

Remembering the Future: The Temporal Relationship between Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Stephanie de Villiers

University of Pretoria

devilliers.stephanie@yahoo.com

Abstract:

If you can remember your future, can you change it? In this article, I examine this question with reference to the intertextual and temporal relationship between Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason burns down the house of her husband, Rochester. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha, who has been renamed Antoinette, is locked in the attic and remembers her past in *Jane Eyre* which, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is located in her future. She remembers that she must set the house on fire in order to fulfil the role she plays in *Jane Eyre*, where she is an obstacle that must be overcome before Jane and Rochester can end up together. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys critiques this role of the madwoman by providing Antoinette with a history and an explanation for her madness. This article explores the relationship between the two novels, arguing that, through the intertextual relationship, Rhys subverts conventional notions of time as linear and chronological in order to reject Brontë's depiction of female madness, and to transform the interpretation of the madwoman.

Opsomming:

As jy jou toekoms kan onthou, kan jy dit verander? In hierdie artikel ondersoek ek hierdie vraag met verwysing na die intertekstuele en tydsverwantskap tussen Charlotte Brontë se *Jane Eyre* (1847) en Jean Rhys se *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). In *Jane Eyre* brand Bertha

Mason haar man, Rochester, se huis af. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* word Bertha, wat herdoop is tot Antoinette, in die solder toegesluit en sy onthou haar verlede in *Jane Eyre*, wat in haar toekoms geleë is in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Sy onthou dat sy die huis aan die brand moet steek om die rol wat sy in *Jane Eyre* speel te vervul – waar sy ’n struikelblok is wat oorkom moet word voordat Jane en Rochester by mekaar kan uitkom. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* kritiseer Rhys hierdie rol van die waansinnige vrou deur Antoinette se geskiedenis en ’n verklaring vir haar waansin te gee. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die verwantskap tussen die twee romans, met die argument dat Rhys, by wyse van die intertekstuele verwantskap, konvensionele idees van tyd as lineêr en chronologies, omverwerp om Brontë se uitbeelding van vroulike waansin te verwerp, en om die interpretasie van die waansinnige vrou te verander.

“I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now” (Rhys 1966:121). Towards the end of Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), the protagonist, Antoinette, utters this statement. Descended into madness and locked up in an attic, she begins to remember a future set out for her by the madwoman, Bertha, in Charlotte Brontë’s canonical *Jane Eyre* (1847). *Jane Eyre* is a Bildungsroman about the eponymous Jane, who falls in love with her employer, Rochester. He, however, has a mad wife, Bertha, who stands in the way of their happiness. Towards the end of the novel, Bertha burns down Rochester’s house and commits suicide in the process, which allows Rochester and Jane to end up in happy union. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, written more than a century after the publication of *Jane Eyre*, Rhys critiques this representation of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* by providing her with a history and a voice, renaming her Antoinette. In this article, I examine the temporal and intertextual relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, paying attention not only to the particular rendition of female madness to be

found in each text, but also to questions of time and temporality. I specifically focus on the ways in which this intertextual relationship critiques the Victorian representation of madness in *Jane Eyre* and how, by providing a history for the madwoman in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys changes the depiction of Bertha/Antoinette's madness.

While the relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is one of the most well-known examples of intertextuality, it is important to examine the theory and origins of intertextuality in order to understand the ways in which this relationship influences an audience's reading of the madwoman's actions. In his book *Intertextualities* (2000), Graham Allen explores the origins and development of the theories of intertextuality, with specific focus on the principal scholars and theorists of intertextuality, including Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva. Allen writes that the theory of intertextuality rests on the notion that reading "is a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations" (2000:1). In other words, a text does not stand on its own, but is connected to all those texts that come before it, as well as those that come after it. Kristeva coined the term "intertextuality" as a result of her "attempt to combine Saussurean and Bakhtinian theories of language and literature" (Allen 2000:3). While neither of these theorists used the term or necessarily focussed on intertextual relations as such, their theories on language form the foundation of intertextual theory.

Saussure's work focussed on signs and what he termed "semiology" and, for him, language "is a structured system of conventional signs, studied in their internal complexity as if frozen in time" (Leitch 2010:847). Bakhtin, on the other hand, focussed on dialogism, and the ways in which language acts not only as a connection between people, but the ways in which meaning is connected. This relates to intertextuality in the sense that, for Bakhtin, the

author and reader must share meaning in order for successful communication to occur. His argument rests on the notion “that all language responds to previous utterances and to pre-existent patterns of meaning and evaluation, but also promotes and seeks to promote further utterances” (Bakhtin cited in Allen 2000:19).

Influenced by Saussurian linguistics and Bakhtinian theory, Kristeva’s focus is on the abstract connections between texts. Her argument, as well as the introduction of the term “intertextuality”, is that no text can be completely original and is therefore influenced and shaped by its preceding texts. She argues that a text is “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given texts, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva 1966-1967:36). Therefore, whether or not an author is aware of this, any written text is connected to others, either in the influence of ideas or as a response to them.

Roland Barthes’s influence on intertextual theory is brought forth in his essay ‘The Death of the Author’ wherein he argues that the author of a text relinquishes the interpretation of that text once it is written; the “Author-God” (Barthes 1968:1324) metaphorically dies and the reader is free to interpret the meaning as he/she chooses. Barthes posits the argument that “a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (1968:1324). Therefore, in concurrence with Kristeva’s views, all texts can be interpreted in a variety of ways precisely because no text is original – any given text is influenced by “the innumerable centres of culture” in which it exists (Barthes 1968:1324). While these theorists are by no means the only ones to influence and shape intertextuality as a theory or genre, and while it would take an entire book to fully explore intertextuality, these are the principal foundations of intertextual theory.

In addition to an examination of the theories of intertextuality, an examination of temporality and postcolonial temporality is necessary in order to understand the relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The concept of time, temporality and the ways in which time functions have been of concern to scientists, philosophers, and even artists since before the invention of the mechanical clock in the thirteenth century. Russel West-Pavlov writes that time is “one of the oldest and most complex subjects of philosophical reflection, artistic representation and aesthetic discourse. It underpins virtually all aspects of everyday life, as even the term ‘everyday’ reveals” (2013:3). For Plato, as Argyris Nicolaidis explains, “time is the mobile image of a motionless eternity” (2008:109), while Aristotle saw time as the result of “a mapping of motion into numbers” (2008:109). For Newton, there exists “a single, universal framework of time, in which events happen sequentially, or, if they are simultaneous, occur in synchronicity within a single framework” (Newton cited in West-Pavlov 2013:25). Resisting such unitary or universal notions of time, West-Pavlov, in his book *Temporalities*, examines concepts of time and the ways in which time has been viewed throughout history, and then serves to proffer the idea that there is “an alternative vision of multiple temporal flows which are coeval with the dynamism of life itself” (2013:11). The preoccupation with time stems not only from the wish to understand the existence and passing of time, but also from the desire to explore the relationship between the past, the present, and the future. This, of course, also means that temporality is closely linked to intertextuality and the relationships between texts. While it seems “that much of modernity’s cultural production consists of attempts to overcome time” (West-Pavlov 2013:33), artists and writers also have also become preoccupied with the rejection of traditional views of time. As Brian Richardson argues, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw “a preference for experienced or ‘subjective’ time as opposed to ‘mechanical’ or monochromatic time, and a general suspicion of linearity and teleology” (2006:603). This

suspicion of time as linear and chronological led to the creation of works that deviate from traditional temporality, such as science fiction narratives that involve time travel. In such narratives, the linearity of time is rejected, as well as the idea that a narrative must move forward to a certain climactic point. Instead, time is often presented as cyclical, fragmented, or even entirely irrelevant and, therefore, linear time and chronological temporalities are questioned, rejected, or dismissed.

More significantly in relation to this article is the importance of postcolonial temporality, starting with the definition of postcolonialism itself. According to Keya Ganguly, the prefix “post” situates the postcolonial “in epochal terms, relative to such other putative eras as the colonial, the modern, the postmodern, and so on” (2004:162). The implication is that the postcolonial can be viewed as a period occurring after a period of colonialism. Instead, this critic suggests, analysis of the postcolonial should approach it “not as an epoch or age but as *a particular mode of historical emergence* ... [and focus on] the ways in which, and the degree to which, the postcolonial has been taken to represent an ‘other’ time whose logic and historical expression are incommensurable with the normative temporality ... associated with Western modernity” (Ganguly 2004:162, italics in original). The complexity of the term postcolonialism is therefore evident in the fact that postcolonialism does not refer to a specific era or time.

In her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2015), Ania Loomba agrees with this notion in her discussion of the complexity of the terms colonialism and postcolonialism and the different ways in which both have been interpreted. She suggests “that it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (Loomba 2015:32). Therefore, in its simplest terms, postcolonialism may refer to the critique of the injustices caused by colonialism and the effects on the colonised. In this

sense, it is also worth exploring the notion of postcolonial “writing back”, an idea which also implies a notion of time and temporality, and, in the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, intertextuality. According to John Marx, postcolonial literature rejects the canon, and “has been shown to *revise* canonical texts and concepts” (2004:83, italics in original). In other words, postcolonial texts do not merely criticise canonical texts, but rather attempt to rewrite and transform those texts with the aim of showing an accurate portrayal of the marginalised or colonised people.

Thus, in terms of the alternative visions of time found in postcolonial works, they can be seen to “write back” “intertextually to the English canon, transforming it in the process” (Savory 2012:233). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which takes place within the setting of colonialism and is told from the perspective of a colonised subject, Jean Rhys “writes back” to the canonical *Jane Eyre* in order to reject the representation of the madwoman and, therefore, to transform it. This intertextuality, as Allen writes, wants a recognition “that texts do not just utilize previous textual units but that they transform them and give them what Kristeva terms new thetic positions” (Allen 2000:53). In other words, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys does not simply fill in the missing pieces of *Jane Eyre* or use the earlier text as starting or reference point, but rather alters the reader’s interpretation of the text. Therefore, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the result of a deliberate intertextual interpretation of the events in the earlier text.

In terms of the temporal relationship with *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, while written more than a century later, acts as the prequel, since the events occur before those of *Jane Eyre*. Trevor Hope writes that *Wide Sargasso Sea* “adds itself to [*Jane Eyre*], that is to say, not as a belated sequel; the later text, the ‘prequel’ is, in fact, a prosthesis of the ‘inside’” (2012:61). In this sense, while “writing back” at the canon, Rhys also “writes forward” in order to reject the canonical text and to alter the interpretation of the events. In addition, the

fact that the later novel's time setting predates that of *Jane Eyre* serves to defy conventional constructions and interpretations of time.

Rhys's main objection to the events in *Jane Eyre*, that which she rejects in her "prequel", is the representation of the madwoman in the attic. When Rhys was asked why she was attracted to the character of Bertha Mason, she responded: "I had always wanted to write about her ... I was annoyed about the poor lunatic West Indian, she's not a character at all, unlike Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester, so I wrote her life. Jane and Mr Rochester come completely to life in *Jane Eyre*, she doesn't, she's just such a horrible character" (Rhys & Burton 1970:108). In other words, Rhys believed that Bertha is inadequately presented as a character, and that her narrative is incomplete.

At its core, Rhys's critique of the representation of Bertha is a critique of Victorian representations of the madwoman. Even in Victorian texts written by women, such as *Jane Eyre*, the illustrations of madwomen are rooted in patriarchal definitions and constructions both of femininity and madness. Allen writes that "the manner in which nineteenth-century women writers avoided censure for taking up the pen [was] by adopting various strategies in which the gendered images of patriarchal culture are accommodated" (2000:146). In other words, in order to avoid appearing unnatural or unfeminine, Victorian women writers had to illustrate madwomen in the same demonised ways as male writers. Thus, by providing a history for Brontë's Bertha, Rhys rejects this patriarchal illustration of female madness, and changes the reader's perception of the marginalised character. As Hilary Jenkins argues, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys exposes both the latent racism and sexism at the core of *Jane Eyre*, by showing that "Brontë allows Mr Rochester a second chance despite many of his faults' while Bertha 'is found lacking and is set aside'" (2001:ix).

It is worth noting that only one chapter in *Jane Eyre* is devoted to Bertha Mason, and we never hear her side. It is Rochester who explains the situation to Jane, and the reader's

sympathies lie with Rochester instead of with his mad wife. Even Jane – who runs away and only returns after the conflagration of Thornfield Hall – does not seem to feel any sympathy for the madwoman. When Jane and the reader are given a glimpse of her, Bertha is described as grovelling, snatching, and growling “like some strange wild animal ... [with] a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, [hiding] its head and face” (Brontë 2010 [1847]:362). She is denied any kind of humanity, not only by being compared to a wild animal, but by being referred to as an “it”. As Barbara Hill Rigney argues, Bertha’s “violent behaviour—rending male antagonists with her teeth—can be called ‘unfeminine’. She has not, however, been masculinized, but rather desexed altogether, symbolically castrated” (1978:26).

Furthermore, Bertha’s dark and haunting presence is what stands in the way of Rochester and Jane’s happiness. He hides his mad wife from everyone and it is not until his wedding to Jane is interrupted by Richard Mason, Bertha’s brother, that he reveals his “lunatic” wife to Jane (Brontë 2010:363). Jane, horrified by the revelation, flees and only returns after Bertha’s suicide. It is only then that she is willing and able to marry Rochester, who has, incidentally, been maimed by the fire Bertha set to Thornfield Hall. Conforming to the Victorian ideal of wife as servant, Jane can then care for Rochester, who has been purged of the evil represented by his mad wife. In the narrative of Western feminist individualism, the black woman – or in this case, the Creole woman – must be sacrificed. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, while “the female individualist ... articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the ‘native female’ as such (*within* discourse, *as* signifier) is excluded from any share in this emerging norm” (1985:244-245, italics in original). In addition, Sylvie Maurel argues that Bertha is a “prop” that functions “as Jane’s dark double, an ‘objective correlative’ of the pitfalls from which she must learn to stay clear” (2009:157). Bertha has two functions in *Jane Eyre* then: firstly, as Elaine Showalter writes, she is an obstacle that ‘must be purged from the plot’ (1987:69) before Jane “can reach her happy

ending” (1987:69); and secondly, she represents the “passion that must be purged from Jane herself” (Showalter 1987:69).

In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is “underpinned by Victorian constructions of otherness, [and her] madness characteristically [appears] as a consequence of excess” (Maurel 2009:155). Her madness is also depicted as hereditary, and Rochester argues that he was tricked into the marriage, only finding out about her family’s history of mental illness when it was too late. According to him, Bertha’s mother, a “Creole, was both a mad woman and a drunkard” and Bertha, “like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points” (Brontë 2010:360). Presenting Bertha’s madness as hereditary is congruent with Victorian assumptions about female madness and gender roles. As Showalter writes, Bertha’s madness “echoes the beliefs of Victorian psychiatry about the transmission of madness: since the reproductive system was the source of mental illness in women, women were the prime carriers of madness” (1987:67).

Furthermore, Rochester tells Jane that he has “marked neither modesty, nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners” (Brontë 2010:377), and that Bertha’s “excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity” (Brontë 1987:378). True to Victorian views of female insanity, Bertha’s madness is presented as a result of sexual excess, and therefore, if Jane is to become a wife to Rochester, she must sacrifice her own passion. This also reveals Victorian notions of gender roles: Jane M. Ussher writes that blaming female madness on their reproductive systems “provides insights into the cultural construction of what it means to be a ‘woman’ and ‘man’, as madness is often defined as deviation from archetypal gender roles” (2011:13). The woman’s place was in the home, and it was abnormal for women to want or to enjoy sex: sexual appetite in women was not only considered to be inappropriate, but also dangerous to the female constitution. Showalter argues that despite being fictional, the depiction of Bertha’s “violence, dangerousness, and

rage, [and] her regression to an inhuman condition ... became such a powerful model for Victorian readers, including psychiatrists, that it influenced even medical accounts of female insanity” (1987:68). In this sense, she becomes an example, both to Jane and Victorian readers, of the consequences of deviating from gender norms.

The account of Bertha’s madness in *Jane Eyre*, however, is entirely one-sided. In contrast to this, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys not only supplies a history for Bertha, but also the potential for an alternative reading of her madness. Hope argues that *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not simply “reinstates a missing story, a misplaced piece of a canonical literary archive imagined ideally to be complete” (2012:67). The purpose of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is therefore not to fill in the missing gaps or to complete an incomplete narrative, but rather, the novel acts “as a postcolonial text that responds critically to the culture of empire ... in order to subvert it from within” (Hope 2012:67). Through the intertextual relationship, Rhys transforms the interpretation of the narrative that plays out in *Jane Eyre*. John Su writes that, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys prioritises Bertha’s “suffering over Jane’s personal growth and insertion into bourgeois English society” (2003:157) and explores “how [a] narrative can refigure our tendencies to validate particular claims of suffering and not others” (2003:158).

Significantly, Rhys supplies Antoinette, a marginalised, silenced character in *Jane Eyre*, with a voice. When Antoinette tries to persuade her husband not to believe the slanderous stories about her, she says “There is always the other side, always” (Rhys 2001:81). In *Jane Eyre*, we are only given Rochester’s side of the story, but in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys provides us with the “other side”. Instead of portraying Antoinette’s madness as a result of excess or deviation from her gender role, Rhys attempts to show how “the first Mrs Rochester may have been driven to madness by the patriarchal and colonial systems, from which Mr Rochester and Jane Eyre also get their money” (Jenkins 2001:xii). In *Wide*

Sargasso Sea, Antoinette's madness is depicted as a result of an identity crisis, as well the rejection of her husband – whom she marries as part of an economic exchange.

Like Brontë, Rhys posits Antoinette's Creole or mixed blood as a contributing factor to her subsequent derangement. Mixed blood is viewed as unhealthy by the Jamaican natives, who refer to Antoinette and her family as "white cockroaches" (Rhys 2001:7), and who believe that people of mixed blood are prone to madness. This is not, however, according to Rhys's portrayal, the *reason* for Antoinette's madness. Rather, the lack of a solid identity is part of what causes her to descend into madness. As a Creole, she belongs to neither the native Jamaicans, nor to the white Europeans. On one hand, she is rejected by the natives of her birthplace, and told to "Go away white cockroach, go away, go away" (Rhys 2001:7). On the other hand, she is also rejected by her European husband, whose perceptions and values, according to Carine Mardorossian, "are identified as a reflection of the European systems of imperial control" (1999:81). Whereas Brontë portrays Rochester's rejection of his wife in a sympathetic manner, Rhys depicts it as one of the main reasons for Antoinette's madness. Instead of portraying Rochester as the victim tricked into a marriage with a madwoman, Rhys, as Elaine Savory writes, moves "Rochester out of the realm of the Gothic romance and explain[s] his capacity for cruelty" (1998:133). Furthermore, she does this by giving the reader his perspective of the marriage as well. In contrast to Brontë, Rhys shows the reader both sides of the story, with Rochester narrating Part II of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In this way, he is the one who shows his cruelty instead of the blame being cast on him.

The first sentence of his narrative reads, "So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations" (Rhys 2001:36). Even in his description of the courtship with Antoinette, he uses vocabulary of war instead of courtship, which foreshadows the outcome of their marriage, as well as the dynamics of the marriage itself. As an Englishman who finds himself in an unfamiliar tropical country, married to a stranger for her family's money,

Rochester feels threatened by the “extreme green” environment, “[n]ot only wild, but menacing” (Rhys 2001:39). He begins to associate Antoinette with the hostile environment, and – representative of the settler who exploits the colonised environment for its resources – he attempts to obliterate it by trying to destroy her. Furthermore, Rochester is told that Antoinette’s mother was insane and, as in *Jane Eyre*, he believes that such madness is hereditary.

Rhys’s narrative, however, provides alternative reasons for both the mother and the daughter’s madness. As Rigney argues, Antoinette’s “mother has suffered a series of atrocities during a native uprising”, while Antoinette descends into madness because she suffers “Rochester’s prudish and cruel rejection of her passion for him” (Rigney 1978: 27). Trying to make him listen to her side, Antoinette asks of her husband: “Do you know what you’ve done to me? ... I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoiled it. It’s just somewhere else where I have been unhappy” (Rhys 2001: 95). Antoinette’s reaction is that of an outsider who has tried to find love, and has been cruelly rejected by the person who was supposed to love her. Moreover, Rochester, representative of the coloniser, asserts his authority over her by appropriating and renaming her. “Bertha is not my name”, Antoinette tells him. “You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by that name” (Rhys 2001: 95). Thus, Rochester not only casts Antoinette as insane, but – because he is threatened by her passionate and seemingly irrational nature – he also attempts to silence her and to change her identity to that of the madwoman in *Jane Eyre*. By giving Rochester a voice, Rhys portrays him as a victim of the patriarchal system too, but Antoinette is the one who must suffer the consequences.

In Part III of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the novel moves to England and into the realm of *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette has descended into madness and, having been locked up in Rochester’s

country house, often has fits of violence. In this section of the novel, conventional notions of time as linear and chronological are disrupted in the rendering of Antoinette's madness.

Narrated by Antoinette, this section has a disjointed, fragmented quality that seems to mimic her frame of mind. The narrative, for example, moves from descriptions of her room to her memories and is interspersed with what would seem to be the ramblings of a madwoman.

Because of the intertextuality found in this section of the novel, where there is contention between Antoinette's narrative and the narrative told that Jane Eyre's Bertha exercises over Wide Sargasso Sea, time becomes fragmented and Antoinette seems to move between the time frames of the two texts. Her memories seem to be those of Bertha's in Jane Eyre, but she rejects them. For example, while she remembers going to England, she refuses to believe it: "They tell me that I am in England but I don't believe them This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England" (Rhys 2001: 117).

More significantly, in her madness, Antoinette's sense of time and the passing of time become distorted. She states that "[n]ights and days and days and nights, hundreds of them [slip] through [her] fingers. But that does not matter. Time has no meaning" (Rhys 2001: 119). Time has become irrelevant and, instead, what matters to Antoinette is the sense that her future is already laid out for her and that she must remember it in order to complete her narrative. Looking at a red dress on the floor, she states: "I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now" (Rhys 2001: 121). What she must remember is her past in another novel which, chronologically, is located in her future. Here too, the clashing of the two narratives defies conventional notions of linear time. Antoinette must remember her future actions – Bertha's actions – in *Jane Eyre* and, at the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she dreams that she walks through the large country house, setting it on fire and ultimately jumping from the battlements. The novel ends with Antoinette, who has woken from her prophetic dream,

stealing her jailer's keys and walking out with a flickering candle, presumably to fulfil her role in the narrative set out by *Jane Eyre*.

Acting as the “prequel”, *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s outcome is determined by the earlier text in the sense that, because the events occur before those in *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s ending must conform to the ending of the earlier text – if only on a surface level. In his discussion of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, West-Pavlov (2013: 145) argues that through this intertextuality, Rhys re-imagines “the very temporality of the past so as to reverse the causal relationship between past and present”. By subverting the temporal relationship between the two texts, Rhys does more than simply supply Antoinette with a history. She allows her foresight into her future, thereby *enabling* her to actively *choose* to follow through with the narrative set out for her by Brontë's Bertha. In addition, Rhys gives Antoinette the opportunity to regain her identity which her husband has attempted to change.

Providing Antoinette foresight into her future is also significant in terms of the function of the text as postcolonial. While, like other postcolonial works, Rhys “writes back” to the novel that preceded it, here she also writes forward in the sense that the setting of the text takes place before the plot of *Jane Eyre*, and is moving forward to the pivotal moment of Antoinette/Bertha's suicide. This further works to provide the madwoman not only with a sense of identity, but with some kind of hope for the future.

The question then is, if Antoinette can remember her future and her suicide, why Rhys does not change the narrative. Why not turn the tables, and allow Antoinette to survive and Rochester to be the one to die by fire? In this manner, Rhys could use the subversion of conventional linear time to the benefit of her heroine, allowing the temporal relationship between the two texts to change the outcome of the storyline. However, realistically this would not be possible. If she were to burn down the house and murder her husband, where would she go? In such a case, she would not only be a madwoman in a foreign country, but

she would also be a murderer without a penny to her name. Secondly, and more importantly, Rhys's critique of *Jane Eyre* is not directed at the outcome of the narrative, but at the way in which it is depicted – as the convenient removal of the marginalised and silenced madwoman.

The plot of Rhys's novel depicts the narrative hold that *Jane Eyre* exercises over the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, thus demonstrating the continuing power of longstanding Western narratives in determining the meaning of its others. The tension and ambivalence which are produced are registered in Antoinette's feelings of being caught between her own narrative and that of Brontë's Bertha, in the fact that although she follows the plotline from the earlier novel, she does not always remember Bertha's actions: "One morning when I woke I ached all over. Not the cold, another sort of ache. I saw that my wrists were red and swollen. Grace said, 'I suppose you're going to tell me that you don't remember anything about last night'" (Rhys 2001:117). What Antoinette cannot remember is recounted to her by Grace Poole, her jailer: "This gentleman [Antoinette's brother] arrived suddenly and insisted on seeing you and that was all the thanks he got. You rushed at him with a knife and when he got the knife away you bit his arm" (Rhys 2001:118). The significance of Antoinette's inability to remember her acts of violence points to the fact that she is acting out the narrative that is not her own.

Because the narrative hold of the plot in *Jane Eyre* is so strong, while Antoinette fights for her own identity, she must follow through with Bertha's actions. Therefore, instead of asking why Rhys does not change the narrative, we must rather ask why she allows Antoinette to remember her future. Su argues that by changing the relationship between past and present, Rhys critiques the depiction of time in *Jane Eyre*: "one that is linear, progressive and looks to the future for the consolation of suffering" (2003:159). This conventional construction of time fits in, as West-Pavlov writes, "with the slipstream of European

trajectory of progress that is dynamic and forward-looking” (2013:164). Such a vision of time, however, is not beneficial for someone who is unable to find solace in the future. Rhys rejects this vision of time because, as we have seen, there is no hope for any kind of relief of suffering in Antoinette’s future, and therefore she “opposes a disappointing present with a comforting and inaccessible past” (Su 2003:160). Because this past is inaccessible, however, Antoinette’s only escape from her suffering and her incarceration is through suicide.

Finally, by allowing Antoinette to remember her future, Rhys makes her an agent of her own fate. Rhys allows Antoinette to make the choice to commit suicide, and by doing so, Rhys changes the reader’s perception of Antoinette’s death. She is no longer the silent madwoman, but the active agent. By committing suicide, as the end of the novel infers, and by actively choosing to do so, Antoinette frees herself in a number of ways – from her confinement in the attic, from normative definitions of female insanity and from her reputation in *Jane Eyre*. Just as Rochester tried to change her identity by renaming her, Antoinette now changes the identity of *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha. Brontë’s Bertha commits suicide so that Rochester and Jane can have their happy ending. Rhys’s Bertha commits suicide in order for a metaphorical rebirth of Antoinette to occur.

In the first part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is cross-stitching in a classroom, and says, “I will write my name in fire red, Antoinette Mason, née Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839” (Rhys 2001:29). In the novel, a difference in colour is used to illustrate Antoinette’s experience of dislocation. While rich colours permeate the narrative of Antoinette’s childhood – such as orchids that are a “bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see” (Rhys 2001:5) – dull, depressing colours are associated with her incarceration in England and her role as Brontë’s Bertha. This is a further indication of the contention between the two narratives – that of Brontë’s Bertha, and that of Rhys’s Antoinette. Therefore, as Gail Fincham argues, the colour red becomes “Antoinette’s

colour, the marker of her identity, linking her with the Caribbean past” (2010:20).

Antoinette’s concern with her red dress, “the colour of fire and sunset ... of flamboyant flowers” (Rhys 2001:119), is an attempt to assert her identity, and to fight the narrative of the madwoman that is imposed on her. However, the dress finally serves to remind Antoinette of Bertha’s actions and through death by fire, “Antoinette is an agent, or potentially an agent, if her dream is to be translated into reality” (Fincham 2010:20).

As a child, Antoinette writes her name in red cross-stitches, and as an adult, Antoinette rewrites her name through the red of fire. She is not only rewritten by Rhys – supplied with a history and a voice – but by acting as an agent and directing the outcome of her own life, she is the one who rewrites herself. More importantly, through the intertextual “writing back” at the canonical *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys rejects conventional notions of time as linear and looking to the future and, in so doing, transforms the representation of the madwoman in the attic.

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