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Who am I and where am I?

The idea of identity and place in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

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Abstract

This essay explores the protagonists Jane and Antoinette, from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and how their identities develop in relation to the places they go to in their respective novels. The essay also explores how this change of places marks the characters' identities. This is done by dividing the places of the two novels into four different sections, namely, the Childhood home, the School, Main setting and the Last stop. By using the concepts of Heimat and Fremde the discussion shows that Antoinette's feelings of Heimat change throughout the book and steadily come closer to Fremde when she loses her identity bit by bit by changing place and locations. Jane's process is quite the opposite since she grows up with feelings of Fremde and for every place she lives at she comes one step closer to her Heimat and final identity. The places affect the identities of the characters but the people occupying the spaces also affect the identities.

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Introduction

Identity is a complex concept and is affected by multiple factors: place, gender, nationality, religion and politics, to name a few. It is immensely important for a human being to have an identity and a sense of belonging, although a person does not have just one identity but rather multiple identities that together form their individual personality. Identity is indeed a complex matter. Place is also a complex concept since a place can be and mean different things for different people. A place can be home for one person but an unknown or even a frightening place for another. A place can also embody numerous things. One thing that is certain is that place is involved in making an identity.

The notion of setting is very present in the novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë and in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys. In both books, the protagonists often change locations in their respective lives and face new surroundings that might not always seem sympathetic. This essay will follow Jane in *Jane Eyre* and Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and their journeys from childhood into adulthood. *Wide Sargasso Sea* was written in response to *Jane Eyre* and the novels have some characters in common. Antoinette is based on the character of Bertha from *Jane Eyre*; however, I will only use the name Antoinette when referring to the character in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Both books address the concept of place. The childhood home, the school and the main setting and the last stop are all places recognised and present in the novels and are somewhat comparable. To clarify the main setting, I will be referring to the longest part of each novel where most of each story takes place, namely Granbois Estate from Jean Rhys' novel and Thornfield Hall from Charlotte Brontë's.

There have been studies regarding the postcolonial aspect of the books, especially *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where there have been a clear postcolonial reading and discourse of the subject. In her article "Jean Rhy's Controversial Post Colonial Text *Wide Sargasso Sea* Implicitly Agrees with and Elucidates the Colonial Project", Farhana Haque discusses how and argues that Rhys with her controversial postcolonial text agrees more with the colonial project than disagrees through her character Antoinette with her aspiration to adopt the Englishness. Cristina González Varo, in her article "The Postcolonial Framework and Reinterpretation of *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre* in Lloyd Jones' *Mister Pip* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*", compares *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* with the use of location, identity and "the postcolonial writer's agenda". I will also, like González Varo, use the concepts of place and identity. However, I will focus on the aspect of place, as both an abstract and physical matter

and not just the mere location, and how it connects to identity. I will also briefly touch on this subject of postcolonialism since Antoinette “has no particular culture or identity to pursue. She drifts between two cultures or identities” (Luo 1222) within the West Indian culture. She is neither black nor white; she does not belong to either culture so she assumes a Creole identity which will become more apparent in this project.

The idea of this project is to explore how the places mark the characters’ identities and how the characters’ respective identities develop in relation to the places depicted. I will do this by studying the settings described in the two books and I have named them accordingly: the Childhood home, the School, Main setting and the Last stop. *Jane Eyre* was written before *Wide Sargasso Sea* but the latter takes place in a time before the former. Therefore I have decided to discuss Jean Rhys’ book before Charlotte Brontë’s in the sections mentioned above.

Theories

To be able to discuss the matters of identity and place and apply them to the notion of setting in each novel, this section will give the background of each theory. Identity, place and the German concepts of Heimat (home) and Fremde will be presented in short.

Identity

As mentioned before, identity is a complex matter. Identity is something that is determined in comparison or contrast to something or someone else. We tend to draw lines between ourselves and the others against whom we define ourselves. There are many factors that determine identity, for example, gender, sexuality, nationality and place. Morley and Robins explain that identities are constructed “through processes of boundary-drawing and exclusion, where the ‘I’ or ‘we’ can only be defined in relation to the Other, from whom it is distinguished” (Morley and Robins 19). They mention the ‘I’ or ‘we’ which is the part that contrasts with the Other and this is the base in constructing identities. An individual’s process of identification needs to be done in relation to another group in order to distinguish the ‘I’ from the Other. However, identity is also connected to memory and “memories of ‘home’” (Morley and Robins 10). These memories of home are also a part of the construction of the individual’s identity and will continuously expand the identity with new memories of life.

Heimat

Morley and Robins describe Heimat as “Home, homeland” which corresponds with the word’s original meaning in German which has no equivalent in English but is mainly regarded as ‘home’/‘homeland’ (Morley and Robins 5). The concept of Heimat could also be seen as the birthplace of a person, which would make it the centre of the world for that person according to Morley and Robins (11). The concept of Heimat concerns not only location but also “invokes a ‘memory of origin’ and inevitably involves a notion of an ‘impossible return’ to (imaginary or real) roots or origins” (Morley and Robins 11). So this “imaginary” place is not an existing place but rather a memory of or longing for a home/homeland. Heimat was from the beginning connected to the dividing of Germany into West and East Germany but for this project I will use it in a more general meaning, the longing for a home and a sense of belonging.

Fremde is the opposite of Heimat: “Fremde evokes feelings of isolation and alienation” (Morley and Robins 25) and the two concepts contrast each other. They always stand in relation to one another and are dichotomies. The more absent the feelings of Heimat are, the more prominent will the feelings of Fremde be and vice versa. While Fremde is synonymous with “separation, hardship, privation, homesickness, and the loss of a sense of belonging” (Morley and Robins 25), Heimat is about “security and belonging” (Morley and Robins 25). Protecting the foundations of culture and identity is what Heimat is about as well as “sustaining cultural boundaries and boundedness” (Morley and Robins 8) by excluding identities that “are seen as aliens and ‘foreigners’” (Morley and Robins 8). The Other is a constant threat towards “the security and integrity of those who share a common home” (Morley and Robins 8).

Place

Place has two aspects to it, one is the physical and the other is the socially constructed. The physical place is the location itself, i.e. the material place which can be seen with the naked eye. It is a question of geography. Kearns and Gesler explain that “Rather than being reduced to mere location, place is a negotiated and contested reality, part material and part social in character” (Kearns and Gesler 293). Therefore is a place not just a location but it is also a space for multiple realities conceived by people and these conceived realities are competing with each other for the place. This competition makes the place fluid and indefinite. MacDowell also considers this observation in her book where she continues to go further into

what defines places (4). According to MacDowell, it is socio-spatial practices that define places. Socio-spatial dialectic is the process of people affecting the structure of cities and vice versa (Knox and Pinch 340), so the place affects the people and the people affect the place. These socio-spatial practices result in places with “multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion” (MacDowell 4). It is the rules and codes of the society that determine where the boundaries are drawn. The “boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of experience” (MacDowell 4). The social aspect concerns the deciding of who is and who is not allowed inside the boundaries and the spatial aspect relates to the material space itself. Moreover, MacDowell continues with the discussion of spatiality and explains that “houses are often thought of as bodies” (93) and that they contain mutual features which affect the perception of the self. She says that ““If people construct houses and make them in their own image, so also do they use these houses and house-images to construct themselves as individuals and as groups”” (MacDowell 93). So houses and places, affect people, and their self-perception, who then, in turn, affect the houses and places they occupy and so on. It is apparent that it is not only the process of constructing an identity that can be excluding and including but also the process of making a place.

The Childhood home

In Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the protagonist Antoinette lives at Coulibri Estate together with her mother Annette, her brother Pierre, her nurse Christophine and the rest of the house staff. The house is in poor condition and it “leaks like a sieve” (Rhys 17) and people seldom visit because the road is in need of repair. They have barely any money left and life is hard since Antoinette’s father died and now they are living by themselves. Antoinette’s mother works hard to not give in and give up. Her main focus is her son, who is mentally disabled and staggers when he walks and cannot speak distinctly (Rhys 10), and she rarely gives Antoinette any affection or attention. Antoinette’s almost only source of love in life is Christophine, her nurse, who takes care of her and comforts her. Despite these conditions, she is content as long as she is within the limits of the estate. At the beginning of her story, Antoinette feels safe and calm whenever she is in or around the estate and her childhood appears to be quite a happy one. This description of the garden at Coulibri demonstrates her feelings:

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible– the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers

mixed with the fresh living smell. [...] All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. [...] This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous. (Rhys 10-11)

It seems as if Antoinette is not affected by the decay of the place but that she rather thrives from it. She finds consolation in the presence of the garden and she mentions various times when the garden reassures her after incidents. One of the incidents, when a little girl followed Antoinette singing “go away white cockroach”, made her run back home feeling miserable and seeking support in the vegetation. Antoinette says: “When I was safely home I sat close to the old wall at the end of the garden. It was covered with green moss soft as velvet and I never wanted to move again” (Rhys 13). The word ‘safe’ is one Antoinette keeps mentioning in relation to her childhood home and it is what she sees herself as. It is also a very natural way of thinking for her as a child. She is supposed to feel safe when she is at home and Coulibri Estate is Antoinette’s Heimat, her home.

Despite the lack of love from her family members in her home, she does get love from Christophine and this is all she needs to be comfortable and secure. It is not only the word ‘safe’ that is repeated but also the places that make her feel safe: “I lay thinking, ‘I am safe. There is the corner of the bedroom door and the friendly furniture. There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall with green moss. [...] I am safe. I am safe from strangers” (Rhys 16). The tree of life and the moss on the wall make her feel safe, even just the thought of them. Antoinette’s confidence is embedded in the physical place which is embodied by the tree and the moss wall. She is afraid of strangers and feels the need to be protected from them which is seen from her reclusive behaviour when she goes to hide away in the garden. This fear of strangers and need of protection is even more prominent when her mother starts going out more and Antoinette feels a shift in the house when she is away, everything becomes duller. Luo argues that Jean Rhys herself, who came from the West Indies, had a Creole identity that provided her with her self-experience of alienation (1222). Luo points to Rhys’ identity crisis as the main contributory factor to *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s theme of identity loss. Antoinette is very connected to this theme of identity loss which is noticeable at one point when her mother is away and Antoinette changes. She takes a walk on the estate and looks at everything around her and reflects, “Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer” (Rhys 16). This reflection, where she admits losing herself, is the shift towards her loss of identity and it is a recurring matter throughout the novel.

When her mother finds a new husband, Antoinette is reluctant to accept him, a stranger, and his restoration of Coulibri Estate. He changes the place and the place changes Antoinette: “Coulibri looked the same when I saw it again, although it was clean and tidy, no grass between the flagstones, no leaks. But it didn’t feel the same” (Rhys 18). She loses both her identity and her feelings of home at the same time. Drawing on Morley and Robins’ discussion of identity and belonging, it can be argued that Antoinette’s Heimat is now just a memory. And this absence of Heimat promotes feelings of Fremde which influence Antoinette. Her experience of Fremde becomes even more prominent when the house at Coulibri Estate is burnt down and thereby manifests the departure of Heimat, in the sense of feelings but also in a physical sense. The house goes up in flames and the last of Antoinette’s innocent childhood disappears together with the house and the tree of life and the moss wall. Antoinette is looking at the fire: “The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like sunset and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left” (Rhys 27). She says that nothing will be left which turns out to be true because together with Coulibri her mother also disappears from her life and she is now by herself. Antoinette thinks to herself: “She [Annette] was part of Coulibri, that had gone, so she had gone...” (Rhys 28). Antoinette loses her house, her home, her safety and her last living parent. She becomes an orphan just like Jane, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.

Antoinette’s relatively easy early childhood contrasts with that of Jane Eyre. Jane’s childhood contains hardships right from the beginning. Jane lives with her aunt Mrs Reed and her cousins at Gateshead. She is miserable and unloved. The adults say that she does not deserve to be loved and one of them even says, “you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep” (Brontë 7) which is in a way true since she is an orphan who lives at her aunt’s house, but this leaves a mark on Jane. She is repeatedly told that she is an ugly child, that her cousins are prettier than she is and that she is basically worthless. This affects Jane and how she sees herself. The people around her are constructing her identity for her by excluding her from their group and making her the Other.

Jane’s life as an outsider at Gateshead is depicted by several descriptions of the garden as well as the house. Most of the settings are rather gloomy and lamentable and this is shown by her mood and her general feelings towards her situation as an orphan in an uncaring household. After a fight with her aunt, where she puts up a strong resistance, she goes out to a secluded area of the garden: “but I found no pleasure in the silent trees, the falling fir-cones, the congealed relics of autumn, russet leaves, swept by past winds in heaps, and now stiffened

together. [...] It was a very gray day” (Brontë 39). Jane is, unlike Antoinette, not calmed by the garden. Almost every adjective has a melancholy mood to it, ‘silent’, ‘falling’, ‘stiffened’ and so forth. Many of the words are related to autumn, a melancholy season, and this, in turn, is echoed in Jane’s general mood at Gateshead.

Another description of setting given is the one of the red-room where Jane finds herself after an incident with her cousin John. Jane describes the red-room as one of the largest and grandest of the house but that the “room was chill, because it seldom had a fire; it was silent, because remote from the nursery and kitchens; solemn, because it was known to be so seldom entered” (Brontë 9). The room and Jane are similar; Jane is also quiet, serious and left out in the cold by her relatives. The coldness, silence and seriousness of the room constitute the essence of Jane’s persona. They are both separated from the rest of the household and a clear line is drawn. The boundaries become even clearer when Mrs Reed draws a “line of separation” between Jane and her cousins after the incident in the red-room. It is a quite distinct border and she has to sleep in a small closet, spend time in the nursery and eat her meals all alone (Brontë 25). Jane is isolated from the other inhabitants of the house which makes her dislike not only the people but also the house itself. Being asked if she likes Gateshead Hall she even answers: “It is not my house sir: and Abbott says I have less right to be here than a servant” (Brontë 22). It is obvious that Jane does not feel at home at Gateshead since she is not welcome there, which produces her feelings of Fremde and alienation.

Both of the main characters’ childhood homes are large houses that endorse both happiness and sorrow. These houses affect their inhabitants and Antoinette is mainly happy as a child while Jane has a hard childhood. Antoinette and Jane both end their childhoods on a somewhat sad note. Antoinette loses her Heimat and has an identity crisis whereas Jane is still searching for her Heimat and living with feelings of Fremde.

The School

Antoinette is sent to a convent after Coulibri has burnt down, and there she finds herself in a new situation. The nuns’ lifestyle is a quiet and tranquil one. Antoinette finds a sense of calm and is largely happy there. The convent changes her and she says “I felt bolder, happier, more free. But not so safe” (Rhys 34). So this place gives her freedom but takes away her sense of security. The convent is not Antoinette’s Heimat because she does not feel safe there and safety is of the essence when it comes to the question of home. Even though Antoinette knows

Coulibri is gone, she still remembers her Heimat. She does not feel safe now when her Heimat is no longer in existence.

Despite Antoinette's loss of Heimat in Coulibri Estate, she finds her sanctuary in the convent. For Antoinette, the convent is "a place of sunshine and death" (Rhys 34) and these opposites are visible throughout the setting descriptions of the place. She seems to balance between some of the most classical dichotomies: "light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell" (Rhys 34). The dichotomy can be applied to the nuns where Antoinette sees the goodness in the nuns and in their chores as well as in their talk about heaven, but she also sees the darkness in the nuns' veils, their Crucifixes and their profound knowledge about hell (Rhys 34). Antoinette's usage of dichotomies continues in her descriptions of the convent. She remembers her school room and what it feels like: "The hot classroom, the pitchpine desks, the heat of the bench striking up through my body, along my arms and hands. But outside I could see cool, blue shadow on a white wall" (Rhys 31). Antoinette longs for the cool shade when she sits inside the hot classroom. The cool shade represents heaven and good, while the heat of the classroom represents hell and evil. The shadows are a recurring theme in her descriptions, especially those cast by the trees, but now the shadows come to represent the arising darkness within her. Antoinette is fascinated by death and the dark and she seems drawn to the shadows playing outside in the garden: "we were back in the shifting shadows outside, more beautiful than any perpetual light could be" (Rhys 34). Antoinette is more drawn to the shadows than to the eternal light, which symbolises the afterlife in heaven. She has something dark inside her and as she thinks more about death, she starts to long for her own. She recognises this longing as a deadly sin and she quickly puts those thoughts from her mind and tries to focus on prayer instead. However, she still seems to hang on to the thought of death as a liberator.

When Antoinette is "liberated" from the convent by her step-father, Mr Mason, she is not at all pleased. She would rather stay at the convent where she can at least find an inkling of happiness. Mr Mason says: "You can't be hidden away all your life" and Antoinette thinks: "Why not?" (Rhys 35). She is not interested in going out into the world and living a normal life because that kind of life is not for her. She creates her own identity within the limits of the convent and does not want to leave her refuge to once again be the outsider excluded from the society because of her dual identity that people construct for her. After Mr Mason gives Antoinette the news of her relocation she thinks to herself: "It may have been the way he smiled, but again a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me" (Rhys 35). It is the

feeling of Fremde that she is overwhelmed by. She is about to lose her happy life at the convent and thereby lose her identity connected to the place once again.

Jane's life also dramatically changes when she is sent to school. At ten she starts at Lowood School where she lives in horrible conditions, it is freezing inside and the water in their washing bowls is frozen to ice. The pupils are starved since they do not get enough food. She has a hard time at Lowood because of this and because of Mr Brocklehurst. Mr Brocklehurst is the supervisor of the school and during one of his visits he calls her out in front of everyone at the school for being a naughty child which is something Mrs Reed had told him. This kind of reminder of Mrs Reed brings back the feelings of Fremde in Jane but despite these hardships, this is the place where she for the first time feels the warmth of love from her school friend Helen Burns and Miss Temple, who is one of her teachers. They both form Jane in different ways and give her a sense of identity.

Like Antoinette, Jane also describes the surroundings of the house. Jane's first impression of Lowood is that it is not as impressive as her former home but "comfortable enough" (Brontë 45). When she, later on, explores the rest of her surroundings, including the garden, it is evident that her own identity is visible in her descriptions:

The garden was a wide inclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect [...] broad walks bordered a middle space divided into scores of little beds; these beds were assigned as gardens for the pupils to cultivate, and each bed had an owner. When full of flowers they would doubtless look pretty, but, now, at the latter end of January, all was wintry blight and brown decay. (Brontë 51-52)

In the first part, the school grounds seem closer to a prison than a school, especially with the high walls and the privacy presented. The last part about the decaying flower beds that would bloom in the spring refers to Jane herself and her process of forming an identity. At the beginning of her stay at the school, she is just an empty shell but as time goes by she will blossom and grow into her own full person. Yet another description of the view in the garden connected to Jane is:

I looked round the convent-like garden, and then up at the house – a large building, half of which seemed gray and old, the other half quite new. The new part, containing the schoolroom and dormitory, was lit by mullioned and latticed window, which gave it a church-like aspect. (Brontë 52)

Jane looks at the house and sees the two parts it consists of, the old and the new. Jane also consists of two parts and they are like the house. The old part, which represents Jane's life at Gateshead, is grey and gloomy, while the new part, which represents her new life at Lowood, contains her new environment with the schoolroom and the dormitory. This hint from Gateshead suggests that Jane's feelings of Fremde are still present at Lowood and therefore it could be argued that this place is not her Heimat. There is also another part of the house described, the church-like windows, that suggests religion. Jane's religious interest is awakened when she gets to know Helen Burns. Helen is a devout Christian and some of her beliefs pass on to Jane. Helen influences Jane and gives her a sense of morality that Jane takes with her for the rest of her life.

After eight years at the school, she starts feeling restless. Her years at Lowood she describes as "[n]ot unhappy years" (Brontë 97) but things have changed since Miss Temple got married and moved away. Jane says: "she [Miss Temple] had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity" (Brontë 98) and thus the place feels different. She is now grown and has formed an identity. Jane is happy but she has not quite yet found her Heimat. She asks herself: "What do I want? A new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances" (Brontë 100) and this is what she gets when she applies and gets a job as a governess. This transition also gives her the opportunity to find her actual Heimat.

The two protagonists both start school after they leave their childhood homes. Antoinette is hesitant at first but later on she accepts her situation. Jane is set for a new start and a change of location but this new place does not turn out to be any better than the last one. Like their childhoods, Jane and Antoinette have both hard and good times in their school years. Jane is pleased after her years at Lowood and is ready for something new while Antoinette is disappointed to leave and would rather stay than change location and start her life over again.

Main Setting

After Antoinette's time at the convent, the next location she goes to is her family's summer house in Dominica which she inherited from her mother. The place is called Granbois and Antoinette has spent a lot of time there through the years and it seems like it is her new Heimat. Antoinette marries; she and her husband, the "unnamed" Mr Rochester, spend their honeymoon at the estate. The narrator changes from Antoinette to 'the man' she marries. From the beginning 'the man' bears a sort of grudge against her and one of the first signs of

him positioning her as the Other is when he describes her eyes as “sad, dark alien eyes” (Rhys 39). He uses the word ‘alien’ and by that he differentiates her from him. He makes a clear line that she is not like him; she is different in an ominous way. This distinction is what Ang-Lygate discusses when she states that non-white women, like Antoinette, are often positioned as the Other in societies which are predominantly Eurocentric (Ang-Lygate 152). In this case, despite being in the West Indies, ‘the man’ is exercising a Eurocentric approach and thus making Antoinette the Other. It is not only in a racial way he differentiates her but also by gender. Ang-Lygate presents the concept of *woman-as-Other* as how the male-centred culture unavoidably defines women in a negative way and that they are seen as the Other in comparison to the “male Self” (Ang-Lygate 152). This means that Antoinette does not define herself but is defined by someone else who also creates her identity for her without letting her have any influence over the matter.

Antoinette’s husband does not only dislike her but also the surroundings he finds himself in. When he describes the environment it seems beautiful but he is inclined to agree with the porter who calls it a wild place. But Antoinette’s husband goes further than that when he describes Granbois, “Not only wild but menacing. Those hills would close in on you” (Rhys 41). He feels threatened by the place and thereby also by Antoinette who is a part of his experience of Granbois. His first impression of the place is not a particularly good one:

[W]e stopped at a flight of stone steps. There was a large screw pine to the left and to the right what looked like an imitation of an English summer house – four wooden posts and a thatched roof. She dismounted and ran up the steps. At the top a badly cut, coarse-grained lawn and at the end of the lawn a shabby white house. ‘Now you are at Granbois.’ I looked at the mountains purple against a very blue sky. (Rhys 42)

He disparages the house by implying that it tries to look like an English one, a better one. ‘The man’ takes notice of the badly kept lawn and the hostile mountains. Antoinette, on the other hand, is happy to see her beloved place once again which is apparent in her urgency to get close to the house. Her urgency suggests her emotional connection to the place and it even suggests that this could actually be her new Heimat. She seems eager to show her husband the place, but he is reluctant: “I went with her unwillingly for the rest of the place seemed neglected and deserted” (Rhys 43). She shows him around and tells him about the garden and what animals and insects he should be careful of. It is apparent that Granbois is a place where she feels at home and indeed, it is almost as if she has found her Heimat again because this is one of few times Antoinette seems really happy and content since her childhood. But there is a

thread of insecurity within her, a suspicion that she is not completely normal and therefore she asks her husband if he thinks that she has “slept too long in the moonlight” (Rhys 49), meaning if he finds her strange or perhaps even a bit mad. He does not give her an answer but instead he just holds and soothes her.

Antoinette’s husband has a hard time adjusting to Granbois and its seclusion while Antoinette is at her best. While talking to Antoinette, her husband says: “So this place is as lonely as it feels?’ I asked her. ‘Yes it is lonely. [...] I love it more than anywhere in the world. As if it were a person. More than a person’” (Rhys 53). Her love for the place is stronger than for any person and the thought of Granbois as her Heimat becomes even more evident. However, this happiness for her new Heimat is soon changed. During a conversation between Antoinette and her husband, she reveals a part of her she has not told anyone about: “I never wished to live before I knew you. I always thought it would be better if I died.[...]’ ‘And did you ever tell anyone this?’ ‘There was no one to tell, no one to listen. Oh you can’t imagine Coulibri.’ ‘But after Coulibri?’ ‘After Coulibri it was too late. I did not change’” (Rhys 54). Here she mentions how she did not change back to her old self after Coulibri. This quote refers to a moment when she felt how she lost herself and this was at the time of her losing her feelings of Heimat and after that she became a different person.

However, now she has found her will to live again through this man although he does not seem keen on being the reason for her will to live. Instead he breaks her down and dismantles her identity by denying her affection and giving her a new name. She sees what he is doing and challenges him by saying that she knows what he is trying to do: “You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name” (Rhys 88). He tries to modify her and mould her after his own desire. He ruins her and he also ruins Granbois for her by doing this. She says, “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 spoilt it. It’s just somewhere else where I have been unhappy” (Rhys 88). ‘The man’ changes both her and her new Heimat which result in that her perception of the place goes from Heimat to Fremde. After this episode, she loses her last bit of identity. She becomes what the man says and he says that she is mad, she becomes a mad girl. He takes her back with him to England.

Antoinette loses her second Heimat and is overwhelmed by Fremde whereas Jane’s main setting is a different one. Jane takes a position as a governess at Thornfield Hall which is a big mansion in the English countryside. Jane is met by warmth and kindness from Mrs Fairfax and little Adele, where the former says about the house: “To be sure it is pleasant at any time;

for Thornfield is a fine old hall, rather neglected of late years perhaps, but still it is a respectable place” (Brontë 113). Jane’s first impression of the house is positive; she likes the change of location and is eager to start her life at this new place. She compares her new accommodation to that of Lowood and is pleased: “The chamber looked such a bright little place to me as the sun shone in between the gay blue chintz window curtains, showing papered walls and a carpeted floor, so unlike the bare planks and stained plaster of Lowood, that my spirit rose at the view” (Brontë 115). She is happy that she is in a new context, in a different environment than she is used to, and therefore it is the material place in itself that makes her content. The influence of the material place, or the house, on Jane, is supported by McDowell’s idea that houses affect people. This influence becomes more prominent when Jane says, “Everything appeared very stately and imposing to me: but then I was so little accustomed to grandeur” (Brontë 116). Despite not being used to, or perhaps because of it, she answers, when she is asked if she likes Thornfield, that she likes it very much (Brontë 117).

After a while, Jane becomes restless because of the lack of company. She wants to interact with other people with whom she can have an intellectual discussion. She says that “the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in silence and solitude of the spot” (Brontë 128). She feels safe but the house and its inhabitants are not enough anymore. Then she meets the master of the house, Mr Rochester, and she falls in love with him and once again the house feels like the right place.

After returning from a month-long visit at Gateshead Jane reflects on the concept of coming home and how she would relate to it: “How people feel when they are returning home from an absence, long or short, I did not know: I had never experienced the sensation. [...] The return to Thornfield was yet to be tried” (Brontë 289-290). She has never felt at home anywhere in her life thus she has never experienced the sensation of coming home. She did not feel at home either at Gateshead or Lowood and now she is excited to see if Thornfield might be the place she could call home. But it is also a bit treacherous to believe that she will stay there forever so her response to the return is very important. As she gets closer to Thornfield she thinks, “I felt glad as the road shortened before me: so glad that I stopped once to ask myself what that joy meant: and to remind reason that it was not to my home I was going, or to a permanent resting-place, or to a place where fond friends looked out for me and waited my arrival” (Brontë 291). She has to calm down her reaction and remind herself of where she is going. She tries so hard to not think of Thornfield as her true home but then Mr Rochester

implies that it actually is her home (Brontë 293) and she in a way declares her love for him by stating “wherever you are is my home – my only home” (Brontë 294). And it seems like she has found her Heimat at that moment but Jane is anything but happy when she is faced with the fact that Mr Rochester is to be married, and that she has to leave Thornfield because of this. Her feelings towards the house are clearly stated when Mr Rochester tricks her into thinking she needs to go away. She says, “I grieve to leave Thornfield: I love Thornfield: - I love it, because I have lived in it a full and delightful life” (Brontë 302). But then she actually finds the necessity herself to leave when she finds out about Mr Rochester’s secret wife in the attic. So she has to leave her home and face the unknown.

In their main setting, Antoinette’s identity is further broken down while Jane’s is put to the test when she faces new challenges in her job as a governess. Jane abruptly ends her stay at Thornfield by going into the unknown and Antoinette too is going into something new because of her forced migration (Henderson 101).

The Last stop

Antoinette is removed from the West Indies and locked up in the attic of a mansion in England by her husband. Grace Poole is the woman who looks after Antoinette and thereby the house is implied to be Thornfield Hall from *Jane Eyre* and her husband is Mr Rochester himself. Grace talks about Antoinette and what she is like: “that girl who lives in her own darkness. I’ll say one thing for her, she hasn’t lost her spirit. She’s still fierce” (Rhys 106). So Antoinette still carries her darkness but she has not yet succumbed completely to it.

Her husband, or Mr Rochester, places her in the attic because he does not want anything to do with her. He draws a very distinct line when he puts her in the locked up room. This line tells her that she is not welcome at the house and that she is different, she is an alien. Antoinette’s displacement from the West Indies to England is Mr Rochester’s attempt to erase her dual identity, according to Henderson (104). Henderson remarks that Mr Rochester does not approve of Antoinette’s Creole identity in his English space and he wants to suffocate these tendencies by hiding her away and not dealing with the imperial guilt Antoinette inflicts on him by representing a colonial legacy (104). Henderson stresses the fact that it is important to recognise Antoinette’s location as “a colonial legacy in the heart of a supposedly pure [...] English space” (104). So when Mr Rochester tries to change her identity by changing her name from the Creole Antoinette to the anglicised Bertha, he also tries to wipe away her

colonial side and substitute it with a purer Englishness. Antoinette recognises and reflects on the importance of names: “Names matter, like when he wouldn’t call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window” (Rhys 106-107). She senses her loss of identity and its connection to her name.

Antoinette herself is not pleased about her strange situation in this new country and by night she sneaks out of her prison to see “their world” (Rhys 107), the world of her prisoners. She ponders, “It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard. I have seen it before somewhere, this cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it. They tell me I am in England but I don’t believe them” (Rhys 107). She does not believe what they tell her. The cardboard world she is now living in is not how she imagined England to be. It is obvious that she does not feel at home, especially since she is not allowed to feel it either. Her feelings of Fremde are clearly displayed in her letter to her step-brother where she begs him to take her away from this place, where she is dying “because it is so cold and dark” (Rhys 108).

A red dress that Antoinette brought with her is one of the few things that reminds her of the place that used to be her Heimat. By looking at the dress she remembers something: “I looked at the red 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” (Rhys 110-111). The red dress reminds her of fire and fire is what ruined Coulibri Estate. The dress makes her realise her purpose and what she has to do. Hope argues that the fire symbolised by the dress functions as a reminder of the destructive side of Antoinette (67). Her destructive side becomes apparent when she sets fire to a room in Thornfield Hall. Hope connects the room with the theme of fire because of its red carpet and curtains (67-68). He also points out similarities, namely the red colour, with the red-room at Gateshead (67) which in turn brings to mind the concept of Fremde and how life at Thornfield for Antoinette is as alienating and unwelcoming as life at Gateshead for Jane. Inflicted by these very present feelings of Fremde, Antoinette finds her true identity in the fire. On the roof, she turns around and looks at the sky: “It was red and all my life was in it”. She sees “the tree of life in flames” and “the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall.” (Rhys 112), things that in the past made her feel safe and brought feelings of Heimat have now come back to her. In her dream she throws herself off the roof and then she wakes up. The thought on her mind is, “Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do” (Rhys 112). So she does find herself in a way in the end. The fire in Thornfield Hall represents both destruction and creation. Antoinette destroys the identity given to her by Mr

Rochester and regains her old, original identity (Luo 1223) from her time at her Heimat. Luo summarises her end as such: “In fire, Antoinette, destroys the prison, burns herself and grasps the power to determine her own action [sic] and her own fate, thus she manages to express her rage, fulfill [sic] her revenge, find her identity and free her soul” (1227). The fire cleans her and she regains her former identity as well as her feelings of Heimat while burning up the place that caused her feelings of Fremde. She is finally free from oppression and leaves the world on a quite sad note but nevertheless she is fulfilled.

Jane’s fulfilment is more complicated since it is divided into three parts: wealth, independence and love. Her last stop is not only one place but multiple ones which all give her a sense of identity. Moor House is one of them and she ends up there by chance. After she has run away from Thornfield she is lost for a couple of days but then she discovers a cottage which she later learns is Moor House. The people living in the house, who she later discovers to be her relatives, save her life by taking her in and she befriends them and thereafter moves in. A bit later when Jane has lived there for a while she ponders about her new friends and their home: “[t]hey loved their sequestered home. I, too, in the gray, small, antique structure – with its low roof, its latticed casements, its mouldering walls [...]; its garden, dark with yew and holly, and where no flowers but the hardiest species would bloom – found a charm both potent and permanent” (Brontë 422). They all get along and Jane and the two girls of the household become attached to each other. She starts seeing this place as her home, where she will live the rest of her life: “My home, then – when I at last find a home – is a cottage” (Brontë 433). It seems like Jane has found a place that matches Thornfield in the way she feels about it. Her feelings are those of Heimat.

After a month in the house, the girls have to go to their respective jobs and their brother St John Rivers sets Jane up with a job as a school-mistress in a nearby village. She moves to a small cottage with the schoolroom and her living area in the same building. She is happy but lonely at the village school: “I felt desolated to a degree. I felt – yes, idiot that I am – I felt degraded” (Brontë 434). She tries to cope with her terrible feelings by asking herself which is better: “To have surrendered to temptation” and stayed with Mr Rochester in the south of France or “to be a village school-mistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England?” (Brontë 434). She comes to the conclusion that the latter agrees with her morals and that it was the right thing to do, but this does not reduce her sorrow and loneliness.

When it is revealed that St John and his sisters are related to Jane it is also discovered that Jane has inherited a large sum of money from her uncle which she shares with her cousins. She is now rich, independent and has a context with her cousins where she belongs. Her relation to her relatives gives her a sense of identity she has never experienced before and she is almost fulfilled. But she cannot stop thinking about Mr Rochester so she returns to Thornfield to see what has happened to him. While travelling she thinks, “Once more on the road to Thornfield, I felt like the messenger-pigeon flying home” (Brontë 511). She feels like she is going home but what she finds there is nothing like her former home: “I looked with timorous joy towards a stately house; I saw a blackened ruin” (Brontë 514). She is shocked but eventually finds out what happened to her beloved Mr Rochester and she finds him. She tells him what she has been through the last year when she has been away from him: “I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress” (Brontë 527) and that she certainly is. She has found independence, richness and now love when they “entered the wood, and wended homeward” (Brontë 543). She finally has a home, her Heimat, and she finally has found her identity.

The two stories have very different endings for the two protagonists; Jane goes to three different places where she gets three different things: wealth, independence and love. Antoinette, on the other hand, goes straight to her last stop in England where she ends her days in a brutal way. Jane’s ending is a happy one and she finds her identity. Antoinette’s ending is sad, she takes her life but finds herself and take back the power over her own life in the process.

Conclusion

This essay has investigated how identity and place interact in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by comparing the two protagonists Jane and Antoinette through their different locations in life. Feelings of Heimat and Fremde are present in both novels and Antoinette and Jane experience both but on different occasions. Antoinette has feelings of Heimat in her childhood in Coulibri Estate whereas Jane grows up with feelings of Fremde in Gateshead Hall. At their respective schools, the change of feelings is prominent; Antoinette who has lost her Heimat starts her journey towards Fremde when she moves to the convent. Jane, on the other hand, who has left the place that evoked feelings of Fremde in her, is coming closer to Heimat while she attends Lowood School. Antoinette seems to have found a new Heimat in Granbois but her feelings change towards Fremde during her time there. Jane finds a potential Heimat in

Thornfield Hall but leaves abruptly when its secrets are revealed. In the last stop, Antoinette's life in England is the definition of Fremde, she is in an entirely different country, culture, another continent where she is treated like an alien because of her otherness compared to everyone else in the house. Even though she is living in isolation she there reunites with her Heimat in the end when she burns down Thornfield Hall and herself. Jane finds three things that lead to her ultimate Heimat: wealth, independence and love. They both start their lives at completely different ends of the Heimat-Fremde spectrum and then end their stories at the opposite of where they started. They both find their identity and Heimat in their own way.

Place does affect the identity and the same place can have a different effect on different people. The developments of the characters' identities are affected by the place but also by the people inhabiting the place. The people are forming the space of the place and this is how the place is socially constructed. Mr Rochester is an example of someone who affects both Jane and Antoinette in their respective stories. Jane feels happy at Thornfield even before she meets Mr Rochester but when he comes into her life the house becomes her home. The same goes for Antoinette, but quite the opposite, she is happy at Granbois before she introduces 'the man', Mr Rochester, to the place and after that she hates it just because he gives the place negative connotations. Antoinette's feelings of Heimat change throughout the book and steadily come closer to Fremde when she loses her identity bit by bit by changing place and locations. She reaches Fremde in England but sees her Heimat one last time before she dies. Jane's process is quite the opposite, she grows up with feelings of Fremde in Gateshead and for every place she lives at she comes one step closer to her Heimat and final identity.

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