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UNRAVELING THE SYMBOLIC CHAINS: A LACANIAN EXPLORATION OF ANTOINETTE COSWAY'S CHARACTER IN JEAN RHY'S *WIDE SARGASSO SEA* (1966)

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Abstract

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This research study aims to analyze the character of Antoinette Cosway, portrayed in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), employing the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan having a particular focus on the concept of Symbolic Order. This study employs qualitative content analysis as a research tool while Lacanian Symbolic Order is a theoretical framework. This novel portrays a great variety of characters. It focuses on the analysis of the character of Antoinette Cosway in Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Judgmental sampling has been used for the selection of the population and sample, which includes relevant passages and dialogues describing the character development of Antoinette Cosway. The concept of the Symbolic order provides valuable information about the psyche of Antoinette Cosway. The analysis reveals the restrictions imposed by colonial, patriarchal, social, and legal structures upon Antoinette Cosway and the role of these restrictions in shaping her fragmented and broken sense of self and agency. By analyzing Antoinette's struggles to navigate the complex issues of her cultural, social, and linguistic identities, this research paper reveals her compromising position in the symbolic structure, where her struggle for autonomy ultimately leads her to commit suicide. This analysis reveals how the Symbolic Order undermined Antoinette's identity and agency by imposing social, political, and legal constraints on her. This research is very illuminating, as it reveals the development of Antoinette Cosway under the restrictions of imposed symbolic systems and it enriches the appreciation of Antoinette's complex portrayal and discussion on postcolonial literature and feminist theory related to this novel as well.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Feminist, Agency, Dialogues, Restrictions

Introduction

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is recognized as an influential piece of literature among literary circles as it explores multiple prominent themes of literature such as colonialism, identity, gender oppression, and power dynamics. The setting of the novel is Jamaica during the period when it was under the colonial rule of the English. The novel reveals the intricate and complex web of relationships and circumstances that create complex identity issues for Antoinette Cosway. The character of the protagonist serves as Rhys's mouthpiece through which she highlights the profound influence of patriarchal dominance, colonial oppression, and social institutions on the subjectivity of an individual. The protagonist, Antoinette Cosway, emerges as an individual enchained in the symbolic chains of the society; at the same time, she is seen struggling to steer the restraints imposed by colonial and patriarchal structures. The story of Antoinette from being an innocent and happy woman to a mad woman has been narrated by Rhys with meticulous details in the backdrop of racial tension between the colored, the white, and the Creoles in Jamaican society. (Batool, Faqir, et. al. 2024), Antoinette struggles to find her identity and her place in the world, where she has been placed in the lowest order of social recognition. Broader themes of alienation, displacement, and resistance are highlighted in the novel through Antoinette's interaction with other characters around her. In this research study, the researcher exposes the symbolic chains that restrict Antoinette in various ways, by using the theoretical framework of the Symbolic Order as proposed by Jacques Lacan. The chief aim of this study is to investigate Antoinette's psyche to unearth the underlying forces that are at play to shape her existence, and the tool to unearth these underlying forces is Lacanian Symbolic Order. The researchers attempt to unveil a fresh perspective regarding the portrayal of

Antoinette's character in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) through the Lacanian lens. The intricacies of identity formation, language acquisition, and power dynamics have been analyzed to reveal the symbolic chains that prove as binding forces within the boundaries of colonial, social, and legal discourses. (Dad, Shabbir, Sultan, et. al. 2023) In the backdrop of these broader socio-political contexts, analysis of Antoinette's experiences is likely to explain the complex issues of race, gender, and power as depicted in the novel. The depths of Antoinette Cosway's psyche will be explored in the light of the theoretical insights of Jacques Lacan. By exposing the symbolic chains that restrict her character in many ways, we hope to reveal the deep truths hidden within Rhys's narrative. It will result in an increased understanding of the *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and its lasting significance within the colonial literary canon.

Statement of the Problem

The novel "Wide Sargasso Sea" by Jean Rhys presents the character of Antoinette Cosway within the context of oppressive patriarchal structures and colonial dynamics. This study aims to analyze Antoinette's identity formation and agency using the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, particularly focusing on the concept of the Symbolic Order. By employing qualitative content analysis, the research seeks to unveil how Antoinette's relationship with language, culture, and power within the Symbolic Order is depicted in the novel.

Significance of the Research

This research is significant as it offers a fresh psychoanalytical insight into the character of Antoinette Cosway. This aspect has been usually overlooked by most researchers. This study provides us with a psychological understanding of identity formation and Antoinette's resistance against forces such as patriarchy, colonialism, and societal norms. This study also contributes to the understanding of the application of the

Lacanian Symbolic Order as a framework for the interpretation of literary works. Additionally, this research has practical implications for scholars, students, and enthusiasts of literature, postcolonial studies, and psychoanalysis. It offers a methodological approach for exploring the interplay between individual subjectivity and societal structures in literary texts, thereby encouraging further interdisciplinary dialogue and scholarship.

Research Objectives

1. Examine Antoinette Cosway's identity formation and agency within the Symbolic Order as portrayed in "Wide Sargasso Sea" by Jean Rhys.
2. Apply Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, specifically the concept of the Symbolic Order, to analyze Antoinette's struggles with colonial, patriarchal, social, and legal structures.
3. Explore how Antoinette's navigation of cultural, social, and linguistic identities reflects her compromised position within the Symbolic Order.
4. Investigate the role of colonialism, gender oppression, and power dynamics in shaping Antoinette's fragmented sense of self and eventual tragic fate.

Research Questions

1. How does Antoinette Cosway's identity formation and agency unfold within the Symbolic Order depicted in "Wide Sargasso Sea"?
2. How does Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, specifically the Symbolic Order, provide insight into Antoinette's struggles with oppressive structures?
3. In what ways do colonial, patriarchal, social, and legal constraints affect Antoinette's sense of self and agency?
4. How does Antoinette's negotiation of cultural, social, and linguistic identities reflect her position within the Symbolic Order?
5. What broader themes of colonialism, gender oppression, and power dynamics emerge

through the analysis of Antoinette's character in "Wide Sargasso Sea"?

Wide Sargasso Sea: A Brief Overview

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) by Jean Rhys is a radical novel that offers an exploration of identity, colonialism, and madness through the depiction of the character of Antoinette Cosway. Set in the period of British Rule in Jamaica, the novel traces the development of Antoinette Cosway, a Creole woman, from a child to an adult woman. In Jamaica, tensions were high among the coloured and the white, while the situation for the Creoles was much worse. As a child, she had the traumatic experience of the disintegration of her family's plantation, and the lack of her mother's attention left her at the mercy of society where she was not accepted by both dominant groups of her society. After the loss of her mother, she is forced into a loveless marriage with an Englishman named Mr. Rochester. This marriage serves as an igniting point where her fragile sense of self, already marred by many factors, begins to unravel. Divided into three parts, each part of the novel is narrated by a different character. Marked by a sense of isolation and longing for belonging, we find the depiction of Antoinette's childhood through her voice in the first part of the novel. The second part of the novel is narrated by Mr. Rochester and it reveals his perspective regarding power dynamics within his married life. We find that Mr. Rochester desires to control Antoinette, and his obsession in this regard is growing day by day. In the third part of the novel, the narrative shifts back to Antoinette, and in this part, we find her struggling to maintain her sanity and her efforts to maintain her identity. Ultimately, she descends into madness and loses her identity. The whole text of this novel reflects the themes of displacement, alienation, patriarchy, and colonialism. (Chen, Garcia, Alcaide, et. al. 2024), The psychological impact of being marginalized within a community has been explored in addition to the power

dynamics that shape the identities of individuals. As we witness the destruction of Antoinette's world, the novel emerges as a hunting depiction of oppressive forces such as colonialism, patriarchy, and law. To sum up, we can say that *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a thought-provoking text that explores issues of identity, patriarchy, and colonialism which are evergreen. Through the meticulous depiction of characters, Jean Rhys invites her readers to face the uncomfortable truths about race, gender, and power. At the same time, the novel shows us the remarkable resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

Literature Review

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), a critically acclaimed novel, is accepted as a rewriting of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. We will examine some of the most recent studies that critically analyze *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) from multiple angles using diverse theories in our literature review section. Since we aim to analyze Antoinette Cosway's character using the Lacanian theory of psychosexual development, therefore in our literature review section, we will review studies from the perspective of theory as well as the Novel.

Using Lacanian theory, Hadi and Asl (2022) investigate how characters with complex subjectivity and a range of identities are portrayed in *Ramita Navai's City of Lies* (2014). The characters in *City of Lies* (2014) pass through various tensions stemming from psychic and social realities. Using Lacan's theory of psycho-sexual development which consists of three main components (Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic), this research article explores the formation of the self. The analysis reveals that some characters remain lost in unconscious tensions, on the other hand, others try to assert their subjectivity within heteropatriarchal customs. Ultimately, the paper challenges homogenous narratives about Iranians and offers equal opportunities for selfhood and subjectivity to characters of both genders. Bekler (2023) has analyzed Jean

Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) employing cultural materialism as a theoretical framework. The study examines the character portrayal of Antoinette and highlights her struggles being a marginalized woman in a society that has a patriarchal and colonial mindset. The author explicates the way Rhys has challenged Eurocentric perceptions as depicted in *Jane Eyre* and tries to give a rebellious voice to silenced Antoinette. Social, economic, and political conditions and power relations of the period have been elucidated by using the theoretical framework of Cultural Materialism. Rhys's personal experiences and cultural background and their relation to her work have also been examined. This detailed analysis sheds light on the dissident nature of Rhys' work and its ability to show resistance against colonial and patriarchal discourses. Mohammed & Abdul (2023) examine *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) as an example of a postcolonial narrative, focusing on the character Antoinette, who is depicted as the "crazy woman in the attic." Antoinette's character has been seen as a symbolic figure that symbolizes the loss of identity and the manifestation of madness within a colonial and patriarchal society. The chief object of this study is to trace the connection between race, gender, and madness in the novel with the help of postcolonial and psychoanalytic feminism. Her madness has been blamed on colonial forces by post-colonial critics while feminist theories try to find reasons for her madness in patriarchal constraints and mother-daughter relationships. The researchers bring out the dynamics of colonizer-colonized, male-female, and mother-daughter relationships through this study. Self-repression, which is an integral aspect of colonial and patriarchal cultures, has been identified as one of the main reasons that led Antoinette to alienation and ultimately loss of identity. Taib & Dizayi (2023) explore Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) from a postcolonial perspective, with special

reference to the theories of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. They aim to assess the influence of colonial powers on the identity formation of the colonized population. The central point of investigation is the examination of identity crises and uncertainty because of contact with foreign cultures. Consequently, Antoinette has been labeled as a Creole who is a victim of a hybrid identity, so she is caught in between, which gives rise to her identity crises. The same can be observed regarding other Creole and African American characters depicted therein. [Gogoi \(2023\)](#) employs feminist theories to analyze the gender oppression that is experienced by Antoinette at the hand of her husband in [Wide Sargasso Sea \(1966\)](#) which ultimately leads to her madness. This research study examines how Mr. Rochester uses his patriarchal dominance to suppress Antoinette and later strips her of her identity and sanity. The researcher argues that Antoinette's madness does not solely stem from her mental illness rather it stems from emotional and psychological abuse which is the result of rejection from her husband combined with his oppressive behavior. The researcher identifies Mr. Rochester as a driving force towards her madness. The studies reviewed above give a brief overview of recent research on the novel [Wide Sargasso Sea \(1966\)](#). The novel has been subject to investigation from various perspectives. Most of the researchers employ either a post-colonial lens or a feminist lens to explore identity issues and power dynamics in this novel. [\(Arrojo, Martin, Lila, et. al. 2024\)](#), Researchers tend to hold Colonial and Patriarchal forces responsible for her madness while overlooking a crucial aspect, which is her mental growth. Considering given reviews, space for psychological exploration particularly from Lacanian perspective remains to be exploited, as none of the researchers reviewed above highlighted this aspect. Therefore, the current study fills this gap by analyzing the character of Antoinette Cosway

from a Lacanian perspective, thereby shedding light on her inner workings of mind and the role of her mental growth in her madness.

Theoretical Framework

The Lacanian theory of subjectivity which consists of concepts such as the Mirror Stage, the Symbolic Order, and the Real, stands as a multifaceted and impactful theory within psychoanalysis. It is a theory that probes into the development of identity and it also explores the impact of language and symbols on our perception of reality. [\(Villarejo, Garcia, Alcaide, et. al. 2024\)](#), Jacques Lacan believes that human subjectivity develops out of a disordered and disjointed environment, known as the mirror stage. When we grow further, our sense of subjectivity and identity gradually crystallizes through symbolic engagements with others and language. This theory, through its various stages of development such as the Mirror Stage, the Symbolic Order, and the Real, reveals the complex journey of formation of subjectivity. This theory particularly emphasizes the role of language and symbols in the construction of our reality.

The Symbolic

In Lacanian theory, the symbolic order develops around the understanding of the signifier. It draws heavily from the concepts of structural linguistics proposed by linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Levi Strauss, and Roman Jakobson. This system, unconsciously adhered to by all manifestations in the world, parallels the structure of language, with speakers unconsciously following its rules when communicating. The symbolic order is thus "a space occupied by language and social law equivalent to adulthood" [\(Hadi & Asl, 2022\)](#). Lacan posits that the unconscious resembles language, comprising signifiers organized akin to language's structure, independent of the external world. For Lacan, on the other hand, the unconscious consists of signifying material. In this sense, Lacan defines the unconscious as the discourse of the Other.

The big Other is language, the symbolic order; this Other can never be fully assimilated to the subject; it is a radical otherness which, nevertheless, forms the core of our unconscious. (Homer, 2004, p. 44). These signifiers, while representing reality, do not directly correspond to it; rather, they mediate a reference to it. This chain of signifiers forms a symbolic system, where meaning is conveyed through successive signs, losing immediacy. Before a child comes into this world, the family starts a discussion about its future, its name, and so on. These pronouncements place the child in a symbolic structure that links it to its lineage. Leader and Groves (2000) argue that "these are symbolic pronouncements since they situate the child in lineage, in a symbolic universe" (p. 43). Humans, according to Lacan, are inherently Lacanian subjects immersed in a world dominated by symbols, where language and culture constitute symbolic systems. As a child grows up, it identifies itself with external images that are governed by symbolic systems thus the connection between the symbolic and imaginary stages is established. The child inherits this symbolic system from its parents or ancestors, and it is passed on to future generations in the same way this shapes our very existence. (Chen, Poquet, 2023), Lacan's assertion that the unconscious is structured like language underscores its composition of a chain of signifiers, akin to language. Although the signifying material resides in the unconscious, the process of signification remains beyond our conscious control, manifesting in dreams governed by metaphor and metonymy. Furthermore, relations and law are symbolic, reflecting deeply ingrained social and kinship structures. The symbol is intimately linked with the notions of law, pact, social and kinship structures. The law that encompasses the history of each individual and which is unconscious in its structure is the foundation of the symbolic. (Glowinski et al. 2002, pp.198-199). The imaginary and the symbolic order are linked with each other

because they deal with the understanding of the role of mother and father. As Lacan (1977) asserts, "It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the Symbolic function which from the dawn of history has identified his person with the figure of the law" (p. 50). "Name of Father" is a symbolic authority and "some may adapt to the social world under the authority, others might rebel against it" (Hadi & Asl, 2022). After being suppressed by this authority in various forms, Antoinette decides to rebel against it, which results in her demise.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is qualitative, and it utilizes qualitative content analysis as a tool of analysis while Lacan's theory of the Symbolic Order will be used as a theoretical framework. The research is centered on the analysis of Antoinette Cosway's character in "Wide Sargasso Sea" (1966) by Jean Rhys. The Symbolic Order will be used to explicate the symbolic systems that are at work against Antoinette Cosway, thus imprisoning her in the symbolic systems.

Population and Sample

The research is based on an analysis of the character of Antoinette Cosway in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Judgmental sampling is employed for the selection of the population and sample, which includes relevant excerpts and passages featuring Antoinette's dialogues and her character description.

Instrument of Data Collection

The main source of data collection is the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). A primary source is the dialogues and character descriptions of the character of Antoinette Cosway while secondary sources are the research articles and other such studies that analyze the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

Technique of Data Analysis

The symbolic order has been used to analyze the character of Antoinette Cosway to

highlight the role of language and other such symbolic systems in her identity formation. Antoinette's journey of life is a perfect subject for Lacanian analysis as we see all of Lacanian concepts such as the Mirror stage, the imagination, and the symbolism at play in her life. (Bridge, Horey, et. al. 2023), Using the symbolic Order, we intend to explain the role of linguistic and cultural systems that her understanding of herself and the reality around her. (Van, Gotch, et. al. 2024), Her interaction with her environment, and in particular her relationship with her husband is the subject of study to understand her complex psychological experiences. By examining the patriarchal and colonial structures of Antoinette's world, the researchers, the researchers will uncover layers of identity formation, power dynamics, and repression in her narrative. Antoinette emerges as a compelling subject for analysis, offering insights into the intricacies of subjectivity and the impact of social constructs on individual experience within the context of Rhys's richly textured narrative landscape.

Analysis and Discussion

The first part of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) has abundant examples of imaginary identification with other characters while in the second part, we find ample instances of symbolic order at work.

Classifications and Judgements

The novel depicts the dynamics of the relationship between Rochester and Antoinette during their honeymoon at Granbois, owned by Annette. Rochester, characterized by his critical nature and aloof demeanor, contrasts sharply with Antoinette's warmth and passion. Despite his reservations about Antoinette's Creole heritage, Rochester marries her, having expectations of English behavior that she cannot fulfill. He says "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys, 1966, p. 61). His unconscious desire for an English wife clashes with Antoinette's

identity. Owing to her Creole origin, Rochester's symbolic order places Antoinette at a lower societal tier, thus making equality or mutual respect impossible. Rochester's practice of classifying things according to English standards extends to his view of the local language, Patois, which he deems inferior by declaring it as "the debased French patois" (Rhys, 1966, p.61) reflecting his disdain for the people who use it. His insincerity in the marriage becomes evident through his judgmental attitude towards Antoinette's interactions, particularly with Christophine, whom she affectionately calls 'my da.' Rochester's disapproval of black people as uncivilized and savage further underscores his prejudice. Rochester's judgments stem from his English perspective, ignoring local standards and culture. He criticizes local dress and customs, failing to appreciate their uniqueness. Antoinette's generosity and affectionate nature, especially towards black individuals, clash with Rochester's reserved conduct. His disapproval of Antoinette's intimacy with Christophine "Why do you hug and kiss Christophine" (Rhys, 1966, p. 83) reveals his ignorance of their shared history and his belief in racial hierarchies. Rochester's rigid adherence to English norms and his inability to understand or respect Antoinette's background and culture contribute to the tension and disconnection within their relationship.

The Patriarchal Structure

At Granbois estate, Rochester exhibits his patriarchal beliefs for the first time. "When Antoinette suggested, "Come, I will show you the house,' I accompanied her reluctantly" (Rhys, 1966, p. 66). Hailing from a patriarchal and colonial background, Rochester resents being led or controlled, especially by a woman. He embodies the typical male archetype of a colonizing nation with deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs. Patriarchy operates as a symbolic framework that imposes hierarchical structures based on gender, privileging one

gender while subjugating the other. Rochester's discomfort stems from Antoinette assuming a leading role in guiding him through the house, as his patriarchal mindset disallows women from holding authoritative and leading positions.

Symbolic Chains of Marriage

Rochester has conflicted emotions towards Antoinette, which he struggles to articulate in a letter to his father. Rochester acknowledges his "confused impressions" (Rhys, 1966, p. 69) about his impending marriage, indicating his lack of genuine affection for Antoinette. Despite his disinterest, he feigns love, manipulating Antoinette's emotions and falsifying affection. It was all very brightly colored, very strange, but it meant nothing to me. Nor did she, the girl I was to marry, when at last I met her I bowed, smiled, kissed her hand, danced with her. I played the part I was expected to play. She never had anything to do with me at all. Every movement I made was an effort of will. (Rhys, 1966, pp. 69-70). Though he truly has no feelings for her, he presents himself as if he is in love with her. Antoinette expresses fear and hesitation about the marriage, recalling dark dreams from her past, as she senses Rochester's dishonesty. Rochester's conscious and unconscious biases against Antoinette, based on her mixed heritage, exacerbate the situation, leading to a lack of trust between them. Despite his assurances of love and safety, their marriage becomes a symbolic union, reinforcing traditional gender roles with the man as a protector and the woman as a passive partner. Thus, their relationship is fraught with deception and societal expectations, rather than genuine connection. (Tong, Yu, Deacon, et. al. 2024)

Chains of Legal System

Antoinette, feeling neglected by her husband, seeks solace and advice from Christophine. Christophine suggests Antoinette leave for Martinique, but Antoinette highlights her loss of autonomy and

wealth under English law, which strips her of her belongings after marriage. Thus, it is the legal system, another symbolic system, that has left her in a vulnerable position. Antoinette dreams of finding happiness in England, as she had heard from her stepfather Mr. Mason about serene England. She says "I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me . . . England, rosy pink in the geography book map" (Rhys, 1966, p. 100). But Christophine warns her against relying on Obeah potions to win Rochester's love, as they bring trouble when used on white people. Rochester renames her as Bertha to exert control over her. Antoinette is bound by societal expectations and laws to obey and accept thus she is unable to assert her agency. Christophine recounts Aunt Cora's failed attempt to secure a legal settlement in marriage "She turned away from the window, the sky, the looking-glass, the pretty things on the dressing table" (Rhys, 1966, p. 100), leading to her resignation from life's struggles. Antoinette, trapped by patriarchal and colonial systems, grapples with her diminishing agency while facing Rochester's dominance and societal constraints.

A Mixed-blood in Racial Structure

The relationship between Antoinette and Rochester deteriorates gradually, and as a result Antoinette's descent into madness. Rochester receives a letter from Daniel Cosway, alleging madness in Antoinette's family and predicting her descent into madness. Antoinette's identity struggles resurface when she's called a "white cockroach" by Amelie, revealing the societal rejection faced by Creoles. (Aslam, Khan, et. al. 2023), Antoinette questions her identity and place in society, feeling rejected by both white and black communities. Though she has white skin, she is not accepted as a white, but rather referred to as a "white cockroach". This leads Antoinette to question her sense of identity, and she asks Rochester "So between you, I often wonder who I am and where is my

country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys, 1966, p. 93). The letter from Daniel leaves Rochester suspicious, leading him to ignore Antoinette, plunging her into isolation and rejection as feared. Antoinette seeks solace from Christophine, who advises her to confront Rochester about her past. Meanwhile, Rochester confronts Daniel, Antoinette's brother, leading to further tensions. Antoinette recounts her traumatic past, including her mother's madness and her losses. Rochester's betrayal, including renaming her as "Bertha," exacerbates Antoinette's trauma. She asserts that "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name" (Rhys, 1996, p. 133). The love potion incident further strains their relationship, leading to Antoinette's breakdown. Christophine intervenes to pacify Antoinette, while Rochester and Christophine blame each other for her decline. Antoinette's deteriorating health prompts Rochester's cruel decision to imprison her, symbolizing his patriarchal dominance. Despite Rochester's love for Antoinette, which is reflected when he says "I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but mine, mine" (Rhys, 1966, p. 150), his disdain for her Creole identity and passion drives him to imprison her. Rochester, being a man, can imprison her and no one is going to question him because the symbolic systems privilege certain parts of the the community at the cost of the oppression of others. In this case, Rochester is privileged while Antoinette is the oppressed. Antoinette's fate reflects patriarchal oppression and Rochester's selfish desires, leaving her isolated and imprisoned as Rochester seeks to forget her.

Antoinette's Revolt against these Symbolic Structures

In the last part of the novel, the story is narrated by two individuals, Antoinette and Grace Poole. Grace Poole serves as Antoinette's caretaker in the house of Rochester, where she is confined. Grace Poole

observes Antoinette's detachment from her surroundings and she often finds her lost in her thoughts. Resilience is seen in her and her morale, though shaken, remains unbroken. During her confinement, the flickering flame of the lantern becomes her solace as it reflects her inner passion, emotions, and memories of Jamaica's warmth. Niaz (2023), Antoinette manages to reach out to Richard Mason, who is her stepbrother, for help; but when he arrives at Thornfield Hall, he fails to recognize her. This results in a sudden outburst of emotion, and consequently Antoinette attacks on Richard. The next day, Antoinette fails to recall this incident until Grace Poole reminds her of Richard's mention of "legally" (Rhys, 1966, p. 165), which triggers her response. Since Richard failed to secure her legally therefore now, she is in a vulnerable position because of legal constraints. This attack is the outcome of her disdain for "Justice" which is a symbolic system governed by law. It is her rebellion against societal norms and patriarchal oppression. (Iram, Saleha, 2024), Although Aunt Cora insists Richard protect Antoinette legally, he fails to do so, and it ignites Antoinette's rebellion against these symbolic systems. Since Richard failed to protect her, now he has no other option but to abandon her to her fate, dismissing her as a mad person. Within the household, rumors circulate of a haunting presence, attributing it to Antoinette herself, symbolizing her marginalized existence and societal alienation. At the very end, she gets a chance to sneak out of her room, burning the whole castle, i.e. her symbolic prison, she jumps into a pool and dies.

Conclusion

In our above discussion, I have highlighted the significant role of symbolic order in Antoinette's downfall. As a Creole woman, she is marginalized by societal constructs, and placed in the lowest category due to her mixed heritage. This results in low self-esteem and a sense of inferiority. Economic status further

exacerbates her social standing. Patriarchy also oppresses Antoinette and her mother, reinforcing their inferiority. Legal systems further disadvantage Antoinette, as her property defaults to her husband due to the lack of legal settlement. Her marriage to Rochester, initially promising love and happiness, ultimately leads to her demise. Rochester's selfish motives and infidelity destroy their bond, erasing Antoinette's symbolic identity. Her symbolic leap into the pool symbolizes her struggle to reclaim her true self amidst imposed identities.

Suggestions

This study was limited only to the application of the Symbolic Order on the character of Antoinette Cosway. For extensive studies, it is possible to apply all three orders of Lacanian Psychosexual development to this whole novel. Other characters can also be analyzed using this theory.

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