

WIDE SARGASSO SEA COURSEWORK

Wide Sargasso Sea is a novel set by a woman in the time when females were obviously being marginalised and seen as one of the least important roles in society. Many different views of women's role in the 1960s. The style written gave the impression that women were becoming aware of the feminist ideas. This grew out of the civil rights and the black movement. The women were especially active in these times.

Also one note to be made is that reviews on this novel speak of Rhys' style of writing is to do with women who need a man in order to live through the struggles of life looking and discussing this through my essay this concludes that this is true.

The novel of Wide Sargasso Sea tells you what it was like to be a woman in these times, and a majority of the novel is written in the mind of a woman.

The first relationship of the male and female is between the main two characters Mr Rochester and Antoinette. The most significant thing about this relationship is that the roles of power change. In the beginning, coming into a new setting, Mr Rochester finds it difficult to adapt to the environment and his ethnocentric view does not aid this. He talks about trying to discover the secret of Granbois. This makes him inferior because he doesn't know the area well enough to have any real knowledge of it, and being a male in this relationship he has negative views of this. In these relationships the men were supposedly meant to be the head of the union, because he is the man. When the novel progresses and Antoinette starts to lose her mind he starts to take over with the power and the dominance in their relationship.

'Certainly I will call my dear Bertha
Not Bertha tonight
Of course of on this on all nights you must be called bertha
As you wish'
Antoinette has given total submission into Rochester.

If you look back to the British Empire women were marginalised and controlled. As Rochester is from England it is typical for him to behave in this dominant manor. Rochester had power over Antoinette sexually using her for his own pleasures rather than for the love of her. He feels no tenderness only lust.

This relationship changes again when Christophine gives Antoinette the love potion for Mr Rochester. He was out of control when he woke up after drinking the poison and Antoinette thought she had him where she wanted him to love her, but then when Mr Rochester became intimate with Amelie the roles changed again. She was able to lure him into sleeping with her and breaking up his relationship.

Throughout the journey to England and even in England he dominates. His biggest form of dominance is through trapping her in an attic; He has nearly broken her but not her spirit.

Mr Rochester has marginalised Antoinette and the novel then ends in a strongly patriarchal tone. He wants to own her this is apparent when he describes her as his mad woman. 'The red eyed, wild haired stranger who is my wife.'

A different relationship, which contradicts the view of men being the most dominant, is with Christophine. Christophine is a fierce obeah woman who is feared in society for her black magic but Mr Rochester has a big problem with the power she has also the fear and respect she carries. He tells Antoinette on many occasions of his strong dislike for her and how upfront she is also her aggressive manner.

‘Take a try of my bulls blood it’s not like the horse piss you drink in England’
You can see that he is the only one who challenges Christophine. This is when they confront each other, you see Christophine begging Rochester to love Antoinette and this is a form of dominance on his part.

You can see that Christophine intimidates Rochester that is why he has threatened to report Christophine to the authorities. I think he feels he hasn’t got the power or the will to convict Christophine himself.

Christophine puts Rochester in his place by telling him the truth of his actions by using sex to control Antoinette. Rochester silently admits to all the accusations made of him.

But she hold out eh, she hold out

(Yes she held out. A pity)

Christophine has stood up for Antoinette and is reminding Rochester of the wrong he has done, the fact she approaches him and addresses him of the wrong he has done ‘But you don’t love. All you want is to break her up. And it help you break her up’ This challenges the opinion that men are more dominant in the situation between these two characters. Christophine has lived in Jamaica all her life and in a way owns the area she is in, Rochester finds it hard to marginalize Christophine, he is the one who is being marginalized by her this is clear through the hints for Antoinette to leave Rochester and run away from Christophine. This shows that as a women she was standing up for herself

The next relationship I have chosen to analyse is the relationship between Mr Rochester and the servant of the house Amelie who Mr Rochester slept with. Rochester’s power over Amelie is only material but her power over him is more than that. He was not able to marginalize her; she was able to manipulate him. She continually stresses ‘ I feel sorry for you’

From the beginning of the novel you can see her attempts to lure him into liking her and destroy their marriage further, she does this without any problems. This form of ascendancy is strong. What Amelie proves is that she is able to get whatever she wants.

On the other hand the purpose for Rochester sleeping with her was due to his anger at Antoinette in order to anger her and he hated Antoinette so he wanted to fulfil his desires differently.

The argument to this view is that Mr Rochester could have found anybody to have an affair with but he gave into Amelie’s hints and gestures and became intimate with her.

She was a slave which could justify the strength (in society) he has over her but other than this affair between these characters Amelie had the upper hand, she gets what she wants.

Concerning this relationship having material things is the most important way of having power in the 19th century and being able to lure somebody abandon their marriage is not the power that can demonstrate authority in this situation Rochester emerges as stronger and marginalises Amelie. He is the one marginalizing Amelie and who has more authority you could see he didn't love her and was using her.

Another relationship I have chosen to analyse is between Annette and Mr Mason. Mr Mason is an English slave owner: he was part of the British Colonising Empire. His views are similar of that to Rochester and considering that he is a slave owner he is dominant. He decided to come to Jamaica to wed. He definitely marginalizes Annette. He has total power over her through wealth but also through, having power over all the servants gives him the idea that he has the power over the other people of that land. He talks of how he will persuade the people not to cause problems for the family in the end he cannot and the house in Coulibri gets burned down

' Their too damn lazy to be dangerous'

You can see that the way that he acts towards Annette he doesn't look after her well enough and she needs someone to do this for her. He later abandons her. The fact is this relationship shows there is a patriarchal masterdom but the fact of him running away does not aid in making a conclusion of his power. The fact of him having money and employees does this for him. The women are normally oppressed by their husbands and the males in their life it was only Christophine who rebelled the idea of men's dominance.

In conclusion looking at the different relationships throughout the novel I am able to conclude this statement: 'For the most part, empire itself was strongly patriarchal, so that women were marginalized and controlled.'