the domination of men, which has an important influence on the development of feminist literary criticism. However, due to their different life backgrounds, Charlotte Bronte and Riess view the world differently. In *Jane Eyre*, Bronte reflects some imperialist feelings, while Riess merciless criticizes imperialism with the image of Antoinette, revealing more deeply the harm of the patriarchal social hierarchy of colonialism and thus having deeper social significance. Antoinette set fire to the estate and himself, a self-defeating defiance that symbolized a certain uncompromising pursuit. It is this kind of persistence that makes the book *Wide Sargasso Sea* show a unique brilliance. Comparing *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we will find that the "crazy woman" story has been subverted after a hundred years, and it has become more complete and more moving.

2. Signs of Antoine's Madness

The protagonist, Antoinette, endures a deprived childhood devoid of her mother's affection and grapples with the challenges faced by individuals of mixed-race in an unforgiving society. Consequently, this young girl who should be basking in the warmth of happiness is instead plagued by fear and despondency throughout her days. Amidst these arduous circumstances, she must navigate and resolve numerous contradictions that ensnare her in a web of anxiety from which escape seems impossible. Ultimately, she finds solace only through the tragic act of taking her own life as it becomes the sole means to realize her authentic self.

2.1 Before Marriage

There are many reasons for loneliness, such as depression, lack of communication with the opposite sex, lack of love from parents, marital discord, no friends around, etc. In childhood, Antoinette like any other girl, was a little girl with a vision of happiness. But her longing for life was immediately overwhelmed by the pain of life. At the beginning of *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jane Rees reveals the plight of the Antoinette family in loneliness and helplessness. Antoinette struggled with the circumstances of her falling family, while enduring the rejection and hatred of both whites and blacks. In this is the most should be the role of comfort and in the family, she did not get comfort and encouragement. To overcome inferiority and achieve healthy personality development, the influence of family and external society is extremely

important. And here, mothers play an important role.^[2] What Antoinette lacked most, however, was her mother's love. She gets no attention from her mother, who cares more for her sick brother Biel, and becomes even more lonely. When Antoinette wakes up from a nightmare, her mother tucks her in and says, "You're making so much noise. I must go and see Beale, you're scaring him." She yearns for her mother's love and care. The lack of maternal love makes her feel that she is an abandoned child, thus producing extreme insecurity, which was one of the reasons for her personality loss and subsequent madness.

2.2 After Getting Married

Antoinette's marriage is different from other normal couples in that it is made up of exploitation, deception and betrayal. One of them wants power, fame, and wealth. Another fears the consequences of any failure, attempting to easily achieve a satisfactory result by taking shortcuts. In addition, there is a significant difference in their identity and situation, and their relationship has not undergone long-term deepening and adjustment. Its essence is an arranged marriage full of benefits and deception. Rochester always had estrangement and hostility towards his wife, although the initial period of passionate love concealed this fact, as time passed, this weakness became apparent. And Antoinette tends to give up his own ideas and submit to the other side. In Antoinette's marriage, she was not an entirely innocent victim. In order to gain the white identity she longed for so long, she married Rochester. Subconsciously, she thinks that marrying a pure white man can change her current awkward position and help her find social belonging.^[3] The appearance of Rochester is the beginning of Antoinette's disorientation and the climax of her inner conflict. Even if the purpose of both parties is not simple, but Antoinette is really into this marriage. She passionately gives everything she can: money, chastity, love, even an unsavory past. And this marriage full of calculation and exploitation is doomed to no good results. The anxiety brought about by this insincere marriage and her inner contradictions exacerbated the formation of her madness. And after Rochester uncovered the mask, he suppressed and humiliated her, deliberately cheated on Antoinette, and more importantly, never gave her a shred of love. All the gentlemanly care before the marriage was just a disguise to deceive her for profit. This was undoubtedly a great blow to Antoinette, which also increased her mental anxiety, and further into madness.

3. The Causes of the Tragedy

Born during the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean, Antoinette's family, being white, faced discrimination and hostility. Social exclusion, cultural oppression and the predicament of life all contributed to the formation of Antoinette's madness. On the surface, Antoinette's tragedy is induced by interpersonal relations, but in fact it is due to the inherent contradictions formed by specific culture. It's not that Antoinette did anything wrong or that her character flaws made others treat her so mean. In fact, she had done nothing wrong. Social culture defines her as guilty, and she can only and must be guilty.

3.1 Unassimilable Class and Race

Jamaica and Dominica were colonized by white Europeans for hundreds of years, with only 1 percent of whites living on the islands in the mid-19th century. Antoinette is a mixed-race descendant of British colonists in Jamaica, and as a Creole, she is seen as an outlier everywhere. Slavery had just broken up, and both slaves and natives were deeply hostile to the colonialists, while real whites despised mixed-race families.^[4] As descendants of the early Europeans who colonized the West Indies, white Creoles, like the indigenous black people of the West Indies, were subject to colonization by British colonial rulers. But unlike the latter, they also had the identity of early colonists. It is this dual identity of colonizer and colonized that makes them not only not recognized by the new British colonists, but also hated and rejected by the local people, and fall into a very awkward situation. Although slavery had been abolished in Jamaica at that time, Antoinette, the daughter of a former slave owner, was rejected and hated by both whites and blacks from an early age. This dilemma made Antoinette deeply confused and afraid of the question of self-identity. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys emphasizes the contradictions and barriers between people in different social backgrounds. The title of the book is not so much a symbol of the vast sea that both separates and connects Britain and the West Indies as it is of a much wider ocean - one that blocks human communication, undermines the social status, ethnic background and cultural oppression that build true love and trust.

3.2 Oppression in a Patriarchal Society

Antoinette's marriage was arranged by her stepfather Mason and Rochester's father and brother; she had no say in the matter and was compelled to marry Rochester, an English stranger. According to English law and colonial custom, all dowry property went to her husband, Rochester. Conversely, Rochester married her solely for acquiring her dowry and gaining complete control over her. After losing his property rights, Antoinette was stripped of his independent identity. Rochester labeled her as mentally deranged and forcibly brought her to England for imprisonment.^[5] Rochester deliberately changed Antoinette's name to "Bertha," and name changes mean a lot here. As an independent code name, it is an important sign of the identity of a social person. The author's description here of Rochester forcibly changing his wife's name has a very profound connotation. This symbolizes the denial and deprivation of women's subjective self, identity and personal freedom by

male power, which indicates that women will completely lose their right to speak in society and family.

4. Conclusion

Antoinette's tragic life, her unhappy marriage to Rochester, is rooted in the tragedy caused by colonialism and the patriarchal marriage of traditional power. At the same time, the work also reflects her resistance to patriarchal marriage and the absolute dominance of men. The "Crazy Woman in the Attic", which was neglected in *Jane Eyre*, has become a real character with flesh and blood in Jean Rhys's pen. People see the tragic fate of a kind, sensitive and passionate woman with life, and her destruction has a shocking tragic force. Antoinette yearns for love but is always in a state of loneliness, yearns for freedom but is in the pain of insanity, and finally shows her last resistance with a fire. She fought at the cost of her own life, like a moth to a flame, knowing that the end would only be self-destruction, but willing to die without regret.^[6] It was the only leverage she had left, the best solution a poor woman could think of under the double pressure of circumstances and ideas. This suicidal defiance is emblematic of a determined and uncompromising pursuit. Jane Riis used Antoinette's image to expose the contradictions and barriers between people in different social backgrounds, and also ruthlessly criticized the unequal social system, so it has deeper social significance.

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