Song of Solomon is a novel of hope while Wide Sargasso Sea is a novel of despair. Discuss this assertion with particular comparison to the representation of culture and society.

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Even after Mr Mason has rescued Antoinette's family from poverty, Antoinette the narrator finds they cannot be embraced into the white culture even with their newfound wealth. Being Creole Antoinette's family is perceived as being racially impure, thus they are rejected by Mr Mason's white English friends who scorn her mother as she dances with Mr Mason, stating Mr Mason has made 'a fantastic marriage and he will regret it'. Antoinette is able to identify with the black culture, this is seen when she calls Mr Mason who is the representative of the colonial centre 'white pappy'. However Rhys demonstrates throughout the novel Antoinette cannot be accepted by either culture making the assertion 'despair' valid.

Singing is used by both authors as a common motif in their novels. It is an oral tradition that is identified as integral to the black culture, and both authors accentuate its importance, particularly Morrison as she uses it as a constructive link to the Dead ancestors. It is seen as a source from which comfort can be derived and unity gained. The song of Solomon allows Milkman to be united with his heritage as he discovers his families past through the verses which contain an oral history of Solomon's family, listing the names of the twenty-one children who were left behind when Solomon 'cut across the sky/Solomon gone home' (pg 303). Morrison highlights the hope singing can bring through Milkman's reaction when he memorizes his ancestors' names and becomes 'as excited as a child confronted with boxes and boxes of presents' (303). The 'unwrapping of presents' is used by Morrison as a metaphor to show that as the presents become 'unwrapped so does Milkman's identity. Singing in Solomon's therefore symbolises 'hope' as Morrison demonstrates that by embracing one's roots one is able to embrace their future. Morrison conveys the idea that the past not only lingers in memories but in the present through songs and stories, waiting to be understood in order to allow one to move forward.

Singing in Wassesso See's used to emphasise both 'hope' and 'despair'. Mr Rochester and Antoinette are brought close when he sings her a song 'Shine bright, shine bright Robin as you die' (pg 49). Antoinette is able to join in with him, allowing an intimate unity to be established between them. However, Rhys image of the Robin' who 'shine's bright' as he 'dies' is startling. Rhys may be subtly hinting at this point Antoinette tragic fate, with the Robin embodying Antoinette.

Both novels identify a strong female character who offers 'hope' to the protagonists. For Milkman it is his aunt Pilate, whilst for Antoinette it is her mother's servant Christophine. The two women are similar in many ways; they are black and astonishingly able to break away from the rules of patriarchal society. Clearly Pilate and Christophine show why 'hope' is an applicable contention for both novels. Pilate in Society is the most contented character since she sustains her self identity and is free of the materialistic values her brother Macon burdens himself with.

Her self-sufficiency, supernatural powers and generosity allows her to be respected and valued by society; this is ironic since it should in fact be her brother commanding these. In addition she changes the inequality of male-female relationships. She is a truly inspiring character, who even Milkman values, this is seen when he realises why he loved her because 'without ever leaving the ground, she could fly'. Pilate alone was the only woman/mother able command Milkman's respect and his love.

Similarly, Christophine is respected by her community. The fact 'the girls from the bayside' helped Christophine with chores despite being 'terrified of her' underlines the respect she is able to command. Like Pilate, Christophine is important as she represents alternative power. She is able to force Rochester to acknowledge her as the holder of judicial authority: 'Now every word she said was...echoed loudly in my head' (Rhys 107). Despite being black and female Christophine is so powerful she reverses the role of the white coloniser Rochester being in power.

In the confrontation between these two characters Rhys explores gender as well as racial issues. In the sections narrated by Antoinette the tense shifts from present to past, this gives her a disembodied presence throughout

the sequential episodic structure, where one cannot locate her in time. Rochester's narration is more like a testimonial and is delivered in the past tense. Much of it, save the end where his deteriorating mind is shown through the fragmented structure is controlled. The contrast of the two narratives underlines the power Rochester, who plays the role of white coloniser, is able to have over Antoinette. The fact Rhys presents us with two voices, is highly effective as no voice is repressed. Through Rochester's narrative Rhys highlights the theme of displacement and self identity. She portrays Rochester's identity crisis in the West Indies the same way she does of Antoinette's Creole identity and ironically Rochester is never named. Morrison herself realises the importance of giving voice to characters in order to identify conflict and allow the readers the chance to draw their own conclusions of other characters. The story which is told in third person does not stay bound to this form. Often readers suddenly experience the point of view of other characters when Morrison slips into their minds and reveals their thoughts. The characters and events in effect become to the reader much more real.

Both authors recognize in their novels that despite the strong presence of Pilate and Christophine the characters experiences are affected by their parent's dysfunctional relationship. Taking a psychoanalytical reading of Sociation one can argue that due to his parents bitter relationship Milkman is denied nourishing love, as a result his emotional growth has been stunted by their behaviour. This could be used to explain Milkman's cruel treatment of Hagar which subsequently leads to her death. Milkman is presented as arrogant and confident; he constantly hurts those close to him, without admitting to his own faults. The harsh treatment of female characters by male characters is shown as despair, since right to the end Milkman still does not realise that Solomon abandoned his children and wife.

On the other hand Antoinette evolves as an inhibited character who craves unconditional love, having experienced rejection from her mother. Rochester, her only offer of happiness rejects her when he sleeps with the black servant Amelie. His behaviour is shocking, and deeply hurts Antoinette. Yet despite this Antoinette still attempts to persevere, unlike Milkman she displays no selfish behaviour as she inflicts pain on no one despite suffering so much. Even to the end when Antoinette is forced to go to England with Rochester and leave her homeland, she thinks of others. Antoinette is extremely composed, Rochester reports her having a 'doll's smile' that is 'nailed to her face'. It is this dignity and selfless behaviour that makes the assertion 'despair' negligible to was self-esso Sea-

The ending of Solicio doubtless categorises why it is a more a novel of 'hope' rather than 'despair'. It is a moving and extremely poetic ending with supposed flight; it reflects the same enigmatic beginning of Robert Smiths attempted flight that gives the narrative a cyclical feel. It is unsatisfactory for readers who prefer a definite end to novels however it does tie up all the major issues raised as well as brings a sense of closure. In her essay 'Rootedness' Morrison asserts 'I have to provide the places and spaces so that the reader can participate' thus she leaves it up to the reader to decide whether Milkman dies or flies. It is difficult for the reader to define a conclusive end to Milkman's fate because of Morrison's use of magical realism. The reader is aware that human flight is impossible but Morrison has interwoven the impossible within reality, one must accept it as reality in the world of the novel. Morrison's very matter of fact tone through the use of short blunt sentences to punctuate her narrative makes the events more realistic.

Milkman's flight is extremely positive, he has achieved a sense of 'self', given up his egocentricity. Like Antoinette he achieves a sense of selflessness when he discerns 'it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother'. Thus whether he dies or flies is not vital, except the fact he has achieved his goal of reaching self identity. Similarly the death of Pilate is positive. It is a powerful and emotional moment, which is dramatised by Morrison's choice of metaphorical and symbolic language:

Two of the birds circled round them. One dived...and scooped something shiny in it's beak before it flew away' (pg 336).

The image of the 'birds' are used to reflect the constant motif of flight, whilst the fact the bird takes Pilate's earring with her name metaphorically shows Pilate's soul has been released, in addition it emphasises that she too has achieved flight. Morrison does not utilize poignant language at this point; she carefully selects the right words to evoke the emotional feeling in the reader. As Pilate dies in contentment the novel is not one of 'despair'.

In opposition to the former novel, we see in some difficult to classify. It is marked as novel of 'despair' seeing as Rochester has been successful in taking away Antoinette's wealth, property and most importantly the little identity she has:

'There is no looking glass here...I don't know what I am...who am I?' (Rhys 116).

It becomes clear through Antoinette's haunted narrative how much Rochester has degraded her. Rochester's role as the white coloniser and Antoinette as the colonised is realised at this point. Through Antoinette's losses Rhys is able to demonstrate the cruelty of the colonial system and the Creole woman's position in society in that period. Conversely Rhys's victim is not entirely passive. By the end Antoinette has achieved a sense of purpose and determination she has not had before:

'Now at least I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. (Rhys 123)

Rochester does not get the last word as Antoinette takes a candle and gets her revenge even though it is through the means of death. Though the ending is ambiguous as Rhys does not reveal whether Antoinette dies or escapes, the use of fire imagery through Antoinette's 'red dress', 'red carpet' and the 'candles' allows those who have not read to discern Antoinette's tragic fate. Antoinette emerges as a heroine in some respect because by defying Rochester she has gained the freedom he denied her.

Thus taking this into account one must be careful when exacting to what degree of 'despair'. Although Morrison does not give solutions to problems, she does demonstrate through Pilate and Milkman the strength of the human spirit, it's endurance and it's ability to 'soar' which prevails in the end. Milkman is able to achieve a sense of 'self' and the desire to live and connect with his people. This makes Morrison's novel one of 'hope'. On the other hand one cannot simply categorize Societies a novel of 'despair' without appearing superficial. According to Gilbert and Gubar in 'Note Continued and Connect with his people. This makes Morrison's novel one of 'hope'. Antoinette is 'the dark double who stands for the heroine's anger and desire, as well as for all the repressed creative anxiety of the 19th Century female writer'. This suggests that Jane Eyre the heroine is envious of Antoinette's 'madness' since through her madness Antoinette can be expressive. Therefore it can be argued that Antoinette's madness is not in fact 'despair' if she is able to be 'free'. A close analysis of the text evidently shows many instances of hope, which overcome despair. One could argue that 'despair' may not be the appropriate word to classify of hope, which overcome despair. One could argue that 'despair' neither presides over the other and as a result the assertions are not strong enough to apply to the novels.

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