

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.

[illegible]

James and Moore's views are supported by a number of prominent Americans who have been to the USSR and have observed the conditions existing in the country. The views of these Americans are based on the fact that the USSR is a country where the people are free to express their opinions and to criticize the government as well as the individual leaders. The views of these Americans are also based on the fact that the USSR is a country where the people are free to express their opinions and to criticize the government as well as the individual leaders. The views of these Americans are also based on the fact that the USSR is a country where the people are free to express their opinions and to criticize the government as well as the individual leaders.

'We see each other, too, etc, as often. I was at saw me. The progress' (X's; p.23)

[illegible][illegible]

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 in *Wuthering* *Seas* is 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.

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.

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

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 *Jane Eyre* 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 *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a novel of 'despair'. Although Morrison does not give solutions to problems, she does demonstrate through Pilate and Milkman the strength of the human spirit, its endurance and its 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 *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a novel of 'despair' without appearing superficial. According to Gilbert and Gubar in '*The Mad Woman in the Attic*' 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 *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In fact whilst both novels show 'hope' and '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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Toni Morrison

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'The Mad Woman in the Attic' Gilbert & Gubar – from secondary material provided by teacher

