

Two Versions of Edward Rochester:

Intertextuality in *Jane Eyre* by
Charlotte Brontë and *Wide Sargasso
Sea* by Jean Rhys

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Introduction

It is almost impossible to read a text without being influenced by other texts you have read previously, at least according to the theory of intertextuality. Coined in 1966 by literary critic Julia Kristeva, the term ‘intertextuality’ deals with the idea of how one text is shaped by a number of other texts and how two readers might perceive the same article, poem or novel in very different ways depending on their reading history. These influences lead to a richer reading experience, since more information and layers are added to the story by the reader.

When speaking of ‘the reader’ it is of course impossible to know what each individual reader might experience with a text, and so I will not assume that I know what the reader thinks. I will draw from my own experiences and when referring to ‘the reader’ it is my own analysis of the two texts that is presented.

Two novels that lend themselves very well to an intertextual analysis are Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*. While written over 100 years later than *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* functions as a prequel, or, as Robert Kendrick calls it in his essay, “[a] complement text” (235), to the story of *Jane Eyre*, building on Edward Rochester’s story of his first wife. Thus, as the character of Mr. Rochester plays a prominent part in both novels, it is difficult to not draw parallels between the works. Interestingly, there has not been written much about the two versions of Mr. Rochester, but instead almost all articles written on *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* focus on the character of Antoinette/Bertha. This might be because Mr. Rochester is not the main character in either novel, or because he plays generally the same role in both books, the partner of the protagonist.

However, the roles are very different apart from the title of partner. In *Jane Eyre* he is the dark and mysterious, yet alluring, owner of Thornfield Hall and the object of the protagonist’s love. Although he is described as a dark, brooding and fairly immoral character, he is still presented as the hero of the story and the reader is supposed to hope for him and Jane to end up together. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* he is again paired up with the protagonist, this time Antoinette Cosway, but it becomes clear that the Mr. Rochester of this novel is cold and hard, using his wife for sex and money while

telling himself and her that she is going mad. Whereas he played the hero in *Jane Eyre*, this time he is far from it, instead playing the role of the villain.

So how do these two versions of Mr. Rochester fit together, and how do they influence each other? This essay will investigate how the characterization of Mr. Rochester in one book may influence the reader's perception of him in the other one. This will be looked at from the perspective of first reading *Jane Eyre* and then *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as well as reading the two books in chronological order from a story standpoint, beginning with *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Is it easier to sympathize with Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea* if one has read *Jane Eyre*, and is it harder to like him in *Jane Eyre* if one has already read *Wide Sargasso Sea*?

The essay will be divided into four different parts, the first one dealing with the theories of intertextuality and post-colonialism. The second part will focus on the character of Edward Rochester and how he is depicted in both books, the third part on the scene in *Jane Eyre* where Mr. Rochester reveals his past life with Bertha/Antoinette and how that is tied to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and, finally, the fourth part will discuss the idea that Rochester is the one who drives Antoinette mad in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as well as what effect that might have on the way the reader sees him in both books.

Intertextuality and Post-Colonial Theory

Elaine Martin states that the term 'intertextuality' was first coined in the second part of the 1960s by Julia Kristeva (par. 1) but as Graham Allen writes in his book *Intertextuality*, "[it] is one of the most commonly used and misused terms in contemporary critical vocabulary" (2). According to Allen, there are so many different definitions of the word that to try and narrow them down to one ultimate definition would be a project "doomed to failure".

However, one could look at the influences and ideas that have shaped the meaning of the word, in this case focusing on Roland Gérard Barthes, a French literary theorist who said that there are two kinds of readers: "consumers" who only read the text as it is, and "readers" who add their own ideas while reading, and in that way become new "writers" of the text (Allen, 69-70). This statement of the reader being the

writer leads to what Barthes is probably most famous for, the idea of “the death of the author”. In his essay with this title, Barthes writes that:

[A]ll writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and [...] literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes. (par. 1)

What he means is that it is the reader that provides the text with its meaning by introducing the voices of other texts and creating “this special voice”. Barthes claims that because of literary magazines, literature history and writer biographies, the way we view literature is “tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his history, his tastes [and] his passions” (par. 2). He criticizes the way critics use the author of a work to explain the work itself, and he does not agree that the sole voice of a text is that of the author. Allen explains this relationship between author and text, which Barthes criticizes, by saying that “[t]he author places meaning in the work [...] and the reader-critic consumes that meaning; once this process has been accomplished the reader is free to move on to the next work” (71). By using the word “consumes”, Allen refers to Barthes’ idea of “consumers” and “readers/writers”, and thus suggests that simply using the author as a way of analyzing a text makes you a consumer, someone who simply reads a text and moves on. A “reader” uses the “several indiscernible voices”, which are all the texts previously read, and they unite to provide the reader with the tools to become the “writer” of the text, applying additional layers and meanings while reading. As Barthes sums it up at the end of his essay:

[T]here is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, [...] but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of (par. 7)

Again, this emphasizes the reader as the most important person, not the author, as well as stressing how the reader uses past texts while reading.

Additionally, when discussing the theory of intertextuality one might also look at post-colonial theory, especially when dealing with works such as *Jane Eyre* and

Wide Sargasso Sea. Post-colonialist theory focuses on taking a dark and mysterious mass of people from a part of the less explored, colonized world (Africa, India etc.) and giving them their own voices and stories. Stephen Lynn writes in *Texts and Contexts* that post-colonial studies are “in-depth examinations of the various relationships between dominant and subjugated cultures, races and ethnic groups” (156).

Wide Sargasso Sea was published in 1966, around the same time as intertextuality as a term was first introduced. In interviews, Jean Rhys has expressed how, when reading *Jane Eyre*, she felt as if the portrayal of Bertha pointed at some kind of distaste for the West Indies in Brontë herself. (*Wide Sargasso Sea* viii) Born in the West Indies, Rhys decided to ‘write back’, taking the known story of *Jane Eyre* and singling out Bertha, one of the minor characters, in order to question the original text and what it says about people from the West Indies.

Therefore, one could argue that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a post-colonial novel. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is the mad woman in the attic without a voice of her own, whose insanity is explained partly because of her heritage. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, on the other hand, Rhys has given her a voice and lets us see the world through Antoinette/Bertha’s eyes. Rhys wanted to show how Bertha is not simply a mad woman from a far off land, but indeed a human being with feelings and ideas as well as a backstory.

Having called the novel “The First Mrs. Rochester” (vii) at one point, one can assume that Rhys never wanted to hide the fact that she based her book on *Jane Eyre*. However, finally naming it *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a title with no ties to Brontë’s text, invites readers who have not read *Jane Eyre* to read *Wide Sargasso Sea* without risking making them feel as if they should be familiar with the story of Jane first. Another way that Jean Rhys distances her novel from *Jane Eyre* is through never mentioning Mr. Rochester’s name. Thus, if the reader has not read *Jane Eyre* or been told of its ties to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is no reason for the reader to think of Rhys’ text as anything other than an independent book. It is not until the reader is introduced to one of the texts, after having already read the other one, that one notices the relation between them and the possibility to investigate how they influence each other arises.

Edward Rochester

There are different aspects of a person that characterize who they are; this also applies to fictional characters such as Edward Rochester. His outer appearance, his morals and his ideas about the world are all important for us to not only get an idea of who the character is, but also in order to compare and contrast him within the two texts. However, I shall start from the beginning by looking at how the character of Mr. Rochester is introduced in the novels.

In *Jane Eyre*, this introduction is dramatic, exciting and most of all romantic. Mr. Rochester is riding on a large horse that suddenly trips on some slippery ice and he falls down, hurting his leg and needing Jane's help in order to get back up on his horse. The first words he utters are "What the deuce is to do now?" (114), which is as close to swearing as one gets in the book, and he then refuses Jane's help. He assures her it is "only a sprain" (115), and it is obvious that he does not consider himself seriously injured, at least not injured enough to need the help of a woman. When he does realize that he needs help, the image of the strong, manly man needing help from the small, weak woman gives him a sense of vulnerability, counteracting his tough exterior.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the first words Mr. Rochester utters are actually inside his head, when he is thinking about how "it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations" (36). He is referring to his wedding to Antoinette, and the words he uses make it seem as if it was more like a battle that he lost rather than a wedding. He sounds as if he has given up, and does not at all resemble the man who fell off his horse but fought his way back up again in *Jane Eyre*. He follows this first sentence with stating how "[e]verything finished, for better or for worse" (36). Again, he seems very resigned and the reader might feel sorry for him because so far he has done nothing wrong. Later on, however, it may be harder to feel bad for him. In fact, Robert Kendrick describes the character of Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as "a selfish, hateful man who, one should hope, could not elicit anything but a carefully distanced pity on the part of the reader" (236).

These two scenes display very different parts of Mr. Rochester and they can be interpreted in very different ways. If the reader's first meeting with Mr.

Rochester occurs in *Jane Eyre*, he might seem mysterious and proud, although not proud enough to refrain from asking for help when he needs it. To the reader who has already encountered him in *Wide Sargasso Sea* however, and who applies that meeting to the meeting in *Jane Eyre*, or ‘rewriting it’ as Barthes calls it, he may seem cruel and harsh towards Jane, using her to get back on the horse but barely looking at or thanking her. If the reader on the other hand first meets Mr. Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he might seem a horrible person who treats Antoinette badly and it will be very hard to think of him as anything else, let alone feel sorry for him for being forced into marriage. However, if one is already familiar with the hero-version of Mr. Rochester through *Jane Eyre*, it may be easier to be concerned about his well-being in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and one might even feel sorry for him, as Kendrick pointed out. So, what you have read before does matter, even in instances like the introduction of a character, because the reader’s previous knowledge can be added to the text and that could create a different impression of the character.

Regarding Mr. Rochester’s looks there are in fact no descriptions of him in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The reader is informed that he is an Englishman and five years younger than Antoinette, but otherwise nothing is revealed about his outer appearance. Shortly before the reader is introduced to Mr. Rochester, Antoinette has a dream in which she follows a man with a “face black with hatred” (34) who leads her away from her childhood home and towards a dark forest. Wearing a white dress, she follows the man until they reach “an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall [where] the trees are different trees” (34). This seems to be a premonition of what is to come, with Antoinette dressed in a white wedding dress and then being transported to England by a man who hates her. This is also as close to a description of Mr. Rochester as we get in the book, the fact that his face is clouded with hatred.

In *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, there are several quite long descriptions of Mr. Rochester’s appearance. It begins during their first meeting, where Jane notices how he is “of middle height, and considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow” (115). Once again his face is described as dark, although this time it is not by hatred. Jane also guesses that “perhaps he might be thirty-five” (115), which is more information than in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where, as stated before, we only know that he is five years younger than Antoinette.

How does this affect the reading experience? Someone who has read *Jane Eyre* when they approach *Wide Sargasso Sea* may not find it troublesome imagining Mr. Rochester because they have already been told what he looks like. If anything, they might not even notice that there are no descriptions of him, because they bring in the knowledge from *Jane Eyre* and in that way once again ‘rewrite’ the text. However, if someone who has no previous knowledge of Mr. Rochester reads *Wide Sargasso Sea*, they might have a hard time picturing him because they do not know anything about his appearance. Moreover, if someone reads *Jane Eyre* after having read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, they may find that their idea of Mr. Rochester differs remarkably from that of Charlotte Brontë’s, and may even have a hard time adapting to the numerous descriptions of the character.

When it comes to Rochester’s ideas about the world, they differ a bit between the two books. In *Jane Eyre*, Mrs. Fairfax says that “she should not be surprised if he were to go straight from the Leas to London, and thence to the Continent” (162). He seems restless, and Jane is told during her first few days at Thornfield that the house is at risk of “getting out of order, unless Mr Rochester should take it into his head to come and reside [there] permanently – or, at least, visit it rather oftener” (101). This tells us that he is not on a one time trip, but stays away from his home most of the time and only rarely returns. Mr. Rochester also tells Jane that once they are married, he will show her the world and she will “sojourn at Paris, Rome, and Naples: at Florence, Venice and Vienna: all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you” (258). He wants to share the world with Jane and show her the sights.

Interestingly, this is very different from the way in which Mr. Rochester in Rhys’ book is presented. While there are moments where he likes Jamaica, stating how the air is filled with “an intoxicating freshness as if all this had never been breathed before” (41), most of the time he feels as if “[e]verything is too much [...]. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near” (39). He refuses to acknowledge the natives’ traditions, scoffing at the idea of Christophine trailing her dress on the ground as a sign of respect and celebration. His only comment is that “[w]hatever the reason it is not a clean habit” (50) and he does not listen to Antoinette when she tries to explain their customs. Neither

does he accept the native language, but sticks to the word “summer house” even after acknowledging that Antoinette calls it an “ajoupa”. For someone who only knows the Rochester of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he may seem like a person who cannot handle anything that differs from his homeland, and the fact that he does not even try to speak the language might make him seem narrow-minded and rude. However, if one has also read *Jane Eyre*, one could bring to the text the knowledge that the reason he starts travelling is because he wants to “seek and find a good and intelligent woman” (307) while at the same time forget about the mad one he keeps in the attic. The fact that he travels in *Jane Eyre* might remind the reader, if familiar with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, of how he does not care for Antoinette/Bertha at all and probably wishes her dead or at least gone, which adds to the picture of him as the villain of *Jane Eyre* rather than the hero.

Indeed, Mr. Rochester is the hero of *Jane Eyre*, and has often been called a Byronic hero. *The Penguin Guide to Literature in English* says that a typical Byronic hero is a “romantic hero, an isolated individual who attacks social conventions and challenges the authorities of the age and who searches for, but never finds, peace and happiness” (115). Mr. Rochester fits into this ideal since he either travels alone around the world or lives at Thornfield with just a few servants, whom he mostly ignores. Julia Miele Rodas writes in her essay that “[t]hrough he may not outwardly rave, Jane’s lover is evidently impatient with the forms of polite social intercourse” (150). For example, when Jane and Mrs. Fairfax join him on his first night back at Thornfield, Jane comments that “it appeared he was not in the mood to notice us, for he never lifted his head as we approached” (122). When seated Mrs. Fairfax begins speaking to him, complimenting him on his hard work and perseverance, and yet his only response is: “Madam, I should like some tea” (122). He also challenges the church’s authority by attempting to marry Jane while his first wife, Bertha/Antoinette, is still alive.

How the character is viewed by the reader depends a great deal on which version one encounters first, because, as discussed earlier, we are always influenced by what we have read. It may be hard to completely discard the idea of Mr. Rochester as a hero while reading *Wide Sargasso Sea*, just as it might be almost impossible to forget about his horrible actions to Antoinette when reading *Jane Eyre*. But this does not have to be negative; it should be considered something good, a way of adding more layers to

Mr. Rochester and of uniting the two texts in order to make him an even more interesting character. As Barthes said, it is in the reader that different texts unite, and in this case those texts are *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Together they create the multi-layered character of Edward Rochester.

Mr. Rochester's story and lies

As stated before, *Wide Sargasso Sea* functions as a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, telling the story of Antoinette Cosway and later also Edward Rochester. While only taking up a few pages in *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester's story of his first wife is the foundation on which Rhys based her novel.

Even in Brontë's text, one might learn a lot about the character of Mr. Rochester by looking at his first marriage, both in Jamaica and later in England. The reason for marrying, the treatment of his wife and finally the decision to keep her locked up all say something about what kind of person Edward Rochester is. But do the different texts show different sides to the marriage? And how might that affect the reader's perception of Mr. Rochester?

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the reader follows Antoinette as she grows up with her family and it is not until right at the end of the first part of the novel that we are told about how her stepfather "has asked some English friends to spend next winter [in Jamaica]" (33), and how he is sure that at least one of them will definitely come. The stepfather's certainty of this, along with the fact that he says he has tried to arrange for Antoinette to be happy, could lead the reader to suspect that this is not a visit from any English friend, but most probably the beginning of an arranged marriage. In *Jane Eyre*, Mr. Rochester does not hide the fact that it was indeed so, and he tells Jane of how his father and older brother made sure the marriage took place. He also points out how they "thought only of the thirty thousand pounds" (303) that Antoinette's family was willing to bring to the marriage, not of his feelings or wants in life.

It might be easy to pity Mr. Rochester in *Jane Eyre* while he is telling his story of how he was tricked into marrying for money, but if the reader has also read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he or she may be influenced by Rhys' text and remember how Mr. Rochester is not the only one forced into the marriage. The fact that he never acknowledges this in *Jane Eyre*, but instead insinuates that Antoinette approved of the

marriage, could make it seem as if he does not care for Antoinette at all. He even says that “[h]er family wished to secure me, because I was of a good race; and so did she” (302), referring to Antoinette. He paints the picture of her caring nothing for love, but instead seeing him as some sort of possession, more concerned about race and heritage than anything else, which is, as it happens, what Kendrick argues that Mr. Rochester does in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, accepting Antoinette “only because of the symbolic value she carries within the dominant order – her fortune and her beauty make her a prized possession for him” (241). It is another way in which the two texts contrast each other, namely of who wanted the marriage and for what reasons.

Furthermore, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette comes off as very anxious to please her new husband right from the start, when they arrive at the destination of their honeymoon. She assures him that the rain will stop soon and finds them shelter inside her friend’s house, all while speaking “hesitantly, as if she expected me to refuse” (37), Mr. Rochester observes. While he finds this disconcerting, the reader can see that Antoinette is trying to make her new husband comfortable.

The two accounts of the beginning of the marriage contrast with each other and if approaching *Wide Sargasso Sea* after already having read *Jane Eyre*, the reader may bring the knowledge of Mr. Rochester being tricked by his family into the new text, adding a new layer of injustice to the situation. It might then be easier to feel sorry for him in *Wide Sargasso Sea* because of the memory of how one felt sorry for him in *Jane Eyre*. However, if one were to read *Wide Sargasso Sea* first, the story Mr. Rochester tells in *Jane Eyre* may seem more of an attempt to get Jane to feel sorry for him, and less about telling her what actually happened. Antoinette/Bertha is painted as a horrible person, while the reader could remember how she tried to please Mr. Rochester and make him feel at ease. It might add a sense of dishonesty to Mr. Rochester’s story.

Furthermore, while on the topic of dishonesty, there is a passage in *Jane Eyre* where Mr. Rochester clearly lies to Jane about his past. He is telling Jane about his dislike of children, and refers to himself as an “old bachelor” (131). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines the word “bachelor” as an “unmarried man” (62) which is clearly a lie since he is married to Bertha. The way it is put in the text, as if he does not hesitate at all while lying, gives the reader who does not have any previous knowledge of Mr. Rochester’s past no reason to question this statement. Further on in the book, this may

lead to great surprise once Bertha Rochester is revealed, but the reader will probably not remember how Rochester lied, since it is only one sentence. Rochester continues by saying that “blood is said to be thicker than water” (131), referring to why he keeps Mrs. Fairfax employed at Thornfield, and that implies that simply being married to a relative of Mr. Rochester means you are blood in his eyes. Again, if the reader has not read *Wide Sargasso Sea* Mr. Rochester might seem very nice for saying something like that and taking care of his old relative. He could be perceived as loyal and caring for the people close to him. However, if the reader is familiar with the story of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the idea of him taking care of a distant family member but not his own wife may give the character of Edward Rochester a sinister and cruel undertone. The reader might remember how Rochester in *Wide Sargasso Sea* never liked Antoinette, even though they were married. This layer of the character will then be applied onto Brontë’s Mr. Rochester and again, he may seem a much darker and villainous character.

Yet another lie Mr. Rochester tells Jane in *Jane Eyre* is that of Grace Poole. This occurs after Jane has heard a terrible laugh and someone set fire to Mr. Rochester’s bed. When she then confronts Mr. Rochester about the matter, he is quick to agree with her that it is indeed Grace Poole who has been causing trouble, and no one else. “Just so. Grace Poole – you have guessed it” (151) he tells Jane, being very clear. Again, if the reader has not read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this lie might not be apparent, instead the reader will probably also suspect Grace Poole. Later, when the truth is revealed, the reader may not remember this lie or will not consider it important. However, the reader who has already read *Wide Sargasso Sea* might notice the lie while reading *Jane Eyre* and the idea of Mr. Rochester taking the easy way out, instead of telling Jane the truth, could lead to Mr. Rochester being perceived as a coward. This idea of him using lies to get what he wants without exposing his secret, together with a previous quote where he states that “[...] I have a right to get pleasure out of life: and I will get it, cost what it may.” (137) creates an image of Mr. Rochester as a calculating and determined man who does not care about who he tricks in order to get what he wants, in this case pleasure. If by “pleasure” he means sex, he also seems emotionally cold and only really caring about women’s bodies.

Finally, the last lie Mr. Rochester tells Jane happens after she has found out that he is already married. He is trying to persuade her into staying with him and

telling her that “I am not married. You shall be Mrs Rochester [...]” (301). To the reader who is only familiar with *Jane Eyre*, his constant tries to be with Jane may seem romantic although a bit desperate. The reader might notice how badly Mr. Rochester wants to be with Jane, and therefore it is easier to overlook the lie as an act of a desperate man in love. However, if one has read *Wide Sargasso Sea* one might again be reminded of how hard Mr. Rochester fights to be with Jane, while he found it very easy to write off Antoinette as a mad woman and give up on their marriage. It may lead to anger towards the character of Mr. Rochester, because after having read *Wide Sargasso Sea* it is easy to apply the idea of Antoinette as the protagonist to *Jane Eyre*, where the idea clashes with the idea of Bertha, the mad woman who no one sympathizes with. Hence, for the reader who has previously read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it could be difficult to accept that Mr. Rochester fights so hard to keep Jane in *Jane Eyre*, to the point where he acts as if his first wife does not exist, while in *Wide Sargasso Sea* he had no problem giving up on his marriage to Antoinette.

To sum up, one could say that while it may be easy for the reader who has not read Rhys’ novel to feel sorry for Mr. Rochester when reading about his story in *Jane Eyre*, it is probably more difficult to do so if the reader is familiar with the happenings in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and brings that knowledge into Brontë’s text. If the reader knows of Mr. Rochester’s previous marriage, then small passages in *Jane Eyre* might stand out, where obvious lies make the character of Mr. Rochester seem calculating and dishonest.

Antoinette/Bertha Rochester: Destined for insanity or driven to it?

The matter of Bertha Rochester’s insanity is a crucial element in both texts. In *Jane Eyre*, no one ever questions the idea of Bertha being mad, although Jane does point out that “she cannot help being mad” and therefore Mr. Rochester should not “speak of her with hate – with vindictive antipathy” (298). Rochester does not deny the fact that he hates his first wife, but he answers Jane by promising her that he does not hate Bertha because of her insanity. The fact that he does indeed hate her is a recurring point in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as well, so to the reader who is familiar with Rhys’ text this may not come as a surprise.

On the contrary, it could be argued that Mr. Rochester's hatred of his wife is what drove her mad. This is never suggested in *Jane Eyre*, where Mr. Rochester continuously points to Bertha's heritage as the root of her madness. He is certain that because the mother and younger brother were said to be mad, Bertha is destined to be mad as well, and since he did not know about her family history when marrying her, he was fooled. Listening to his story, it is clear that he sees himself as someone who was used by his father and brother and left with a wife who was sure to go mad. There is no compassion there, no sense that Mr. Rochester feels bad for his wife; instead he talks of how the two families "joined in a plot" (303) against him and how, as soon as they began their honeymoon, "found her nature wholly alien [...], her tastes obnoxious [...], her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger" (303). There is a sense of disappointment in the way Mr. Rochester speaks of Bertha, as if he had thought she would be so much more than she turned out to be. If the reader has not read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, then the idea which Rhys' puts forward, that Bertha's insanity is due to what happened to her in life and not simply her genes, might not be present. Without this additional layer, the reader may find it easy to accept Mr. Rochester's story in *Jane Eyre*.

However, to the reader of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there may be several reasons as to why Mr. Rochester himself could be the reason for his wife's insanity. The first one is the fact that he continues to not only think of her as mad, but also act as if she is mad. When arriving at the house where they are going to stay, one of the first things he stops to contemplate is how her bedroom door "could be bolted, a stout wooden bar pushed across the other" (43). He is obviously already considering locking her up, something which readers who are familiar with *Jane Eyre* might notice.

Also, the idea of locking her up makes her seem like a child, an image that returns on multiple occasions in *Wide Sargasso Sea* when Mr. Rochester thinks of Antoinette. He rocks her "like a child" (49) and sings to her, says she throws rocks "like a boy" (52) and calls her "the girl I had married" (64) instead of using the word "woman". He clearly does not see Antoinette as an equal, but instead as a child who he is responsible for. When Antoinette speaks to Christophine, she says: "I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him" (68). This also seems to indicate a child's situation in the world. Rhys' shows that Mr. Rochester

considers himself above Antoinette, and he does not think of her as very smart or able to take care of herself, which might stem from his belief that she is losing her mind. Here Rhys uses the idea of Antoinette and Mr. Rochester in order to comment on the situation of women in the 19th century and how they were treated as inferior to men, not being able to have much in terms of possessions and not having any real freedom to do what they wanted.

By letting the protagonist be treated like this, the effect in the reader might be that of a sense of injustice and disapproval towards the depiction of women as children, most likely the exact reaction that Rhys wanted to achieve. The theory of post-colonialism could also be applied to this, which in that case would point to how Mr. Rochester might treat Antoinette as a child because of her heritage. The fact that she comes from a less developed country than England could make Rochester think that she herself is not as developed as English women. Again, this could lead to a sense of injustice and disapproval because the reader, who has followed Antoinette since she was a child, will probably know that this is not true. Rhys' shows, through her writing, that Antoinette is just like any other woman with thoughts and emotions the reader can relate to. The fact that Mr. Rochester does not seem to understand this, but instead assumes Antoinette is very different from everything he knows back in England, makes him seem ignorant, which is most likely what Rhys intended.

Furthermore, when Mr. Rochester speaks of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, he speaks of how, while living with her for four years, "her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank" (303-304). But in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the text indicates that it is actually Mr. Rochester who brings out these vices, i.e. sexuality, in Antoinette. He is the one who initiates sex, and says that "[v]ery soon she was as eager for what's called loving as I was – more lost and drowned afterwards" (55). There is also a scene where, when finding Antoinette's dress, it makes him "breathless and savage with desire" (56) to the point where he initiates sex and does not turn away from her until he is exhausted. This happens, as he says himself, "without a word or caress". Julia Miele Rodes also comments on this, saying that Rochester's "series of mistresses and his swift disgust with and disposal of these women [...] demonstrate a predilection for sexual self-indulgence that seem to parallel the "vices" of his captive wife" (151). The way Mr. Rochester uses Antoinette/Bertha simply for her

body, just like he did with the mistresses, is something that could very possibly have driven her mad. Talking to Christophine, Antoinette says that “he does not love me, I think he hates me” (66), and the reader may be able to sympathize with her, imagining how horrible it must be to live with someone you know hates you. It makes Mr. Rochester look even more like the villain of the novel.

In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is depicted as a very passionate and sexual person. She is compared to a beast and the descriptions of her are very physical; she runs “backwards and forwards” (291) and attacks Mr. Rochester as soon as she sees him. Her hair is long and tangled, symbolizing the unruly and wild, in contrast to Jane’s way of having her hair smooth and plain. Her clothes are rags and one can imagine that they do not cover as much of her body as for example Jane’s clothes do. Having only this description of Bertha/Antoinette, it might be easy to see only what Mr. Rochester wants Jane to see, which is a mad woman who is beyond saving and who is in this situation because of bad genes.

However, Rodas argues that there is an “uncanny resemblance between Bertha and Rochester” (149) in *Jane Eyre*. Rodas states that “it is not Bertha’s appearance alone, but also her personality, her passions, that find a correlative in Rochester” and she also points to Rochester’s “penchant for violence” (151) as a common trait between the two characters. This strengthens the argument that Mr. Rochester was the one to make Antoinette/Bertha into who she is, at least probably to the reader who has read *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It supports the argument that Bertha/Antoinette’s sexual needs and other passionate traits were awakened by Mr. Rochester since she did not act in this way before her marriage to him.

Another point on which the two texts differ is of course the name of Bertha/Antoinette, and Rhys indicates that Mr. Rochester changing Antoinette’s name in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an important part to why she was driven mad. In Brontë’s novel, there are no signs of that Bertha would ever have been named anything but Bertha, although it is said that her full name is “Bertha Antoinetta Mason” (288). However, if the reader has previously read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the name Bertha may carry a lot of significance. It constantly reminds the reader of how cruel Mr. Rochester can be, since he is the one who suddenly decided to stop calling his wife Antoinette and instead rename her Bertha.

A name is more than just a word, it is part of who we are and a very personal matter. It is what other people call you, it is what represents you in the world, and it is the one thing that you will always carry with you. When Antoinette married Mr. Rochester, she was no longer Antoinette Cosway, but instead Antoinette Rochester, meaning she already gave up her surname for him. This was standard practice at the time, but when Mr. Rochester later suddenly changes her first name, it is as if he has symbolically changed all of her. There is now nothing about her name that ties her to who she was before she met Edward Rochester. Rhys' is commenting on women's situation at the time, and how they were basically owned by their husbands. Taking the man's last name shows that the wife is now part of him, but what Mr. Rochester does in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is to change all of Antoinette so that she is no longer herself, but instead his wife and a woman with a very English name, Bertha. We already know that Mr. Rochester hates Antoinette, as discussed previously, and the fact that he misses England and everything English might be one reason why he changes her name, to make her a little more like what he loves and a little less like her native country. He has already decided that she is going mad, so maybe he sees this name change as a last attempt to change her into something better, something that he can stand to be around. But the name change clearly upsets Antoinette, as we can see in this passage, where she speaks to Christophine:

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, "Goodnight, 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 [...] I sleep so badly now (70).

We see how the name change does not only affect her when she is awake and in Mr. Rochester's vicinity, but she thinks about it enough that it is making her have problems falling asleep at night. The fact that he calls her Bertha every night before bed makes it seem as if he thinks that if he just says it enough times, she will forget her old name and simply start using the new one. He must see that this is causing her pain, yet he continues.

To the reader who has not read *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the name Bertha probably does not mean anything when Mr. Rochester's first wife is introduced in *Jane Eyre*. However, if the reader has read Rhys' text and remembers how Antoinette came to be named Bertha, the name may be influenced by the events in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and stands for all the ways in which Mr. Rochester dominates his wife and threatens her identity. When reading Brontë's novel, the reader might be reminded of Mr. Rochester's actions in *Wide Sargasso Sea* every time the name Bertha is mentioned, especially in the chapters where everything is revealed to Jane. When seeing how he still calls her Bertha, even though he almost never sees her and does not care for her at all, the reader might 'rewrite him' as someone cruel and cold hearted because of the influences of Rhys' text.

Similarly, if the reader approaches *Wide Sargasso Sea* after having already read *Jane Eyre*, it may be hard to discard the idea of Mr. Rochester as the hero. The idea of him changing the name of his wife could seem over the top, an easy way to make him seem like a horrible person. The reader may also be more ready to believe that Antoinette is going mad because of her family history, since that is what we are told in *Jane Eyre*. The idea of Antoinette as Bertha, the crazy woman in the attic, is always present when reading Rhys' text and it may affect the reader even if it might not be noticeable. Bertha is a minor, flat character in *Jane Eyre* and having already seen her in that way, it is hard to accept her as the protagonist of a story. Furthermore, it is even harder to do so when the character one has viewed as the hero suddenly turns out to be the villain.

To summarize, it should be said that intertextual elements play an important role in how the reader views Mr. Rochester. *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* present very different views of the relationship between Mr. Rochester and Bertha/Antoinette. It is not until the reader is familiar with both texts that the contrasts can become apparent, and how the reader sees Mr. Rochester, whether as the hero or villain, partly depends on which text he or she read first. The way Mr. Rochester treats his wife might seem less horrible to the reader who has read *Jane Eyre* because they know what is to come in terms of Bertha/Antoinette's violence and attack against her brother, while the reader who sees Antoinette as a protagonist might think it awful to see how she is treated in *Jane Eyre*.

Conclusion

We constantly draw parallels between what we read and what we have read before, being reminded of certain feelings and thoughts we might have had last time we read about the same subject. By doing this, we add new layers to texts and in a way create our own version of the text, meaning that two people never read the same text in the exact same way.

This is highly applicable on *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. In both texts the character of Mr. Rochester plays a great role, but in very different ways. The reader may be greatly affected by the portrayal of Mr. Rochester that he or she reads first, and this then carries over into the other text, affecting it intertextually and adding new layers to the character.

If the reader first reads *Jane Eyre*, then the idea of Mr. Rochester as a hero will probably seem as the 'right' portrayal of him. He is big, strong, mysterious and willing to lie in order to marry Jane. The reader might pity him for his unfortunate first marriage to the mad Bertha Mason, and does not question his decision too much to keep her locked up in the attic.

If *Wide Sargasso Sea* is where the reader is first introduced to Mr. Rochester, then the idea of him as the villain may seem to be the 'right' one. He is cruel towards his wife, Antoinette, and quick to believe anyone who tells him that she is going mad. There is no reason for the reader to see Mr. Rochester as anything but the villain of the story.

However, it is when these two texts are united that it becomes interesting. Since Mr. Rochester is present in both novels, the idea the reader got of him in one text could carry over into the second text and add new layers to the character. If the reader is already convinced before reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* that Mr. Rochester is a hero and Antoinette is crazy, then Mr. Rochester's actions towards her will probably not seem as cruel. It might then be easier to sympathize with Rochester in Rhys' novel, and just as he believes what other people say about his first wife, so may the reader. On the other hand, the reader who began by reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* will most probably dislike the Mr. Rochester of *Jane Eyre* because the reader may already think of him as the villain of the story. All the small lies and references to Antoinette might remind the

reader of how horribly he treated his wife in Rhys' novel, and the reader will probably never see Mr. Rochester entirely as the hero.

Finally it should be said that while some might argue that every text should be seen as a stand-alone work, the fact that we influence texts by adding layers of our own is not something negative. As Barthes said: "there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, [...] but the reader" (7th par.), which I for one consider a good thing.

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