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Ingleses y su Proyección Social

“This Is My Place and This Is Where I Belong”:
Memory and Place in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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Abstract

In her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the Dominican-born British writer Jean Rhys depicts the identity formation of Antoinette, a white Creole of British origin who lives in the Caribbean island of Dominica. In the course of the narrative, Antoinette feels different degrees of attachment to Dominica's natural world as she undergoes an evolution in her Creole consciousness, and she reflects such a link with the landscape through memory retrieval. Although scholars such as Jessica Gildersleeve or Sandra Paquet have explored the relationship between character and place in the novel, none of them have provided an in-depth analysis of how Antoinette's interaction with Caribbean landscape reflects an evolution in the formation of her Creole identity throughout the narrative. Therefore, the main aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate that there is a close relationship between Caribbean landscape and the evolution in Antoinette's identity formation as a Creole.

As regards methodology, I have used memory studies through a narratological analysis. This approach is aimed at identifying how Antoinette recalls both certain events belonging to her past and her interaction with Dominica's landscape at different stages of her Creole consciousness. Accordingly, this piece of research will devote one chapter to each one of the sections into which the novel is divided: part I deals with Antoinette's sense of alienation stemming from the attacks inflicted by Dominican blacks; part II revolves around the Creole's growing identification with her native place as her husband feels at odds with the natural world of the island; finally, part III takes place in the English attic where Antoinette has been incarcerated, and the subtle references to Dominica's landscape in this section contribute to enhancing that the Creole favours her Caribbean side to the detriment of her British lineage. As for results, it has been found that Antoinette's interaction with the Caribbean natural world mirrors an evolution in her Creole consciousness. Indeed, she is afraid of the landscape in the first part of the novel, while she eventually grows more attached to it when she marries an English man. By examining the relationship between identity formation and Caribbean landscape, this dissertation attempts to widen the bulk of literature on the retrieval of memory in Jean Rhys's fiction while casting new light on the paramount role of the Caribbean landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Keywords: Jean Rhys, memory studies, Creoleness, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Caribbean landscape.

1. Introduction

Jean Rhys is a complex author that cannot be easily placed within a specific literary tradition. Indeed, she is a liminal writer who wrote both modernist and postmodernist works. Linked to her liminality in terms of period, her multifarious identity should be foregrounded: she was a Caribbean white Creole of British origin. Yet, such a complex identity became problematic for Rhys because she felt that she did not belong anywhere. This feeling gradually became a malady of the spirit that haunted this Caribbean writer all along her career and that gave shape to her most celebrated characters. This sense of displacement was represented in the four modernist novels which she wrote from 1928 to 1939: *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). The most outstanding work of Rhys's literary production is her late novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). This work is representative of its author's multiple facets since its protagonist is a white Creole named Antoinette who also partakes of different cultures: the Anglo-Saxon one and the Caribbean one. However, as is the case of both Rhys and her previous female characters, this complexity in terms of identity proves by no means fruitful in the novel. Rather, Antoinette is deeply affected by her condition as a Creole who is rejected for two main reasons: first, she and her mother are mocked by the black inhabitants of Dominica because her family were slaveholders in the island; second, she is doubly neglected by her British-born husband since, as a woman born in a colony of the British Empire, she has a subordinate position within the marital sphere and within the Empire.

The sources of Antoinette's dejection can be better understood through an analysis of how Antoinette recollects the memories of her past as the main internal narrator of the novel. From her position as a woman who has been imprisoned in the attic of her husband's mansion in England, she gives voice to the transition from adolescence to early adulthood which she experienced in her native country by means of a narration in retrospect. In such a narration, Antoinette relies on memory in order to present a sketch of her life in Dominica and, most importantly, how she reacted to some important events of her past. Hence, Antoinette's memories prove a valuable testimony that helps understand the identity formation of this white Creole and the multifariousness of the island where she was born.

Together with Antoinette's use of memory, there is another way by which the readers of *Wide Sargasso Sea* get to better understand the great variety of characters that inhabit the small Caribbean island of Dominica, where two thirds of the action take place: the relationship between characters and the natural world of the island. Not all the characters feel equally attached to the Caribbean landscape, and their (dis)connection with the land shows different types of identity and varying degrees of self-consciousness. Researchers such as Seodial Deena, Jessica Gildersleeve, Carine Mardorossian or Sandra Paquet have analysed how these characters relate to the Caribbean natural world, highlighting the stark opposition between the Caribbean natives' confidence to walk through the beautiful yet dangerous forests of Dominica and the English characters' sense of being trapped in the middle of a landscape which they are unable to control. To these studies this work adds an insight into the relationship between the depiction of the Caribbean landscape and Antoinette's (dis)connection with her native land from the outset of the novel to its ending.

My main contention in this dissertation is that there is a relationship between the Caribbean landscape as recollected by Antoinette-the-narrator and this female character's Creole consciousness. Indeed, Antoinette's different degrees of attachment to the natural world of Dominica reflect an evolution in her sense of deracination as a woman who feels uneasy in her native country. Therefore, this piece of research aims to cast light on the relevance that Creole consciousness has in the formation of Antoinette's identity and how this evolution in terms of identity is suggested by her depiction of Caribbean landscape. Furthermore, it also attempts to bring to the fore the key role of memory in Antoinette's reshaping of her changing attitudes to the natural world of Dominica.

Having exposed this dissertation's main aims, it is necessary to provide a description of the methodology that has been followed for the attainment of such objectives. Generally speaking, this novel has been approached from the field of memory studies and hence there has been a narratological analysis that reveals how the internal narrator gives shape to both her evolution in terms of attachment to Dominica and how this progression is enhanced by her representation of Caribbean landscape. In the first reading of Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there has been a narratological analysis aimed at identifying the afflictions suffered by both Antoinette and her mother and, most importantly, how these maladies are reported through Antoinette's memories. After that, a corpus of secondary sources on memory studies has been selected with a view to enriching the

analysis of the main findings at this stage. Moreover, there has been a revision of some literature on Rhys's depiction of Creole identity and displacement in her work, with a focus on *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Then, there has been a second reading of the novel paying attention to the key role played by the natural world of Dominica, with which Antoinette has an edgy relationship and which triggers an array of reactions on her at different stages in the novel. In this exploration of the island's landscape, there has been a selection of both descriptive and evaluative passages dealing with Dominica's vegetation, mountains and climate. These passages have been close-read so as to identify some important hints revealing to what extent this novel's characters —especially Antoinette— are attached to the Caribbean landscape and to what extent their connection to the natural world reflects their psychological state. Furthermore, this analysis of the relationship between landscape and Creole consciousness has been complemented by a selection of some secondary sources dealing with the role of Caribbean landscape in this specific piece of prose fiction.

As to the structure of this dissertation, first the theoretical framework that has been followed in the analysis of Rhys's novel will be presented (chapter 2). This chapter provides a review of the selected secondary sources from the field of memory studies. In this review there will be a focus on the ideas that are more interesting for the narratological analysis of the novel. Second, chapter 3 is an introduction to Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In order to provide a succinct but comprehensive contextualisation of the novel, there will be a selection of some key moments in the life of the author, a summary of the main themes and traumas dealt with in Rhys's work, and a first approach to the portrayal of Caribbean landscape in the novel. Once this contextualisation has been done, there will be a presentation and discussion of the main findings in the analysis of the novel as regards the relationship between the natural world of Dominica and Antoinette's Creole consciousness. The novel is divided into three sections: Part I, Part II and Part III. Such a division is revealing of Antoinette's evolution in her identity. Accordingly, the in-depth analysis of the novel has been divided into three chapters, each one devoted to a different stage in terms of Antoinette's identity formation: chapter 4 focuses on Part I and examines how Antoinette as an adolescent comes to terms with her being neglected as an offspring of a former slaveholding family, and how her sense of displacement is enhanced by the portrayal of Caribbean landscape as a threatening space; chapter 5 focuses on the exploration of Antoinette in Part II as an early adult who has already married an English man and whose connection with the land grows stronger as her husband feels more

overwhelmed by the island's natural world; chapter 6 assesses to what extent Antoinette identifies with her native place in Part III while being incarcerated in the attic of her husband's mansion at the time when she is recollecting her past and narrating it. Finally, in the conclusion there will be an overview of the main ideas of my dissertation and a brief reflection on how this piece of research contributes to knowledge in the field of literary and cultural studies in general and in Jean Rhys's studies in particular. Moreover, some future lines of research into the issues of memory and the connection between self and landscape in Jean Rhys's fiction will be suggested.

2. Memory and Place: Understanding the Reconstruction of Identity Formation

This chapter aims to present and develop the theoretical framework that will be followed in the analysis of Rhys's novel. First, there is a thorough revision of some relevant literature on memory studies that will foreground the study of how the internal narrator of this novel—Antoinette— gives voice to a selection of episodes from her life in Dominica and to the different stages of her Creole consciousness. Second, the collective side of cultural memory will be discussed alongside its role in shaping group identity. Third, there will be a brief account of the process of memory retrieval and how this process is reflected in the structure of the narrative. Finally, there will be an exploration of the relationship between memory and place, which has a fundamental role in both the construction of individual and group identity and in the search for meaningful memories.

2.1. An Introduction to (Cultural) Memory Studies

In her book *Memory in Culture* (2011), Astrid Erll provides a synoptic approach to the field of memory studies. As Erll points out, memory studies is an international phenomenon that emerged in France in the mid-1980s and that was emulated in a large number of countries in the course of the 1990s (2). Actually, scholars such as Susannah Radstone note that by the end of the 1990s memory had become “both a central and organising concept within research in the humanities and in certain branches of the social sciences” (1). In addition to its international scope, memory studies is a field that encompasses “an impressively diverse array of public discourses, media, and academic fields” (1). Actually, as Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins have noticed, memory research is “a nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless [sic] enterprise” (106). Therefore, this

field is by no means exclusive to literature and to a given culture, but has gained weight due to the never-ending dialogue between different disciplines and cultures. Along the same lines, Jay Winter notes that the growing interest in memory arises out of “a multiplicity of social, cultural, medical, and economic trends and developments of an eclectic but intersecting nature” (364). Having brought to the fore the interdisciplinarity and transnationality of memory studies, the concept of memory should be defined. At the beginning of the 1990s, Richard Terdiman clarified the meaning of this notion by explaining that memory refers to “how the past persists into the present” (vii). Such a definition brings to the fore the strong connection existing between the past and the present: it is through memory recollection that the past is made somewhat contemporary. However, the phenomenon of memory goes beyond mere mnemonic activity. As Terdiman argues, memory should also be explored as “a *problem*, as a site and source of cultural disquiet” (vii; italics as in the original). This means that memory plays a fundamental role in the exploration of present-day conflicts and struggles both at an individual level and on a global scale. With the aim of fostering a broad understanding of memory, Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche put forth the idea that memory is “a symbolic representation of the past embedded in social action” (5). In other words, memory should be explored in a sociocultural context that reflects the ongoing relationships between people across the globe and their diverse interventions. With this aim in mind, Astrid Erll provides the following preliminary definition of memory: “‘Memory’ ... is an umbrella term for all those processes of a biological, medial [sic] or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts” (*Memory in Culture* 7). This definition accurately reflects the complexity of this notion, since it puts the focus on the connection existing between different disciplines such as biology and sociology while enhancing the relevance of culture(s).

This close relationship between memory and the field of cultural studies is explored by Alon Confino in his article “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method”. Confino argues that “the notion of memory has taken its place now as a leading term, recently perhaps the leading term, in cultural history” (1386). As suggested by the quotation, memory is acknowledged to have a key role in the reconstruction of past events. This foregrounding of memory within cultural history is relatively new, since memory and history had hitherto deemed incompatible. This incompatibility is highlighted by Aleida Assmann in her article “History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony” (2006). She exposes that up until the 1980s memory had been seen by historians as “an undisciplined

activity that troubles the clear waters of historiography” (263). However, from the late 1980s onwards memory and history have gradually come into closer contact and hence memory has become part of historical discourse (262-263). In order to prove her thesis that memory and history are no longer rivals but partners, Assmann focuses on traumatic events such as the Holocaust, and argues that “the Holocaust ... is an event both in history and in memory” (262). This means that, as well as being recorded in written documents and studied as an event which happened in the past, the Holocaust is an event which is continuously recalled through memory and contrasted with the present in sociocultural contexts.

This emphasis on sociocultural contexts further enhances the strong link between memory and culture. In her article “Traumatic Pasts, Literary Afterlives, and Transcultural Memory: New Directions of Literary and Media Memory Studies”, Astrid Erll marks that scholars describe the interconnectedness between past, present and future in different sociocultural contexts by using the term ‘cultural memory’ (1). This is an umbrella term that is succinctly defined by Astrid Erll in her study *Memory in Culture*: “Cultural memory can thus broadly be defined as the sum total of all the processes (biological, medical, social) which are involved in the interplay of past and present within sociocultural contexts. It finds its specific manifestation in memory culture” (101). As can be seen in the quotation, Erll’s definition of cultural memory seems tantamount to the preliminary definition of memory that she provides in the introductory section of the book. However, in the case of cultural memory she goes on to argue that it manifests itself in memory culture, thus highlighting the word *culture*. As Seyyed Mehdi Mousavi, Farideh Pourgivi, and Bahee Hadaegh mark, “from a memory studies perspective, culture is theorized as a set of complex and multidirectional processes of remembering and forgetting” (62). This means that the great diversity of sociocultural contexts where memory takes place brings about a network of relations which do not simply relate past and present in a given culture; rather, the multidirectionality of these connections brings into closer contact different communities. This characteristic of cultural memory is complemented by Erll’s assertion that cultural memory “has an individual and a collective side, which are, however, closely interrelated” (“Traumatic Pasts” 1). The collective side of cultural memory reveals, once again, that cultural memory is a complex phenomenon that is worth studying. Actually, cultural memory enables readers and critics to better understand how certain sociocultural issues that are still present affect different individuals and societies worldwide and, ultimately, to mediate between different groups of people. In the theoretical subsection that

follows, there will be an assessment of the importance that the collective side of cultural memory has in the field of memory studies.

2.2. The Collectivity of Cultural Memory

As Alon Confino points out in his article “Memory and the History of Mentalities”, the concept of collective memory was first used by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in his 1925 work *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. In the late 1920s, this term was also explained by the historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre (“Memory and the History of Mentalities” 78). As Confino summarises, these three French scholars attempted to explain that collective memory referred to how societies remember and represent their past, but they failed to provide a transnational approach to this specific concept (78-79). Furthermore, it could be argued that such a definition of collective memory is somewhat limited since it does not simply stand for a mere recollection and representation of a memory in a specific community. Along the same lines, David Manier and William Hirst mark: “A collective memory is not simply a memory shared across a community. It must serve a function for the community” (253). Hence, they provide a comprehensive definition of collective memory that reveals the function performed by the memory itself: “Collective memories ... are representations of the past in the minds of the members of a community that contribute to the community’s sense of identity” (253). This means that the ultimate goal of collective memory should be to ensure the construction of a specific group identity that gives cohesion to the community.

This approach to cultural memory discards the hackneyed and reductionist view of culture as monolithic, hence embracing the diversity of identities as an engine that prompts the multidirectional network of relations mentioned above. As a matter of fact, Mousavi et al. argue that “individuals in the contemporary world rely on a globalized intersectional network of relations and resources to create a sense of personhood and identity” (69). However, Mousavi et al. warn that cultural memory studies generally fail to acknowledge the potential which cosmopolitanism has in the construction of group identity through collective memory (68). As a matter of fact, they expose the problematic interpretation entailed by the following definition of the identitarian function of cultural memory by Jan Assmann: “Reflexive participation in or the *commitment* to a culture” (emphasis added) (cited in Erll’s *Memory in Culture* 110). The commitment to a culture which this definition foregrounds is controversial in that it may overlook the necessary dialogue across cultures. With this aim in mind, Mousavi et al. suggest that cultural memory studies take into

account cosmopolitanism, which is defined by Zlatko Skrbiš and Ian Woodward as openness to “being changed by encounters with difference” (10). According to Mousavi et al., cosmopolitanism ensures a dialogic engagement with the other aimed at challenging simplistic views of culture (68). This cosmopolitan approach will be embraced in the present dissertation with a view to highlighting how the memories of the Creole protagonist enable her to explore her identity as a complex construct in opposition to the reductionist approach to Caribbean culture that an imperialist discourse takes.

This dissertation will explore how the protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who is the main internal narrator of the novel, uses memory in order to link the present to the past and, above all, to sketch her Creole consciousness at different stages in the narrative and to describe her interaction with the landscape. Her recollection of the past is not a construct that applies exclusively to her experience. On the contrary, this experience is also undergone by her mother, who is the agent that transmits her daughter a concern about her roots as a daughter of former slaveholders. Moreover, this situation may have also been experienced by a relatively high group of white Creoles who, as is the case of Antoinette’s family, were slave owners. Therefore, her testimony is a collective memory that, as will be demonstrated in this dissertation, enables her to create and ultimately assert her complex identity as a white woman who is not almost exclusively European, but who partakes of both Anglo-Saxon and Caribbean cultures. In the following subsection, there will be an exploration of the workings of memory to represent the past.

2.3. Giving Voice to the Past through Memory

The narrativisation of memory is a powerful tool that gives voice to a past that might otherwise be forgotten, thus keeping it present. However, Aleida Assmann warns the following in her article “Canon and Archive”: “The dynamics of individual memory consists in a perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting ... In order to remember some things, other things must be forgotten” (97). This suggests that memory can by no means provide an accurate portrayal of a given event or experience. Likewise, a memory is far from remaining stable with the passing of time; as Laurence Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson and Mark Barad contend, “memories are changeable over time; that is to say, they are not fixed or perfect copies of experience but undergo repeated revision and transformation with each attempt at recollection” (8). This malleability of memory runs

parallel to the permeability of identity: far from remaining fixed, both identity and cultural consciousness are continuously being constructed.

There is yet another similarity between memory and identity that is paramount for the purposes of this dissertation: the question of prominence. As Kirmayer et al. maintain, “We have a variety of learning and memory systems that extract details, meanings, and associations from the stream of experience according to *specific needs*, the ongoing deployment of attention, and *cognitive and perceptual salience or relevance*” (8; emphasis added). In the process of memory retrieval, it seems reasonable that individuals do not bring to the fore all the memories from their stream of consciousness; what they do is select the memories that they deem more relevant for a specific need. In the case of those individuals whose identity is a complex one, there is a culture with which they will be likely to identify more, both at a conscious level and at an unconscious one. Therefore, in the case of Antoinette-as-narrator, she will choose those remembrances of her past that enable her to assert her Creole identity, since it will be shown that she has been physically deprived of her native land by being taken to England. This process of active remembering is called “canon” by Aleida Assmann and, as she maintains, the canon is the “actively circulated memory that keeps the past present” (“Canon and Archive” 98). This means that the canon enables the individual to connect past and present, hence engaging in the multidirectional network of relations that characterises collective cultural memory. This is what Antoinette does in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as will be explained in the analysis of the novel.

Having briefly presented some key ideas about the dynamics of memory retrieval, there will be an account of how this mental process has an influence on the structure of the narrative. In words of Jürgen Straub, “memory processes and recollection achievements follow in an equally important way the narrative structure” (216). Given the aforementioned interaction between remembering and forgetting, there tends to be not total recall of all the events comprising a specific memory. Among the events and perceptions brought to the conscious, a fraction of them can be vividly remembered. However, the potential gaps of knowledge which stem from the process of forgetting make it difficult to provide a logical order to the succession of thoughts. This becomes even more complicated when there happens to be free association of ideas, which may link two memories that apparently have no connection with each other. Such discontinuities give rise to the disruption of narrative chronology in the verbalisation of memory. Moreover, the failure in

recalling some specific events —especially traumatic ones— translates into ellipses and silences that make it difficult to follow the narrative. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, these silences and obliquities may give rise to a number of ellipses and abstractions that are present in the discourse of Antoinette, the internal narrator that is remembering and giving voice to her preoccupations and fears. In the case of fears, it becomes even more difficult to translate them into a comprehensible narrative since they have been transmitted to her by her mother, who is unable to understand the aftermath of the 1833 Emancipation Act, whereby slavery is abolished in Dominica. Since Antoinette herself does not fully understand why her mother is suffering, she cannot provide an accurate and reliable account of the preoccupations with which both of them are coping. This supports Ernst van Alphen's contention that, in the case of children who witness their parents' distress, memories are not indexical: there is no continuity between the event and its memory. Instead, the knowledge of their past is the result of combining historical knowledge and memory (486). This idea further demonstrates that history and memory are closely linked to each other. Moreover, it strengthens the importance that memory has in Antoinette's retelling of her identity formation.

2.4. The Relationship between Memory Retrieval and Place

In her article "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory", Michelle Balaev draws on the role of place in trauma narratives specifically. She argues the following with regard to place: "We can understand place as the locus where nature and culture converge to construct meaning and inform both individual and collective identity" (160). This quotation reflects the parallels that exist between memory, place and the search for meaning. Indeed, place is a complex reality where different elements converge and which does not apply exclusively to a specific person in isolation, but goes beyond the individual. This assertion echoes the nature of cultural memory as a construct whose collective dimension should lead to the construction of group identity.

As well as informing individual and collective identity, it is suggested that place has a fundamental role in constructing meaning (Balaev 160). This is certainly the case of the novel to be analysed in this dissertation, since the depiction of Caribbean landscape helps Antoinette give shape to the contemporary changes and identities of all the characters

in the narrative. As posited by Kirmayer et al., “the reconstructions of memory always occur in social contexts that warrant certain types of story as more or less credible” (9). The social and cultural context depicted in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the colonial period, which relegates the Dominican Creole to the position of subordinate to the English colonisers. Indeed, the protagonist notices her inferior position in terms of social hierarchy both in the island and in the metropolis: in Dominica, Antoinette is the victim of her narcissistic husband’s plot to exert his power both in the marital sphere and in the colony; once in England, Antoinette’s subordination is worsened when she is taken to England and ultimately locked in the attic of her husband’s mansion on the grounds that she is mad. From this inferior position, she reconstructs a series of memories from her life in Dominica whose interest lie not in their reliability, but in their subversive nature. Such memories become eventually subversive because she brings to the fore her relationship with the geography, people and folklore of the colony of Dominica while narrating the story from the metropolis. Therefore, her memories become what the French historian Pierre Nora calls a *milieu de mémoire*. In words of Nora, this concept refers to “an integrated memory, all-powerful, sweeping, un-self-conscious and inherently present-minded” (2). Indeed, as Astrid Erll argues in her article “Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies” (2011), *milieux de mémoire* “may even be a site of “*counter-memories*” to the official narrative of the past” (310; emphasis added). This subversive potential applies to the novel to be analysed, since it is a postmodern rewriting of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Rochester’s Creole wife.

As will be explored in the following chapters, the natural world of Dominica triggers an array of emotions in the inhabitants of this country at different points in the novel. In the case of Antoinette and her mother, both of them undergo a series of difficulties deriving from an event that is inextricably tied to the land of Dominica: the end of the exploitation of both labour force and the land after the 1833 Emancipation Act. In this context, the landscape of the island cannot be said to be inconsequential. According to Balaev, “the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character’s identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience” (150). In the case of Antoinette, her interaction with the Caribbean landscape enables her to understand to what degree she is attached to her native land. By means of assessing this attachment in the recollection of her past, this character-narrator explores the different stages in the construction of her Creole

consciousness. As will be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6, her Creole consciousness evolves as she grows more attached to the natural world of her native country. For a better understanding of the relationship between Antoinette's Creole identity and Caribbean landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there will be a contextualisation of the novel in the chapter that follows.

3. Wide Sargasso Sea and the Problematisation of Creole Identity

This chapter aims to provide a contextualisation of the novel to be analysed. First, there will be a brief overview of Jean Rhys's life and works, with an emphasis on those aspects of her biography that are closely linked to the main ideas of my dissertation. Second, the focus will be placed on *Wide Sargasso Sea*; in this subsection, there will be a plot overview and an introduction to the main themes reflected in the novel and to the role of Antoinette as the main internal narrator. This discussion is meant to be a bridge between this chapter and the following ones, in which I present and discuss the results of my research as to how the evolution in Antoinette's Creole consciousness is reflected in her varying degrees of attachment to the natural world of her native island.

3.1. Jean Rhys: The Burden of Belonging Nowhere

It seems inexcusable to approach Jean Rhys's fiction without taking into account the importance of her biography. As Helen Carr argues in her monograph *Jean Rhys*, Rhys "used her life, in all its painful rawness, as the material from which she formed her fiction" (3). Moreover, she goes on to argue that "even in *Wide Sargasso Sea* many of the details are drawn from her own Caribbean childhood" (21). Jean Rhys herself wrote an unfinished autobiography in the last few years of her life. This autobiography is entitled *Smile Please* (1979) and comprises a number of vignettes mostly from the author's childhood and early adolescence in Dominica, although she also reconstructs some key events of her first steps in Europe. In the foreword to *Smile Please*, the editor Diane Athill maintains that Rhys's works "were not autobiographical in every detail ..., but autobiographical they were" (6). This quotation enhances the hybridity of this female writer's works as pieces of literature

combining fiction and biography. Furthermore, researchers such as Helen Carr, Patricia Moran, Teresa O'Connor and the biographer Carole Angier draw parallels between Rhys's fiction and her life. Nevertheless, Carr warns that "Jean has suffered from having her life and work read against each other" (1). This suffering is by no means unjustified: as Carr underlines, "Jean Rhys found herself again and again depicted, by analogy with her victims, as oppressed and defeated" (5). However, Rhys did not yield to such a shallow depiction of her complex personality; she never ceased to write (Carr 6) and, what is more, she attempted to overcome all the hardships which she underwent throughout her life, especially her feeling of deracination, in a "heroic" way (Carr 6).

From the outset of her life, Jean Rhys proved to be a complex figure with a multifarious identity: she was born in 1890 in the Caribbean island of Dominica, which at that time was under British control. Rhys's complexity in terms of identity can be seen, in first place, in her genealogy: Rhys was a Dominican-born white Creole of British origin and, as Angier marks, "like so many 'English' colonial families, Jean's was not English, but Welsh, Irish and Scottish" (6). However, her manifold identity was at times an obstacle for her, since she felt that she did not belong anywhere (Carr 22). The main reason for her sense of dislocation stemmed from the fact that some of her relatives had been slaveholders in Dominica. As Angier summarises, Jean's great-grandfather on her mother's side — James Potter Lockhart— had come from Scotland so as to run a sugar plantation (7). In her autobiography *Smile Please*, Rhys highlights that, due to their role as slaveholders, "the Lockharts, even in my day, were never very popular" (33). Therefore, when the Emancipation Act was passed in 1833 with the aim of abolishing slavery in the island, the former slaves' hatred of the Lockharts gave rise to several fires at some estate houses (*Smile Please* 33; Angier 7). The aversion of Dominica's black population greatly affected Rhys's sense of belonging, since her family had been rejected and continued being regarded in a suspicious way (Angier 14). Indeed, Veronica Marie Gregg argues that Rhys's Creole identity was "sustained by simultaneous love and hatred of black people" (*Jean Rhys* 67).

The years which Rhys spends in Dominica have an influence in the formation of her Creole consciousness. As H. Adlai Murdoch marks, "Rhys ... spent her most formative years as a Creole in a Caribbean colony, overdetermined by many of the same cultural patterns and strictures as her black and 'coloured' counterparts" (146). Such restrictions are accounted for by the status of Dominica as a colony subordinate to the British Empire. As Rhys was born in this colony, she herself was subjected to the power of the British

rulers governing this territory. Nevertheless, during her stay in the island she was utterly unaware of the power relations exerted by the British Empire since she was no more than a child. In this context, memory plays a fundamental role in unveiling how the relationship between colonisers and colonised shapes the construction of Rhys's identity. Indeed, the mature Rhys recollects her childhood and early adolescence in the island so as to bring about the realisation of these particulars. For instance, there is a section in her unfinished autobiography which is entitled "Geneva". In this section, she summarises how her mother's Scottish grandfather, James Gibson Lockhart, acquired the plantations on what was Geneva estate and became a slave owner (*Smile Please* 33). It is at this point in her autobiography that she highlights how the relationship between her British-born colonising ancestors and the black population of the island deteriorated to such an extent that an exceedingly dim view of Lockhart was taken by Dominicans: "As he was a slave owner the Lockharts, even in my day, were never very popular. That's putting it mildly" (*Smile Please* 33).

Given that Rhys had British-born relatives, she as a Creole was placed in a liminal position in terms of social and cultural hierarchy and, gradually, her feelings while in the island became contradictory. In her unfinished autobiography, Rhys covertly shows that she became conscious of her Creole identity in one of her interactions with her nurse Meta. This employee is described, in words of Rhys, as "the terror of my life" (*Smile Please* 29). Meta is a black servant that continuously plays jokes on her, shakes her violently and, most importantly, infects her with distrust: "Meta had shown me a world of fear and distrust, and I am still in that world" (*Smile Please* 32). What makes Rhys raise concern as to her hybrid identity is that Meta taught her "to fear cockroaches hysterically" (*Smile Please* 30). As will be seen in the analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the cockroach is a derogatory term that black Dominicans use in Rhys's fiction so as to refer to the white population of the island. Hence, what Meta is implying is that the Creole child of whom she is taking care should be suspicious of whites. As a consequence of such an inflicted fear, Rhys develops an edgy relationship with her identity, and the ambiguity stemming from her Creole identity contributes to shaping her narratives on her native land. This ambivalence is perfectly illustrated by the doll episode in *Smile Please*. The Creole child is given two dolls as a present from her grandmother. Though not remembering how old she was at that time, the biographer Rhys vividly recalls the following as regards the dolls: "One was fair, one was dark. Both beautiful. But as soon as I saw the dark doll I wanted her as I had never wanted anything in my life before" (39). The different colours of the dolls could be said to

point to Rhys's hybridity in terms of identity. Probably influenced by the wicked warnings of her nurse Meta, she favours the dark doll in an attempt to subtly reveal that she is not attached to her British roots. As Murdoch explains, "Rhys frequently returns to this world of familiar doubleness, one whose contradictions continually undermined the sterile world of metropolitan whiteness to which her skin colour appeared unequivocally to condemn her" (146). The references to hybrid identity in Rhys's recollections are hence aimed at analysing the stark opposition between the two cultures of which she partakes: the variety in terms of cultures that characterised her birthplace contrasts the reductionist view taken by the culturally barren British Empire, and the remembrance of such a tension enables Rhys to fully explore the complexity of Creoleness while criticising the one-sidedness of metropolitan whites.

At the age of sixteen, Rhys was sent to England so as to study at the Perse School in Cambridge. However, as she recalls in *Smile Please*, she left the School at the end of the first term because she wanted to be an actress (101). She joined the Academy of Dramatic Art accordingly, but found herself compelled to find a job after her father's death. Rhys goes on to explain the following: "My mother wrote that she could not afford to keep me at the Academy and that I must return to Dominica. I was determined not to do that (...), and I got a job in the chorus of a musical comedy called *Our Miss Gibbs*" (*Smile Please* 105). However, her two-year period in the chorus left a scar on her mind: she was overcome by a feeling of nostalgia and dislocation, and this was aggravated by a tendency to gamble (Angier 71) and a failed relationship with a well-off lover who, despite Rhys's aversion to beg for money, eventually gave her a cheque through a lawyer (*Smile Please* 121). These events turned her initial feeling that she did not belong anywhere to a feeling of deracination: "I am a stranger and I always will be" (*Smile Please* 124). It is in the autumn of 1917 when her situation changed for the better: as she summarises in *Smile Please*, Rhys met the half-French, half-Dutch painter Jean Lenglet (136-137). She left England and married Lenglet in 1919. From that moment onwards, Rhys led an itinerant life: she lived in such diverse places as Vienna and Paris, which enhances the multifariousness of her identity.

While in Paris, Rhys tried to earn money by translating the articles which her husband wrote in French and by selling them to English newspapers and magazines (*Smile Please* 153). It is at this period that the English writer Ford Madox Ford, editor of *The Transatlantic Review*, realised the potential that Rhys had as a writer. Hence, as Angier notes, "Ford set her to write short stories" (134). In 1927, Rhys published her first

collection of short stories, entitled *The Left Bank and Other Stories*. In the introduction to this collection, Ford Madox Ford vouches for the quality of Rhys's writings by contending that she goes beyond modernist aesthetics and shows "an instinct for form being possessed by singularly few writers of English" (LB 24). Apart from this first collection of short stories, Rhys wrote four novels in the 1930s: *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). These novels revolve around female characters that, as was the case with the author, are immigrants and feel alienated in society. As Patricia Moran maintains in her article "The Feelings Are Always Mine" (2015), the protagonists' "state of shame engenders profound despair, leading the protagonists to wonder if they have any worth at all, or if others' rejection, abandonment and betrayal of them somehow speaks to who or what they truly are" (190). Rhys's exploration of the consciousness of neglected people through their memories transcends any categorisation to do with time. Even, as Helen Carr contends, Rhys explores "a dimension of modernist, even postmodernist consciousness that perhaps only appears elsewhere before the Second World War in Kafka's work" (xiv).

After the Second World War, Rhys disappeared from the literary panorama, supposedly because she was undergoing economic and emotional hardships (Carr xi). However, as Erica Johnson and Patricia Moran highlight, "Rhys wrote journals, stories, poetry, letters upon letters and even drama during the twenty-seven-year interval between the publication of her first four novels and that of her fifth" (3). During this period, she also wrote the drafts of a longer text that was to become her most successful novel: *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The publication of this novel in 1966 was a turning point in Rhys's career not only because it led her to literary stardom, but also because it brought to the fore her Caribbean origins (Carr 1). Indeed, it is set in the Caribbean¹ and the narrative is mostly told from the perspective of a Creole woman. As will be highlighted below, *Wide Sargasso Sea* reflects a series of disappointments that Jean Rhys herself suffered, such as a deep sense of dislocation and, in connection with this concern, an evolution in the main protagonist's Creole consciousness.

¹ The internal narrators of *Wide Sargasso Sea* locate the events which they recall in Jamaica. However, given the evident parallels between the novel and Rhys's life, this dissertation will refer to the Caribbean island where virtually all the events are set as Dominica.

3.2. Wide Sargasso Sea: Plot Overview and Main Themes

As it is widely acknowledged, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a rewriting of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. As a matter of fact, it gives life to the origins of Rochester's first wife (Bertha Mason) through the story of a Dominican-born white Creole née Antoinette (and later renamed Bertha). As Elaine Savory points out, this rewriting enabled Rhys to "revision *Jane Eyre*'s lurid description of the Creole wife, which reflected nineteenth-century British stereotypes about white Creoles" (79). Hence, the memories recalled by the female internal narrator of this novel could be considered a counter-narrative aimed at overcoming the essentialist views on the complex identity of which Creoles partake, an identity which was neglected during the colonial period. Along the same lines, Veronica Marie Gregg argues that "Rhys's reworking of historical data, cultural references, and literary allusions suggest that, in rewriting the Victorian novel, she is calling into question the entire Book, the metatext of the dominant, metropolitan discourse" (*Jean Rhys* 84). Hence, one of the objectives of Rhys's novel is to challenge the prominence of the coloniser's discourse during the Victorian Era by foregrounding the voice of a member of the colonies: the silenced Bertha Mason.

In this context, the task of reconstructing the (his)tory of Bertha Mason was a complicated endeavour for Rhys. As Lilian Pizzichini indicates,

The difficulty was that she had to re-create the mad woman Charlotte Bronte had turned into a monster, and then she had to write the man who married her. At the same time, she had to make her reader understand them both. She had to find sympathy for Mr Rochester. She knew that 'a mad girl speaking all the time is too much!' If it was too much for her, it would be too much for her readers. But she had to make Mr Rochester speak too. (279)

In order to give voice to the story of Bertha Mason, Rhys lends her the majority of the narration of this novel. Two thirds of the novel —Part I and Part III— are entirely narrated by the Creole protagonist, who is an internal narrator that recollects her past in Dominica from the attic of her husband's mansion in England, where she is confined. In the case of Part II, it is narrated by the Creole's husband, although it is incidentally interrupted by Antoinette in the approximate centre of this section. Hence, this novel is set in the small island of Dominica in the 1830s and is divided into three parts: Part I deals with Antoinette's childhood and early adolescence; Part II focuses on the relationship between

Antoinette/Bertha and her husband; Part III explores the Creole's psychological condition while being in England.

Part I is entirely narrated by Antoinette who, trapped in the third floor of her husband's house, recollects her origins. The story begins shortly after the 1833 Emancipation Act. This historical event sets a precedent in the life of Antoinette's family: as former Creole planters, they grow impoverished and start feeling neglected by both white Europeans and the black population of Dominica. This worsening of the family's welfare is enhanced by the novel's first sentence: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (*Sargasso* 5). What follows is a series of serious events that have a negative effect on the mind of Antoinette's mother, Annette: first, one of Annette's friends, Mr Luttrell, suddenly leaves the island (*Sargasso* 5); then, the family's horse is poisoned (*Sargasso* 6); finally, the freed slaves set fire to Annette's house and Antoinette's brother dies as a result of the arson (*Sargasso* 20). All these events precipitate Annette's fall into madness and Antoinette's growing self-consciousness. Unable to care for Antoinette, her family sends her to a convent, where she spends her adolescent years.

After a temporal ellipsis, Part II retakes the story through the voice of Antoinette's husband. The name of this character-narrator is not mentioned; however, the novel's condition as a rewriting of *Jane Eyre* makes it clear that the Creole's husband is Rochester². From the beginning, it is shown that Rochester is a feeble man who falls ill easily (*Sargasso* 40) and who does not adapt to the island. In addition, he acknowledges that he does not love Antoinette: "I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me" (*Sargasso* 58). The reason why he is not attached to her has to do with the fact that theirs is an arranged marriage. Rochester's lack of affection towards his wife is strengthened by an incriminating letter that he receives from Daniel Cosway, an alleged relative of Antoinette's who warns the English coloniser against the family's madness (*Sargasso* 61). Feeling uneasy both in Dominica and within the marital sphere, he steers clear of Antoinette and sets his heart on returning to England. Even, he has sexual intercourse with one of Antoinette's servants. Enraged at Rochester's infidelity, Antoinette grows insane and resorts to drinking and violence. Nevertheless, Rochester remains unaffected by his

² Although the name of Antoinette's husband is never mentioned in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he will be referred to as Rochester throughout the dissertation on the grounds that Rhys's novel is a rewriting of *Jane Eyre*

wife's irrationality: he has made the decision to deprive her of her Caribbean roots and take her to England at all costs.

Part III is set in the house which Rochester owns in England, and more concretely in Antoinette's room. However, the most relevant setting in this section is the Creole's unconscious, which reveals her longing to return to Dominica. She dreams that she is leaving the room while her guard (Grace Poole) is sleeping and that, after accidentally setting the English manor on fire, jumps into the pool from which her childhood friend Tia is calling her.

As regards the novel's main themes, first it should be highlighted that there is a focus on the issue of Antoinette's identity: as a Caribbean white Creole of British origin, Antoinette partakes of elements from at least two different cultures, namely the Caribbean and the British ones. However, she never finds herself completely at home. As Mary Lou Emery notes in "Modernist Crosscurrents", Antoinette is "an outcast, a sort of freak rejected by both Europe and England, whose blood she shares, and by the black West Indian people, whose culture and home have been hers for two generations or more" (164-165). When being in Dominica, both whites and blacks make her feel alienated. As Seodial Deena argues, "whites alienate Annette's family on the basis of her low economic status, while blacks alienate them on the basis of her high economic status" (75). In the case of the black population of the island, they deride both her and her family and call them "white nigger" (*Sargasso* 10); thus, she finds in her aversion to socialise a shelter to feel "safe from strangers" (*Sargasso* 12). In the case of the white population, Margaret Joseph argues that "Annette Mason and Antoinette Cosway are both victims of Englishmen who ... went to the colonies to make money with no regard for the consequences on the lives of the people who lived there" (33-34). Since the act of being deprived of the Caribbean and being taken to the metropolis is a by-product of both colonialism and hate, Antoinette is not likely to feel that she belongs in England. Indeed, she is confined to a little room in the attic of a house, thus having no contact whatsoever with other people except for Grace Poole.

Another theme of great relevance in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the question of colonialism. As Carole Angier marks, Dominica became British in 1805 and, even after the abolition of slavery in 1834, the relationship between colonisers and colonised was far from peaceful (4). In the novel, this somewhat violent and resentful relationship is twofold. On the one hand, the former slaves are shown to bear a grudge against the originally colonising Antoinette's family and ultimately burn to ashes their mansion at Coulibri. On the other hand, the newly arrived colonisers (Mr Mason and Rochester) open old wounds

in this family because they marry Annette and Antoinette respectively in their own interests. In the case of Rochester, Angier argues that he feels the need to marry the Creole in order to avenge his being his father's least favourite child, and hence "his anger and hate degenerate into an overt desire to bully, to possess and to destroy" (167). Therefore, the convenience marriage of Rochester stems from his need to accumulate the possessions which he has hitherto been denied and, symbolically, this points to Angier's contention that "England needed and exploited Dominica, but didn't love her; and Dominica resented England" (Angier 5). By marrying white Creoles whose origins lie on the colonisers' side, both Mr Mason and Rochester take over the Creole and black population of this Caribbean island: as a consequence of that, they accumulate powers to such an extent that, as Deena maintains, they "can only relate to the peoples of the Caribbean as master to slaves/servants" (60).

The last relevant theme that will be briefly dealt with in this section is the characters' relationship with the landscape of the island. In the first lines of the monograph *Jean Rhys*, the biographer Carole Angier provides a brief but comprehensive description of the Caribbean landscape:

The sun shines hotter and the moon brighter here than anywhere in Europe. Rain falls more suddenly and night comes more quickly. Colours are brighter, smells stronger; trees and flowers and insects grow bigger. So much grows so quickly that almost everything has a parasite, even people. Species overflow, individuals don't count. (3)

As can be seen in the quotation, the feature that characterises the natural world of Dominica is its intensity, as suggested by the comparative form in adjectives such as "hotter", "brighter" and "stronger", and by adverbs of manner, namely "suddenly" and "quickly". The acuteness of colours and sounds may evoke the beauty of this landscape, but also points to its peril: the overflow of species creates an overwhelming effect that might perplex the human senses and even "dwarf" people (Angier 5). Therefore, the landscape of Dominica is paradoxical: as Angier maintains, "Jean's island is both an earthly paradise and almost uninhabitable" (5). Further, Jessica Gildersleeve contends that "Rhys's texts recognise tropical landscapes as an unassailable mystery that cannot and will not be subsumed into an existing European plot" (34). This mysterious essence of the Caribbean landscape offers Rhys the opportunity to provide an accurate sociological portrayal of her native island. Actually, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* the contradictory nature of

the landscape has an effect on how the inhabitants of the island interact with it: whereas at some times it is an Edenic setting at other times it becomes a wild zone. Moreover, the paradox mentioned above reflects dissimilarities in terms of identity, as is the case of the stark contrast between Antoinette's hybridity and Rochester's purity in terms of Englishness, and it also points to different stages in the maturation of the protagonist's Creole consciousness. In the chapters that follow (chapters 4, 5 and 6), there will be an exploration of how the (dis)connection between Antoinette and the Caribbean landscape as recollected mainly by Antoinette-as-narrator reflects the evolution in her Creole consciousness.

4. From an Edenic Garden to a Hellish Landscape

This chapter will focus on the connection between the sudden change in the Caribbean landscape and the isolation felt by Antoinette as she and her family are rejected and mocked in Part I in the novel. In this chapter, there will be an account of how Antoinette-as-narrator reconstructs her coming to terms with her social and historical position as a Creole by selecting a series of key memories and events from her late childhood and adolescence in Dominica: her mother's reaction to the effects of the abolition of slavery in Dominica (chapter 4.1), Antoinette's realisation of the mockery and neglect of Dominican blacks towards her and her mother (chapter 4.2), her first nightmare after she realises the grudge that black people bear against her (chapter 4.3) and a second nightmare that takes place on the eve of her marriage to Rochester (chapter 4.4). As will be seen in these three recollections, Antoinette juxtaposes the gradual formation of her Creole consciousness as a source of worry and despondency to the sudden change in the Caribbean landscape from an idyllic garden to a wild and dangerous place.

4.1. The Aftermath of the Emancipation Act

Antoinette begins her narration by making reference to the effects that the 1833 Emancipation Act has had on her family, and more especially on her mother. Antoinette explains that her mother, Annette, was her father's second wife and, "worse still, a Martinique girl" (*Sargasso* 5). The emphasis placed on her birthplace points to her being a Creole who was born in a Caribbean island. Being the wife of a slaveholder, she has

participated, either directly or indirectly, in the exploitation of people who were born in the same place as she was. Therefore, the former slaves bear a grudge against her, as explained by the internal narrator: “The Jamaicans had never approved of my mother” (5). It can be seen that Annette is rejected from the beginning of the novel. This rejection seems to have had a negative impact on her, since she lies to Antoinette when she asks her why so few people come to see them at Coulibri Estate: Annette replies that the road is in bad condition (*Sargasso* 5). Due to her Martinican identity, Annette may also feel that she has betrayed her origins when engaging in slaveholding. This slavery-related burden is enhanced by a specific by-product of the Emancipation Act: Antoinette reconstructs a conversation between her mother and Mr Luttrell, Annette’s “only friend” (*Sargasso* 5), in which they express their waiting for a compensation³ promised by the English. However, this compensation never comes, and Mr Luttrell eventually leaves the island and commits suicide by drowning: “He shot his dog, swam out to sea and was gone for always” (*Sargasso* 5). At this point in the novel, there are four elements recalled by this novel’s internal narrator that contribute to constructing Annette’s postslavery-related despondency: (i) her being rejected by the black population; (ii) the burden of having betrayed her origins; (iii) a feeling of tiredness related to the never-ending process of waiting for a compensation; (iv) her family’s subsequent impoverishment. Immediately after, Antoinette will provide an account of a series of events which trigger her mother’s mental deterioration. In fact, these events mark a sharp contrast between Annette’s mental stability before the Emancipation Act and her subsequent fall into madness.

The first event that sets a turning point in the narrative is Antoinette’s finding of Annette’s horse lying dead: “I saw her horse lying down under the frangipani tree. I went up to him but he was not sick, he was dead and his eyes were black with flies” (5-6). Later, she explains that the horse has been poisoned. The key relevance of this event is reflected in Annette’s reaction: she claims that the family is “marooned” (6). As explained in the “Notes to the Text” section to Penguin’s 2000 edition of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the term *marooned* stands for ‘the son of fugitive slaves’. This reference to slavery may suggest that Annette’s past, and more concretely her being the wife of a slaveholder, determines both the present of the family and their future. Indeed, the horse is likely to have been poisoned by former slaves of Dominica. Moreover, the relevance of the horse’s poisoning is

³ In the “General Notes” section to Penguin’s 2000 edition of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is an explanation of the compensation that both Mr Luttrell and Antoinette’s family are expecting: “the British government awarded owners a compensation rate of £19 per slave” (133). However, it is warned that “compensation for the loss of slaves often went to the planters’ creditors, not to them” (134).

reflected in the reference to the frangipani tree in the quotation “I saw her horse lying down under the frangipani tree” (5). The allusion to nature anticipates what comes shortly after this finding: a sudden change in the family’s perception of the Caribbean landscape, which mirrors their uneasiness at finding themselves unable to respond to this situation. With regard to this lack of response, Annette wonders: “What will become of us?” (6). Unable to change her situation, she grows metaphorically paralysed. As the internal narrator exposes, her mother suddenly “grew thin and silent, and at last she refused to leave the house at all” (6). This numbness on the part of Annette may show that she has fallen prey to a deep feeling of despondency that is preventing her from reacting and even acting.

After narrating the finding of the horse’s corpse, Antoinette vividly recalls her family’s garden through a description of how it looked before and after this first key event:

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. ... Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. (...) The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it. (6)

The main idea in this quotation is that the family’s garden has undergone an abrupt and deep change. Before the turning point in the history of Antoinette’s family, their garden had an Edenic essence that made it a place to enjoy. Moreover, there is an emphasis on life, since one of the trees in the garden was the tree of life. However, the poisoning of the horse brings about wilderness and death: this hitherto paradisiac natural world grows wild and some of the flowers die. Among the flowers which grow out of the wild soil, there are orchids that are claimed not to be touched. This means that any intention on the part of Antoinette to interact with the landscape will not be fruitful at all, since at this moment the garden is dangerous. This perilous nature of the Caribbean landscape is strengthened by the description of an orchid as “snaky looking”: if Antoinette ventures to touch one of these “strangely zoomorphised plants” (Gildersleeve 36), she might be poisoned as well. It is because of this that Antoinette recalls never having gone near it.

Since the previously familiar garden has become utterly unfamiliar for the Creole protagonist, it can be argued that the narrator’s retrieval of this memory anticipates the overarching feeling of displacement of Antoinette throughout Part I in the novel. As Inna Malissa, Che Jamal, Hardev Kaur, and Manimangai Mani note, “a displaced person will feel disconcerted and the feeling of attachment to a certain place they were once familiar

with will be unfamiliar to them” (115). It is suggested, therefore, that in this first part of the narrative Antoinette will be suspicious of the Caribbean landscape and will remain at a distance from it. Actually, the garden has turned dangerous at the same time as her mother has become paralysed, so Antoinette can be said to be aware of her mother’s emotional numbness and of the reasons why the family’s native land has become threatening to them. Eventually, Antoinette’s awareness of how dangerous her homeland has become for her will lead to a deep sense of displacement that affects negatively her Creole consciousness.

The hitherto safe land of Dominica can no longer be perceived to be a home: now, it is felt as a physical and psychological prison where Antoinette’s family was trapped. It is a physical prison because they have no alternative but to stay cut off from the island’s natural world. It is a psychological prison for two main reasons: first, both Annette and Antoinette are unable to react; second, and most importantly, they are aware that their condition as slaveholding Creoles curtails their cohabitation with Dominican blacks, so they become frustrated since they fail in establishing social relationships with others. With regard to the issue of entrapment, Sandra Paquet argues that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a novel where “images of entrapment and frustrated life menace the security and beauty of the garden” (108). This contention may point to two relevant aspects of Annette’s new condition in a post-emancipation society: her frustration at her gradual impoverishment and her tendency to seclusion within the domestic sphere. When Antoinette notices how affected her mother is by the succession of events aforementioned, she grows afraid and, to a certain extent, worried. In a way, Annette has passed on her sorrow to her daughter: hence, Antoinette has been legated Annette’s concern with the drawbacks of being a Creole in Dominica.

Antoinette’s realisation that her mother is going through a period of emotional crisis is of great relevance for the understanding of how Antoinette starts being affected by her Creoleness. At this point in the novel, Antoinette-as-narrator speaks: “No more slavery —why should *anybody* work? This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous” (6). In this excerpt, Antoinette acknowledges that, being a child, she did not remember Dominica when it was prosperous. It is obvious that she is not acquainted with the time when there were sugar plantations in the island, since she had not been born yet. The knowledge which Antoinette has at the time in which she is narrating her past is, as Ernst van Alphen argues, “a process of conveying, of combining historical knowledge and the memories of others” (486). Nevertheless, as has been reflected in the paragraph above, when she realises the change in her garden she notices that her mother is

emotionally paralysed and starts worrying about her. Although the change in the historical background of Dominica does not sadden her, the realisation of her mother's condition does affect her: in the lines that follow, Antoinette summarises Annette's gestures and shows that she is now afraid of her mother. Accordingly, she spends most of her time in the kitchen with her servant Christophine, hence reducing the contact with her mother. The reason why Antoinette feels afraid of her mother, thus moving away from her, is that she fears that her mother is growing mad. As is the case with the garden, Antoinette remains at a distance from her mother because she might be dangerous as well.

4.2. Antoinette's Recognition of the Negative Side of Her Hybridity

As has been highlighted above, Antoinette has realised that her mother's psychological state has deeply changed as a consequence of the Emancipation Act. In this context, Antoinette has decided to remain at a distance from both the landscape and her mother for fear that she might be affected negatively, thus growing alienated. This fear may be considered a prelude to her disconnection with her native land and hence a sense of uneasiness derived from her hybrid identity.

Her fear notwithstanding, Antoinette-as-narrator has made clear that the new situation of her family did not sadden her. By asserting this, the narrator may want to covertly express that at this point in the story she was repressing certain emotions at an unconscious level. In a way, she might be averse to acknowledging the effects of such frightful events on her own mind so as to find, in words of Dominick LaCapra, "a 'positive' identity" (66). This search for a 'positive' identity is something that Antoinette direly needs, since she goes on to admit being hated by the black population of Dominica: "I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches" (*Sargasso* 9). In addition, she gives voice to a key piece of her memory in which a little black girl follows her singing "Go away white cockroach, go away, go away" (9). By seeking a more positive identity, Antoinette is trying to counteract the hatred shown by the people who had been ruled by such former slaveholders as her family. Likewise, as Melanie Weaver argues, Antoinette has inherited an identity crisis from her mother that is itself "a legacy as an exile without a strong identity" (14). The exile pointed out in the quotation is linked to the natural decision of Annette and Antoinette to move away from both the people of Dominica and the natural world. Actually, as has been previously

mentioned, Annette covertly makes reference to this exile by claiming that her family is “marooned”. In this context, all the efforts of Antoinette to find a stronger identity may be meant to overcome her mother’s feeling that the family is marooned. In other words, she may be trying to unconsciously fight against her family’s past as slaveholders in order to guarantee a more positive future in which they will no longer have to run away or worry about the question of slavery.

At this specific moment, Antoinette is unable to answer back to the little girl’s attack, since she cannot verbalise her emotions. Instead, she runs away in search of a safe shelter. This inability to articulate a message, and hence bring to the conscious her repressed emotions, demonstrates that she is greatly affected by the aversion of black Dominicans: as is the case with her mother, she finds it impossible to express her stance with regard to the question of postslavery. In fact, the only emotion that she has shown so far is that of fear, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter. As a consequence of that fear, what she does after the little girl’s insult is to move away from her, just like she grows distant from both her mother and the landscape. Subsequently, she resorts to seclusion, which is a decision that her mother has also made. As the internal narrator explains, “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. Everything would be worse if I moved” (9). In this occasion, Antoinette is on the verge of entering the garden that has been described as wild and dangerous. However, she does not interact with the natural landscape; she sits beside the wall located at the end of the garden and remains paralysed. This element of paralysis is related to her inability to convey her emotions and answer back to the black girl.

In this context, Antoinette’s numbness entails keeping her emotions repressed so as not to be further judged by the narrow-minded population of Dominica. This numbness is accurately conveyed by Antoinette-as-narrator, who recalls her reactions when being a child: “But Christophine told her loudly that it shameful. She run wild, she grow up worthless. And nobody care” (11). This is an instance of free indirect speech whereby the voice of Christophine is presented mediated by the narrator. It is to Christophine that the broken sentences “it shameful”, “she run wild”, “she grow up worthless”, and “and nobody cares” belong. This black servant speaks Creole English, as can be seen in the lack of concordance between the subject and the main verb, as well as in the lack of a copular verb in “it shameful”. In this part of the narrative, the internal narrator is presenting the reactions of Antoinette-the-child not through her own words, but through Christophine’s.

Although Antoinette-as-narrator is trying to reconstruct her memories and narrating them in this novel, she is perfectly aware that at this point in the story she as a character was not able to speak about her distress naturally. Therefore, she may be using this stream-of-consciousness technique with a view to reflecting this paralysis in terms of speech, a state of numbness which points to the fear caused by the rejection that she feels for being a Creole.

There is yet another element that deteriorates Antoinette's psychological condition and hence her Creole consciousness: the lack of communication with her mother. The internal narrator remembers: "All that evening my mother didn't speak to me or look at me" (11). In her wretched condition, Antoinette is in dire need of a person to lean on and to let her express her emotions in a controlled, rational way. However, the only person who may support her is reluctant to speak to her or even look at her. According to Maude Adjarian, Annette is only interested in two things: the welfare of her disabled son Pierre and her decaying social status (2). Consequently, "Antoinette never gets to see herself constituted as a whole, autonomous self in her mother's eyes" (Adjarian 2). All in all, her mother has become as thorny as the Caribbean landscape, since Antoinette cannot interact with either of them. Therefore, Antoinette finds herself isolated in both her own family and in her native land. Since Antoinette as a Creole is lacking protection from the beginning of the novel, she will have two nightmares which present her as a vulnerable person. In these two dreams which are recalled by the internal narrator, the landscape of Dominica looms large as a threatening setting which mirrors Antoinette's anxiety as to her Creole identity. These nightmares will be explored in the two subsections that follow.

4.3. Walking through the Menacing Forests: A Prelude to a Turning Point in Antoinette's Welfare

The first nightmare that Antoinette-as-narrator recalls and verbalises takes place immediately after Antoinette's acknowledgement that her mother refuses to look at her. The Creole's first nightmare is reminisced as follows: "I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move" (11). The first element that is forefronted in this reconstruction is the forest. As is the case with the description of Dominica's landscape exposed above, this forest is not a shelter for such a

defenceless character as the Creole. Rather, it is a setting that resembles the family's thorny garden because it may be potentially harmful for her. First, this danger is suggested by the abruptness with which the phrase "not alone" is uttered. In terms of musicality, this appended subject complement contributes to breaking the somewhat pleasant rhythm achieved with the previous complete sentence. Second, the menacing atmosphere is confirmed by the subsequent explanation of who is accompanying Antoinette in the scene. The Creole perceives that she is not walking on her own, but is being followed by an entity that she cannot elucidate. As Mojgan Eyvazi et al. explain, "this dream shows Antoinette's repressed fear and paranoia in her unconscious mind while it forecasts her fearful future that awaits her" (159). Taking into account Antoinette's fears as to her Creole identity, it could be argued that what is haunting her is the reluctant attitude of the Dominican blacks, as suggested by the presence of the unnamed person who hates her. In this case, the individual that is chasing her may be an embodiment of the little black girl who has insulted her or even an image that stands for the resentful Dominican black community. Not coincidentally, such an instance of repudiation has been internalised by Antoinette and has provoked a sense of fear and uneasiness on her.

In this occasion, the landscape of the island proves detrimental for Antoinette's welfare, since it is a place where she could be hurt. Moreover, this forest becomes a suffocating environment from which the victim cannot escape: as highlighted in the quotation, she cannot move, and this reference to paralysis points to the perplexity of her mind and to her loneliness in a society where she can find no support. Finding herself alienated in a hitherto familiar island, she is unable to find a way to change her situation for the better. As well as being troubled by a sense of impotence, her psyche is too troubled with questions to do with identity. Hence, instead of moving towards progression, Antoinette has no alternative but to relive her past and compulsively repeat physical reactions such as struggling and screaming. This sense of entrapment, which has been explained previously, is reflected in the recollection of this dream: Antoinette is struggling to escape the threatening forest but her efforts prove futile. Her body is paralysed, as is the case with her mind. Likewise, this dream could be interpreted as a prolepsis that anticipates what will happen in the pages that follow: Antoinette's impossibility to escape from her immediate destiny. Being a foreigner and even an enemy in her own country, she is about to undergo the arson of her family's mansion at Coulibri.

The emphasis put on Antoinette's troubled mind suggests that the Creole has contradictory views on the landscape of Dominica. As regards such contradictions, Thomas Loe notes the following: "Left to her own devices and without familial defences, Antoinette's later references to landscape clearly alternate between the security she feels and her continued sense of threat" (54). This alternation is reflected in the internal narrator's reconstruction of the Creole's thoughts after awaking from the nightmare: "I am safe ... There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. The barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers" (*Sargasso* 12). In order to comfort herself, the Creole protagonist provides a view of the Caribbean landscape that is set in stark opposition to the threatening natural world depicted in the dream. As can be seen in the quotation, Antoinette argues that she feels safe as she realises that the natural elements of Dominica are supposed to protect her. In this case, the barrier which the island's geography provides does not entail imprisonment. Instead of being an overwhelming cage to which Antoinette is confined, Caribbean landscape is perceived by this character as an element that protects her against further attacks. However, this positive depiction of Dominica's natural world proves illusory. Immediately after, Antoinette-as-narrator describes the grass as "razor grass" and highlights that she saw a snake (13). This means that the apparently soothing effect that the nature of the island had on Antoinette's mind after her nightmare has vanished in no time. Actually, Antoinette is in two minds about her degree of connection with the landscape of Dominica: while she tries to lean on the protection that her native country might provide her, she is aware that Dominica has become a dangerous place that is threatening her welfare.

As a consequence of this inconsistency, Antoinette is also doubtful about her Creole consciousness: whereas she understands that her family is hated, she clings on to her homeland both at an unconscious level and at a conscious one. With regard to the former level, Antoinette unconsciously suggests her attraction to Dominica's soothing landscape in her post-nightmare reflection despite her fear. With regard to the latter one, Antoinette makes it clear that she does not want to leave the island. This willingness can be perceived when her mother informs her second husband (Mr. Mason) about her desire to leave Coulibri. As Antoinette-the-narrator highlights, "I knew that we were hated — but to go away ... for once I agreed with my stepfather. That was not possible" (15). At this stage in the narrative, the internal narrator recollects Antoinette's agreement with Mr. Mason

because leaving her birthplace would have implied deracination. What is conveyed in such a stance is that, her fear and her doubts notwithstanding, the Creole protagonist is somewhat attracted to her origins. This tension reflects the complexity of Antoinette's hybridity and anticipates that, throughout the novel, her Creole consciousness will be modified as her (dis)connection with her native land —especially with Dominica's landscape— evolves.

4.4. Antoinette's Second Oneiric Visit to the Threatening Forest

The arson at Coulibri Estate has detrimental effects for Antoinette's family in both physical and psychological terms. The protagonist's younger brother, Pierre, dies as a consequence of the fire, and this dreadful event accelerates Annette's fall into insanity. As summarised in Antoinette's narration, the Creole protagonist is looked after Aunt Cora in Spanish Town while her mother is resting in the country. However, it is revealed that her mother's condition is not bound to improve. As recalled by the internal narrator, Antoinette goes to visit Annette but she violently shoves her aside. In this context, it is obvious that her mother is unable to live together with her. Moreover, her stepfather spends virtually the whole year away from the Caribbean. Hence, Antoinette is taken to Mount Calvary Convent, where she will have the nightmare that is analysed below.

At first, Antoinette's welfare seems to have improved by the time she has established herself at the convent: "This convent was my refuge, a place of sunshine and of death where very early in the morning the clap of a wooden signal woke the nine of us who slept in the long dormitory" (*Sargasso* 31). At the beginning of this evaluative passage, the internal narrator seems to provide a positive portrayal of her new home, since it is described as a refuge. Actually, this is a place where she is protected from any potential physical or verbal attacks on the part of Dominican blacks. However, in the explanation that comes after there is a juxtaposition of two opposed elements, namely "sunshine" and "death". This contradiction might be said to be a product of the unclear stance of Antoinette towards her identity: she is evaluating the pros and cons of a place that, as is the case with Coulibri, can be said to be her home; however, she is unable to decide which of the two sides of her home —sunshine or death— prevails. As Mary Lou Emery claims with regard to place in the novel, "the setting in itself cannot give the protagonist a home; rather it places her divided identity within the cultural and historical context of its division"

(“Modernist Crosscurrents” 167). This means that Antoinette’s ambivalent feelings for the convent are revealing of her hybrid identity: she is a Caribbean Creole of British origin. Such an ambiguity is enhanced by the subsequent reconstruction of the protagonist’s interior monologue while coming to terms with her new life as a boarding student: “But what about happiness, I thought at first, is there no happiness? There must be. Oh happiness of course, happiness, well” (*Sargasso* 32). This is a reflection that foregrounds Antoinette’s indecisiveness, since in her first question it is entailed that she has not found happiness yet, this feeling pointing to the deathly side of the convent mentioned before. However, later on she tries to appease herself by asserting that there must be happiness, which brings back the idea of the convent as a place of sunshine. Nevertheless, the following paragraph in Antoinette’s memory narration confirms that the Creole character is still at odds with her welfare: “But I soon forgot about happiness” (32). This contention suggests that the convent might not be as helpful for her as it seemed to be. Actually, the narrator’s reflection anticipates the unrest that the Creole will experience in the following pages.

The mental agitation of Antoinette is triggered by a visit of her stepfather in which he announces that some English friends will come to Dominica so as to spend the winter there. The Creole reluctantly asks Mr. Mason whether these people will eventually come, to which her stepfather replies: “One of them will. I’m certain of that” (33). Shocked by her father’s words, Antoinette’s reaction is recollected as follows: “It may have been the way he smiled, but again a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me. This time I did not let him see it. It was like the morning when I found the dead horse” (33-34). Although Antoinette does not externalise her feelings, she is shown to have been struck by his father’s assertion that one of his English friends is determined to come. This sudden revelation provokes a sense of despondency that overwhelms the Creole in the same way as the landscape depicted in her first nightmare. Furthermore, the inclusion of the noun *loss* in the description of the feeling might suggest that the impending arrival of Mr. Mason’s friend might put an end to the sources of her ephemeral happiness, these sources allegedly being protection and privacy. Finally, the analogy between her stepfather’s announcement and the finding of the family’s dead horse may imply that the visit of the English friend will have a profound effect on her Creole identity. With regard to the poisoning of the horse, it was the first of a series of attacks against her family on the part of Dominican blacks and it made Antoinette feel alienated in her homeland. In the case of the coming of

Mr. Mason's English acquaintance, there is an idea of circularity implied by the narrator's reference to the death of the horse. Taking into account the protagonist's reaction, such a reference might be interpreted as a prolepsis anticipating that the coming of the English man will also be detrimental for her Creole consciousness. Indeed, as will be seen later in the dissertation, this man will become her husband and will try to deprive her of her Dominican roots. Hence, the inclusion of the word *loss* in the internal narrator's reconstruction is not trivial at all.

It is at this point in the narrative that Antoinette recollects her second nightmare: "This was the second time I had my dream" (34). The first two sentences of this memory suggest that this dream might be a reproduction of the first one: "Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest" (34). However, there is a noticeable difference with respect to the first nightmare: whereas in the former she was being followed by an unidentified entity, in the latter Antoinette highlights that it is she who is following someone. The person whom she is following happens to be a man; since she has been informed of the impending arrival of the English man, the man in the dream could be a projection of the fears that Antoinette has with regard to the friend of Mr. Mason's. This fearful attitude can be perceived in that she is not chasing the man in order to threaten him. Rather, she is cautiously following a man who is ushering her through a forest, therefore taking the lead in the stroll. The male leadership in the dream is enhanced by the following narratorial explanation: "I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse" (34).

So far, the Creole is depicted in the dream as a benumbed creature that is getting carried away by the man's will, since she gives no offer of resistance. As will be explained later on, the Creole might be unconsciously foreseeing that she will be the inferior member in the relationship with this man: after all, she has been born in a colony that is subordinated to Britain, which is the birthplace of the male figure in the nightmare. It is at this point that the narrator for the first time overtly points to Antoinette's awareness that, as a Creole, she will never find herself at ease. While she has been rejected by black Dominicans before, she is bound to be neglected by her soon-to-be English husband as well. In words of Nazila Herischian, "the dream ... suggests the troubles that Antoinette will face after meeting Rochester" (77). Indeed, she is metaphorically enclosed within an identity-related cage where she might never escape no matter how hard she tries. Hence, she decides not to save herself and wait for the man's reaction instead, a reaction which

could be potentially anticipatory of what kind of a life Antoinette will lead when married to Rochester. Along the same lines, the scholar Kathy Mezei poses the following question with regard to the narrator's remembrance of this second dream: "Is the narrator ... shifting from a past dream to a premonition of her future English nightmare?" (200). Not arbitrarily, as can be seen in the selected quotations from the dream this memory is narrated in the present tense. Hence, the immediacy suggested by this specific tense may point to the connection between Antoinette's psychological imprisonment in Dominica and her later physical and psychological incarceration in England.

The image of Antoinette's entrapment within her Creole consciousness is reflected accordingly in the narrator's subsequent description of the oneiric Caribbean landscape: "We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees. I do not know them" (34). At this precise moment in the dream, Antoinette recognises the setting at which the two dreamlike characters have arrived: they are now in a garden that is walled. The sense of closure enhanced by that physical barrier points to Antoinette's paralysed mind, which makes her a prisoner of her fears. As a matter of fact, this garden can be considered a projection of the hitherto Edenic backyard at Coulibri. The parallel between both gardens is strengthened by Antoinette's explanation that the trees are unfamiliar for her: as is the case with the tree of life and the orchids which have become snaky-looking, the trees in the dream are alien for the Creole. Hence, the natural world of Dominica becomes once again a microcosm that reflects Antoinette's ambivalence towards her Creole consciousness: incarcerated within her troubled mind, she is an alienated individual who finds herself uneasy with her hybrid identity because of the repudiation inflicted by Dominican whites and, after Mr Mason's announcement, because of the arrival of an alleged suitor that is English.

As has been described in this first chapter of the analysis, Antoinette's recollection of some key events and dreams from her late childhood and adolescence provides a negative view of the Caribbean landscape that mirrors the protagonist's troubled mind as to her Creole consciousness. Finding herself rejected by her mother and black Dominicans, the Creole has metaphorically created a mental barrier that aims to protect her against further physical or verbal attacks because of her family's former condition as slaveholders. Similarly, the internal narrator has wittingly reflected Antoinette's distancing from both these perpetrators and a natural world that has turned venomous for her. In response to such recollection, Mezei argues that Antoinette's narration in Part I is "obsessed with

safety, her understandable desire to find refuge, the progressive diminishment of any feeling of safety, and conversely her increasing sense of isolation or, to use Antoinette's more poetic phrase, being 'marooned'" (204). Having put the emphasis on the Creole's marooned condition as a victim who is unable to escape from her psychological imprisonment, it can be argued that, by the end of Part I, the protagonist does not find herself at ease with her Creoleness. In the chapter that follows there will be an analysis of how Antoinette's Creole consciousness evolves to more positive terms in the novel's second part.

5. Dominica's Natural World as an Empowering Place for Those Who Dare to Connect with It.

This chapter will explore Antoinette's process of embracing her Creoleness in Part II of the novel as reflected in her stronger attachment to the island's natural world. This process is inversely proportional to her English husband's displacement in Dominica: His edgy relationship with the suffocating landscape of the island deteriorates as he becomes more reluctant to living in the colony. At the same time, his psyche is degenerated to such an extent that he finds himself in dire need to return to England. First, there will be a focus on how Rochester's mistrust of the Caribbean nature seems to relate him to her alienated wife in the first part of his internal narration (chapter 5.1). After that, the interruptive narration of Antoinette in the centre of Part II will be analysed with a view to elucidating the Creole's growing attachment to her native place (chapter 5.2). Finally, Rochester's account of his growing despair and his final scheme to deprive Antoinette of her native land will be studied (chapter 5.3).

5.1. A Disempowering Colony for an Alienated Coloniser

Rochester as internal narrator starts his account of his stay in the West Indies with a vivid recollection of the last stage in his honeymoon. This means that there is a temporal ellipsis that, in the first pages of Rochester's narrative, omits both how he arrived in Dominica and his marriage to Antoinette. However, such events are not completely erased from his story. Rather, they will be reminisced in the course of his recall, so it can be asserted that

Rochester disrupts the narrative chronology of his narrative. The reason why he may have decided to remember this stage in first place is the heavy rain from which the couple is sheltering: “There we were, sheltering from the heavy rain under a large mango tree, myself, my wife Antoinette and a little half-caste servant who was called Amélie” (*Sargasso* 39). As can be seen in the quotation, the mango tree becomes of great help because it protects them from the storm. Hence, it appears to be that Rochester is going to provide a positive depiction of Caribbean landscape in opposition to that of his wife. However, his portrayal of the island’s natural world is not as favourable as it might seem. In his internal focalisation of the setting, he adds: “I looked at the sad leaning coconut palms” (39). The evaluative adjective *sad* provides a subjective view of the palms that is by no means positive. On the one hand, it evokes a feeling of nostalgia that might point to Rochester’s potential desire for returning to his native place and, hence, to a degree of displacement. On the other hand, it may be aimed to reveal why this character-narrator has decided to start his narrative with the reference to the storm: both the ellipsis aforementioned and the heavy rain are anticipatory of Rochester’s distaste of the island that will be recurrent throughout his stay in the colony.

After his description of the palms, Rochester continues evoking the fierceness of the rain: “The rain fell more heavily, huge drops sounded like hail on the leaves of the tree, and the sea crept stealthily forwards and backwards” (39). The hyperbolic tone of this description entails a certain degree of danger, as suggested by the adjective *huge*, the simile comparing the drops and the hail and, most importantly, the stealthy movement of a sea. The creeping and stealth of the Caribbean suggests caution and hazard: unless Rochester takes some precautions, the landscape of the colony could disempower him. Further, he explains: “I was married a month after I arrived in Jamaica and for nearly three weeks of that time I was in bed with fever” (40). The sea change undergone by the English friend of Antoinette’s stepfather is aggravated by the great strain provoked by the excessiveness of the island as recalled by Rochester: “Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after hear. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger” (42). The succession of parallelisms in this description enhances the oppressive force that Dominica’s natural world has on this man. Rather than a coloniser who was supposed not to be weakened by this Caribbean colony, the island is making him weary and impotent.

At this point in Rochester's narrative, it can be argued that the exotic Caribbean landscape has had a dwarfing effect on this English man. As is the case with the narrative of his wife, Rochester's is connecting the natural world of Dominica with a sense of uneasiness in terms of identity. However, the affected elements of the respective identities of these characters-narrators are dissimilar: while Antoinette seems agitated due to her Creoleness, the male protagonist in Part II is greatly affected by what is expected of him as a male white English coloniser. Indeed, Rochester's hyperbolic statements might be said to convey a feeling of desperation. This distress might be explained as a consequence of his failure in seizing the colony where he has settled. As Caparoso-Konzett explains, "his colonial unconsciousness, narcissistically wounded by that which negates its control, turns upon itself in a desperate effort to possess that which it never really had" (138). This quotation puts the focus on the clash between Rochester's colonial enterprise and his inability to possess the Caribbean land, this failure contributing to his anxiety.

However, it is not only the land that resists falling prey to the coloniser's drive. As Rochester highlights at the end of his previous remark, "the woman is a stranger" (*Sargasso* 42). Later on, he goes on to argue: "I felt little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did" (58). Such assertions point to this character's inability to understand and even establish rapport with his wife. Being a stranger, Antoinette has virtually the same impact on Rochester as Dominica's natural world. In this context, given that Rochester has not been able to possess the island's land, it seems unlikely that he manages to possess the flesh-and-bound alienated islander to whom he is married. In words of Mary Lou Emery, "Antoinette, who occupies no place, becomes a place that he both fears and desires to inhabit" (*Jean Rhys* 48). Moreover, as Caparoso-Konzett's statement cited above makes clear, Rochester is blinded by his desire to possess what he never had. Since he is unable to possess both of the key Dominican elements in the novel, it might be asserted that the natural world of the island becomes an ally to the Creole. In words of Jessica Gildersleeve, "the tropical island and Antoinette herself become 'entwined in Rochester's mind,' so that both come to be seen as exotic and dangerous, but also capable of undermining his corporeal control and his superiority" (36). This link is anticipatory of what will be demonstrated in this chapter: there is a connection between Antoinette and Dominica's landscape, and this increasingly strong attachment proves crucial for Rochester's disempowerment.

Rochester's inability to effectively communicate with Antoinette can be perceived in the internal narrator's reconstructions of their dialogues about the contrast between the island and England. In the first dialogue, the couple is walking by a little river at Granbois⁴ when Antoinette makes a remark about the soil: "The earth is red here, do you notice?" (43). Rochester replies the following: "It's red in parts of England too" (43). Nevertheless, the Creole makes no notice of her husband's answer and calls back: "'Oh England, England,' she called back mockingly, and the sound went on and on like a warning I did not choose to hear" (43). This dialogue subtly marks the different perspectives of Antoinette and Rochester. Such a recollection of these dissimilarities, as Emery notes, evidences "the development of Rochester and Antoinette as antitheses of one another, each clinging to the validity of a perspective of reality in direct opposition to the others" (*Jean Rhys* 48). Since the Creole has never left the island, she sees the red earth as an oddity than cannot be found elsewhere. When her husband replies that the soil is red in some parts of his homeland, she answers back with a degree of mockery in an attempt to show that she deems her remark valid. This somewhat derisive tone conveys that Antoinette has no interest whatsoever in how England is like and that she is hence becoming more attached to Dominica. This growing link is enhanced by Rochester's impression that the Creole's mockery is a warning: if Antoinette's attachment to Dominica's natural world becomes more solid, he will find it more difficult to uproot her from her native place and thus possess her.

There is another conversation that enhances the clash between the respective native lands of Antoinette and Rochester. After an opulent dinner, Antoinette wants to ensure whether what she knows about England is genuine. The internal narrator reproduces her question: "'Is it true,' she said, 'that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.'" (*Sargasso* 49). The Creole's question makes it clear that her knowledge about Rochester's land is somewhat slanted because its source is one specific person who is not even English. In this recollection, the narrator juxtaposes Antoinette's voice and that of her acquaintance by means of an embedded instance of direct speech that literally reproduces the voice of the Creole's acquaintance. This juxtaposition enables the reader to know her friend's impression of London as a "cold dark dream" from which she wants to awaken. In a way, there is a parallelism between such a

⁴ The estate of Antoinette's family outside a town called Massacre

view and Antoinette's depiction of Caribbean landscape in Part I as a result of both her fears and her sense of alienation. Additionally, this parallel is by no means inconsequential. As the voices of Antoinette and her acquaintance merge, it could be suggested that in the whole question the Creole is covertly expressing her aversion to England, and this is the reason why she decides not to use the indirect style in the report of her friend's stance.

Rochester-as-character seems to notice Antoinette's hint, since he replies: "This is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream" (49). This answer might be read as a reproach about Antoinette's previous question, since his view on Dominica is analogous to his wife's opinion about England. Indeed, the dialogue with Antoinette has become awkward for him because the Creole seems to grow attached to her native land every time England is mentioned. This attachment might be said to have a negative effect on Rochester's male colonial unconsciousness, since the metropolis is somehow neglected by a woman who is a representative of the colonised. Rochester's awkwardness is enhanced by his succeeding descriptions of the Caribbean natural world: the narrator makes reference to a strong scent of flowers (49, 51) which makes him feel "giddy" (51). As is the case with the overwhelming excess of odours and colours, these descriptions reveal that Rochester is feeling gradually more displaced and impotent in the island. As Katherine Henderson contends, Rochester's descriptions "insist upon the absolute difference between Rochester's experience of the West Indies and of England. His dichotomy elides any previous intersection between them, disentangling his own —and England's— history from that of the British Empire" (97). By keeping both settings in different spheres, Rochester might want to subtly express his refusal to embrace the differences between metropolis and colony. According to Lee Erwin, this refusal is accounted for by Rochester's fear of "contamination from contiguity, one racial term slipping or 'leaking' into another through sheer proximity" (146). Hence, in order not to contaminate his English colonial unconsciousness by contact with the West Indies, he chooses not to reconcile England with Dominica; what he does is widen the gap between both lands as he does it with regard to his marriage.

The process of alienation undergone by Rochester is diametrically opposed to that of his wife in Part II: judging from her mockery and from how she refers to England, it seems that her aversion to Rochester's native land is making her feel less uneasy in Dominica. At an unconscious level, she might be realising that a potential journey to an unfamiliar country would accentuate her alienation as a Creole woman living in England

and married to a coloniser. Hence, aware of her Creoleness, she might be unconsciously clinging to Dominica. As a result of this attachment, her interaction with Caribbean landscape is no longer affected by fear. Actually, she tells Rochester that “the land crabs are harmless” (54) and that “our snakes are not poisonous” (54). As can be perceived in such descriptions, Antoinette’s amelioration as to her attachment to her native land is not thoroughly analysed by Rochester-as-narrator. Rather, he confines himself to presenting his wife’s words through direct speech and selecting a fraction of her utterances so as to make clear that it is his voice that prevails. Such a narcissistic and colonial attitude on the part of Rochester translates into a prejudiced view of both the island and Antoinette. Such a slanted view is accounted for by the fact that, while Antoinette has a hybrid identity, her husband only partakes of the English identity. Accordingly, Carine Mardorossian contends: “It is no coincidence that a more unidimensional Rochester cannot relate to the tropical landscape that surrounds him, while the more complex protagonist Antoinette can and does in a profound way” (113). Rochester’s reductionist approach will be further reflected in the subsequent account of his reaction to the sudden arrival of a note from a man who claims to be Antoinette’s brother by another mother.

The letter which Rochester receives has been written by Daniel Cosway, a coloured man who acknowledges being an illegitimate child of Antoinette’s father and one of his slaves. Presumably, he bears a grudge against the Cosways because he was excluded from inheritance when his father passed away. Therefore, he avenges his alleged family by informing Rochester about the potential madness to which both Antoinette and her ancestors have fallen prey. He further warns him that his marriage to the Creole is hazardous: “Money is good but no money can pay for a crazy wife in your bed. Crazy and worse besides” (62). This report immediately alerts the troubled Rochester, whose reaction is to sit beside a river and walk through the forest. The internal narrator reconstructs the scene as follows: “Then I passed an orchid with long sprays of golden-brown flowers. One of them touched my cheek and I remembered picking some for her one day. ‘They are like you,’ I told her” (62). In this recollection, the fortuitous physical contact between Rochester and the orchid is highlighted because it triggers a memory on the character whereby he associates the Dominican flower to his Caribbean wife. Since both elements of the island have been revealed to put Rochester under threat, this is another memory that enhances the increasingly stronger link between Antoinette and the landscape of her native land. Indeed, both Dominica’s nature and his wife have contributed to his weakening as a

coloniser who has found it utterly impossible to exert his assumed power in the colony. The tie between Rochester's Creole wife and this specific flower is revealing of the change in Antoinette's relationship with Caribbean landscape. In the recollection of the family's garden in Part I the orchid was described as "snaky-looking" (*Sargasso* 6). However, at this point in the narrative such a negative stance has evolved into a strong identification of Antoinette with the flower. This growing connection suggests that the orchid, as a metonymical element that is representative of the island's natural world, has become an ally to the Creole.

At the same time, Rochester is likely to have connected the single orchid with his wife in order to enhance his hatred towards them. Not coincidentally, he links the flower to the Creole immediately after reading a letter in which he gets acquainted with Antoinette's origins and is warned about her potential madness. As will be explained later in the chapter, from this moment onwards Rochester's suspicious and disapproving view of his wife gives way to abhorrence and hostility. Since the arrival of the letter may be considered a climactic moment in Rochester's narrative, Rhys decides to highlight the importance of this turning point by making a relevant change in terms of narrator. As Mezei notes, "it is in Rochester's narration that the author's presence as manipulator and organizer is most strongly felt since Rhys permits Antoinette to interrupt Rochester's narrative and tell her story" (206). Now that Rochester's bitterness is likely to tinge his narrative with an utterly mordant description of his wife, Rhys decides to fleetingly lend the narration to Antoinette so that she can provide a less prejudiced account of her own experience at this stage in the story. In accordance, her interruptive narrative proves essential for understanding the Creole's feelings as to her identity prior to her uprooting.

5.2. The Succinct Manifesto of a Rooted Creole

Antoinette retakes her narration in order to remember her visit to Christophine's house. As the internal narrator tells it, the black woman "was sitting on a box under her mango tree, smoking a white clay pipe" (68). The element of the natural world under which Christophine is smoking is analogous to that which Rochester foregrounds in the first sentences of his narration. However, the Creole's remembrance of this tree does not convey danger: whereas Rochester's first verbalised memory is a storm, that of the interrupting Antoinette is a soothing scene where Christophine is resting in a peaceful

haven. Since this element of Dominica's landscape is by no means intimidating, Antoinette is likely to feel at home. Indeed, after leading her horse to a stream, she takes a seat under the tree beside her bosom friend.

The easiness which the hitherto displaced Creole feels is enhanced by a passage where the internal narrator reports Antoinette's thoughts while contemplating the landscape:

The sky was dark blue through the dark green mango leaves, and I thought, 'This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay.' Then I thought, 'What a beautiful mango tree, but it is too high up here for mangoes and it may never bear fruit,' and I thought of lying alone in my bed with the soft silk cotton mattress and fine sheets, listening. At last I said, 'Christophine, he does not love me, I think he hates me. (68)

The reconstruction of Antoinette's impressions at Christophine's proves fundamental for the understanding of how this character's Creole consciousness has evolved since she married the English man. So far, in the second part of the novel the Creole's psychological evolution has been roughly introduced through some instances of direct speech selected by the commanding Rochester. Hence, it can be said that such a selection is somewhat mediated by the narrator. However, the recollection cited above is unmediated by Antoinette, so her viewpoint is revealing of this character's true feelings towards both nature and her Creole identity. As can be seen in Antoinette's report, she is more attached to Dominica than she was at the end of Part I. While she had ended her narrative with an ambiguous description of the convent and a subsequent nightmare, she begins her interrupting narration with a positive view of nature and, most importantly, with the claim that she belongs in Dominica. Not coincidentally, this favourable depiction of the landscape is enhanced by the image of the blue sky seen from in between the mango leaves. This reference could be read as a metaphorical reminiscence of an orchid, a previously dangerous flower to which Antoinette has grown attached. As Mary Lou Emery notes, at this point in the narrative "Antoinette makes it clear that her quest involves 'place' rather than 'who'" (*Jean Rhys* 45). This assertion might be said to strengthen the idea that Antoinette is aware of her hybrid identity and that she embraces it. In this context, she might give less prominence to the search for a person to lean on because it is precisely a series of people—her mother, black Dominicans and Rochester—that have made her feel alienated. What Antoinette desires is to live in a physical setting where her identity is not shattered, but unified. As Antoinette implies judging from her stream of consciousness,

this setting is bound to be Dominica because she feels identified with it. However, she is not completely attached to her native land because of her troubled psyche. The reason why she feels puzzled is revealed at the end of her thoughts: she is worried that Rochester hates her, and hence she is seeking Christophine's advice.

Christophine suggests Antoinette leaving her husband in the following terms: "I tell you a hard thing, pack up and go" (68). This is a piece of advice that is not unfounded: Christophine has known Antoinette since her birth and has seen her mother's psychic deterioration firsthand. Hence, she deems it necessary that Antoinette leaves so that her sense of alienation cannot be deteriorated by her arranged marriage. However, the Creole refuses to abandon Rochester because she is fully aware of her economic status. As Antoinette-as-character declares, "I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him" (69). This is accounted for by the fact that, when marrying Rochester, all of her money and properties were passed on to her husband by English law. In this context, Christophine offers her an alternative: She considers that Antoinette should deceive the coloniser by telling him that she wants to visit her cousin in Martinique. In response to this, Antoinette surprisingly declares that she desires to see England: "After all I could, but why should I go to Martinique? I wish to see England, I might be able to borrow money for that. Not from him but I know how I might get it. I must travel far, if I go" (69). As can be seen in the Creole's statement, she wants to travel to England not because she likes the country. Rather, she might have chosen that place because it is essential that she moves far away from her husband. Accordingly, Antoinette ponders:

I have been too unhappy, I thought, it cannot last, being so unhappy, it would kill you. I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me ... England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Then Imports and Character of Inhabitants. Names, Essex, Chelmsford on the Chelmer. The Yorkshire and Lincolnshire wolds. Wolds? Does that mean hills? How high? Half the height of ours, or not even that? (...) After summer the trees are bare, then winter and snow. White feathers falling? Torn pieces of paper falling? They say frost makes flower patterns on the window panes. I must know more than that already. For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago. (70)

In this reflection, the internal narrator brings together the meditations of Antoinette as an early adult sitting by Christophine and the impressions about England that the incarcerated Creole has at the moment of narration. The first part of the quotation summarises

Antoinette's awareness that she has been unhappy and that she is in need of a change in terms of setting. Apparently, the place which will mark a change in this character's welfare is England as she will be away from all the people who have mistreated her. However, the healing effect that England is bound to have on her psyche proves illusory: as will be explained below, such a remote place even aggravates her sense of displacement because she is confined to a room from which she is unable to escape.

After the suspension points in the quotation, Antoinette provides a vague sketch of England from what she remembers about a text that she has read in an explanatory text of a geography book. Such an account mixes the objective pieces of information which she remembers from the book and her subjective views on the country. In this context, the impressions that the early adult has with regard to England can be said to be mediated by the more mature Antoinette-as-narrator. Actually, the voice of the captive internal narrator can be heard in the comparison between the landscapes of the two countries. This intrusion of the internal narrator is remarked by Kathy Mezei, who argues that Antoinette-as-narrator "reveals her knowledge of England, a knowledge that can only come from living there and thus from the narrating self" (206). As is the case with the dialogues between Rochester and Antoinette mentioned above, the analogy established by the Creole favours Dominica. This can be seen in the description of English vegetation as bare in autumn and of its hills as somewhat low. Such a view confirms that Antoinette identifies with her native place as well as she feels linked to Caribbean landscape. Moreover, it is anticipated that the growing connection between both entities is bound to endure while the Creole lives in England. What follows is a statement where the voice of the internal narrator is clearly seen: "I must know more than that already. For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago" (*Sargasso* 70). This assertion reveals that the speaker is acquainted with the English house where she dwells and that she feels alienated there, since it is described in fairly negative terms. Indeed, Antoinette her feeling of coldness and unbelonging while in the mansion is contrary to the sense of warmth and protection that she feels under the mango tree.

Since Christophine is aware of the threat that such an unfamiliar country could pose to the troubled Antoinette, she expresses her scepticism as to whether England really exists. Furthermore, she adds in her Creolised English: "Why you want to go to this cold thief place? If there is this place at all, I never see it, that is one thing sure" (70). Such a

statement suggests that Christophine mistrusts England, and this suspicion can be said to run parallel to the grudge that black Dominicans bear against Antoinette's family. As a black Caribbean servant, she is fully aware of her subordinate position within both Dominican society and the British Empire at large. Hence, she is conscious of how dangerous it could be for such a Caribbean-born woman as Antoinette to travel to the metropolis, where her subordinate position would be worsened. Since this surrogate mother understands the degree of alienation to which her beloved Antoinette is subjected in the marital sphere, at first she refuses to help her so that she can be loved by Rochester in return: "If the man don't love you, I can't make him love you" (71). However, Antoinette feels that she needs to be supported by her husband. Moreover, she highlights a piece of information that is paramount to the understanding of how Rochester tries to uproot her: he no longer calls her Antoinette, but Bertha. This is a clear intertext that alludes to the name of Rochester's Creole wife in *Jane Eyre* and that anticipates the incarceration of Antoinette. Since she is in dire need of protection, the Creole urges Christophine to use magic in order to create a love elixir that can guarantee Rochester's affection and that prevents an attack inflicted by the English coloniser upon her Creole identity.

Finally, the black woman consents and prepares the potion. When Antoinette leaves with the elixir hidden under her vest, she hears the crow of a cockerel: "Nearby a cock crowed and I thought, 'That is for betrayal, but who is the traitor?'" (74). Antoinette interprets the sound as a sign of treason, but cannot elucidate who the traitor is. The recollection of such an impression is by no means trivial: the internal narrator highlights the symbolic crow of the cockerel because it anticipates the twofold betrayal of Rochester in the pages that follow. Before transferring the narration to Rochester, Antoinette provides a thorough description of what she perceived prior to leaving Christophine's house:

I can remember every second of that morning, if I shut my eyes I can see the deep blue colour of the sky and the mango leaves, the pink and red hibiscus, the yellow handkerchief she wore round her head, tied in the Martinique fashion with the sharp points in front, but now I see everything still, fixed for ever like the colours in a stained-glass window. Only the clouds move. (75)

From the attic at Rochester's manor, Antoinette verbalises the last moment of her life in Dominica that she will reconstruct in her narrative. In this reconstruction, the internal narrator assembles the different elements that she perceived in such a way that she creates

a photograph-like portrayal of her perspective. The accuracy of her depiction suggests that the image which she reminisces is substantially important for the Creole. Indeed, she makes reference to a series of bright colours that suggest happiness and smoothness. The vast majority of these colours are highlighted in relation to some key elements of the natural world such as the sky and the flora. This demonstrates that the Caribbean landscape provokes a feeling of joy in the protagonist, who no longer feels disconnected from her native land.

However, the merriment suggested by such a portrayal is set in sharp opposition to what Antoinette perceives from Rochester's English house. This change is introduced by the adverb *now*, which reveals that Antoinette-as-narrator is going to describe her present perception, that is, the visual stimuli that she receives while looking through the only window in her prison-like room. In contrast with the dynamism implied by the bright colours mentioned above, what the narrator sees in England is fixed but for the sky that is changing with clouds moving. This stillness marks that, whereas Antoinette has a certain degree of freedom in Dominica, she is a displaced prisoner in England. Hence, this internal narrator remembers the shiny microcosm with a pang of nostalgia because, from this moment onwards, she will increasingly become more alienated and ultimately a psychological and physical captive. In words of Teresa O'Connor, the Creole "relies on the memories of her home to help her struggle against those forces that threaten to destroy her, to limit her natural sensuality, and to deprive her of autonomy and freedom" (147). This gradual process of deracination will be explained below as viewed from the perspective of Rochester, who retakes the narration immediately after Antoinette's vivid remembrance.

5.3. Rochester's Plan for Deracination

Rochester retakes his narration by reporting the announcement of a servant called Baptiste that Antoinette has temporarily left the house. The events simultaneous to Antoinette's visit to Christophine are crucial for Rochester's mindset: he urges the half-caste servant Amélie to speak to him because he has received a second letter from Daniel Cosway. In this note, Daniel orders Rochester to have a face-to-face conversation with him so that he can be informed about his wife's past. Prior to the meeting with Amélie, Rochester-as-narrator recalls how the coloniser perceived the Caribbean landscape as he sat on the veranda:

I knew the shape of the mountains as well as I knew the shape of the two brown jugs filled with white sweet-scented flowers on the wooden table. I knew that the girl would be wearing a white dress. Brown and white she would be, her curls, her white girl's hair she called it, half covered with a red handkerchief, her feet bare. There would be the sky and the mountains, the flowers and the girl and the feeling that all this was a nightmare, the faint consoling hope that I might wake up. (75-76)

Such feelings suggest that he is tired of contemplating the landscape as his attitude towards it has not changed for the better. Instead, the natural world of Dominica has contributed to a feeling of oppression that has evolved into a nightmare. Benumbed by this antagonistic island, he unconsciously expresses his desire to awaken from this bad dream, that is, to return to England. This assertion anticipates the inevitable outcome of his stay in Dominica: he will abandon the country as he takes Antoinette with him. Additionally, he makes reference to a woman who integrates the colours brown and white. This somewhat pictorial description suggests that he is referring to a half-caste woman who in this case is Amélie. In the last sentence of the quotation, this woman is enumerated together with the threatening elements of the landscape, and this implies that Amélie may have a negative effect on Rochester's welfare.

Rochester's hint that Amélie could be a defamer is not trivial. She informs him that Daniel Cosway allegedly has a brother called Mr Alexander and, most importantly, that this supposed brother has a son called Sandi. With regard to Mr Alexander and Sandi, she unveils the following: "I hear one time that Miss Antoinette and his son Mr Sandi get married, but all that foolishness" (77). This contention has a detrimental effect on Rochester's narcissism: as Daniel Cosway confirms in his interview with him, "Your wife know Sandi since long time. Ask her and she tell you. But not everything I think" (79). Such pieces of information enrage Rochester and the internal narrator reports this bitter feeling accordingly. In the conversation with Amélie, he responds in a somewhat alarmed tone: "What did you say?" (77). As for the interaction with Daniel, he reacts by desperately trying to leave the room and by growing resentful: "Now disgust was rising in me like sickness. Disgust and rage" (80). In a way, Rochester fears that Antoinette still loves Sandi because that would thwart his hitherto futile attempts to possess her. This problem in terms of colonial consciousness is aggravated by the fact that Sandi is a coloured man. As Teresa O'Connor argues, "his paranoia and insecurity escalate so that ... he fears that those who serve and administer to the native whites mock him and despise him" (149). In this context, if Antoinette happened to prefer a Caribbean man whose ancestors were slaves, Rochester's failure as a coloniser would be more than humiliating.

When Antoinette returns to Granbois, the Creole encourages her husband to confess why he is reluctant to loving her. Rochester replies as follows: “‘I do not hate you, I am most distressed about you, I am distraught,’ I said. But this was untrue, I was not distraught, I was calm, it was the first time I had felt calm or self-possessed for many a long day” (81). The narratorial comment is representative of what this male character feels for Antoinette at this point in the narrative: now that he is aware that she had a lover during her adolescence, he feels no sympathy for her. What the narrator wants to highlight is that he was not carried away by the rage mentioned above. Instead, he feels serene and does not seem to be affected by whatever element of the island that may surround him. This apparent stillness might suggest that he is considering the option of returning to England, thus gaining control over his wife. Indeed, they hold a conversation about Antoinette’s origins where, for the first time in the story, Rochester openly acknowledges in front of the Creole that he feels alienated in Dominica: “‘I feel very much a stranger here,’ I said. ‘I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side.’” (82). In this context, such a confession should not be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Actually, it could be seen as a strategy on the part of this male character to gain his wife’s sympathy and, ultimately, ensure that he will dominate her with little difficulty.

In a way, Rochester might be subtly trying to convince Antoinette that he is a victim of the unfamiliar natural world of Dominica so that she can finally have a sense of blame and fall prey to his colonial scheme. If an analogy is to be drawn between Rochester’s hypocritical statement and Antoinette’s second dream, the coloniser might be trying to take the lead in a marriage where his superiority has been questioned. As Teresa O’Connor wittingly observes, “‘from the time she and Rochester arrive there, she becomes his guide and protector. Rochester, who is both seduced and repelled by the retreat, reluctantly follows her leadership” (147). Hence, Rochester’s purpose is to reverse the roles which, from the perspective of the coloniser, have been mistakenly assigned to each member of the couple. Ultimately, he wishes that the Creole will follow him and admit his pre-eminence in both the matrimony and the colony.

Rochester’s strategy is enacted after he awakens from a nightmare in which he is buried alive. At first, the coloniser seems to be deeply affected by a feeling of suffocation which makes him suspect that he has been poisoned. However, as soon as he enters Antoinette’s room there are hints that he is likely to regain power by performing his stratagem: “‘She may wake at any moment, I told myself. I must be quick. Her torn shift

was on the floor, I drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl” (*Sargasso* 88). It is through the narratorial reconstruction of Rochester’s thoughts that the tactics of the disempowered husband are foregrounded. It is conveyed that the coloniser must act with no haste so as to attain his goal. What he does is draw the sheet over his wife, and this action conveys a high degree of symbolism. Indeed, the narrator establishes a comparison between the Creole and a corpse. This analogy is an ironic remark on the part of the internal narrator that is set in stark opposition to Rochester’s previous dream: whereas he himself was to be buried in his reverie, now it is Antoinette that acquires a symbolic death-like quality. Hence, the simile is revealing of the English husband’s intention of metaphorically killing his Creole wife by making her more deadened and eventually reducing her to nothingness. Immediately after performing this symbolic act of covering Antoinette, he has sexual intercourse with Amélie while his wife is listening in the adjacent room.

The breach in terms of fidelity has a pernicious effect on Antoinette’s psyche, and the internal narrator decides to provide a detailed description of her reaction with a view to judging her mad and hence justifying his commonsensical need to rule over the insane Creole: “The door of Antoinette’s room opened. When I saw her I was too shocked to speak. Her hair hung uncombed and dull into her eyes which were inflamed and staring, her face was very flushed and looked swollen. Her feet were bare” (*Sargasso* 93). As can be seen in this passage, the narrator’s description is expressionistic in that he provides a somewhat distorted portrayal of Antoinette’s countenance so as to highlight her apparent madness. Indeed, both her dishevelled hair and her hell-fire gaze confer the Creole a beast-like appearance. Being aware that Antoinette is no longer inclined to establish rapport with him, Rochester deals a fatal blow to the Creole’s hierarchy in the marriage by calling her Bertha once again. The narrator recalls Antoinette’s feedback as follows: “tears streamed from her eyes” (94). Such a response entails that the female protagonist of this novel feels humiliated for having been dispossessed both of her name and of her being a wife. Unable to answer back, she seems to have internalised that she is eternally bound to alienation within the marital sphere. As Emelie Söderberg argues, by renaming Antoinette “the husband pressures her into leaving her identity as a West Indian by succumbing to her other sense of self” (23). Accordingly, Antoinette finds herself forced to choose the English side, with which she has been previously shown to be at odds. Hence, the optimism which she is reported to have by the time that she leaves Christophine’s house

gives way to a deep feeling of despondency and resignation. Actually, in words of Söderberg the husband “enhances her anxiety by forcing her to choose sides and by emphasizing the fact that she does not really belong on either side” (23). Therefore, even if the couple continues living in the island, Dominica will never become a completely homely setting for the Creole.

The savageness highlighted by Rochester-as-narrator is enhanced by his report of Antoinette’s growing tendency to drink and, above all, her fierceness when Rochester urges her to drop the bottle of rum: “I managed to hold her wrist with one hand and the rum with the other, but when I felt her teeth in my arm I dropped the bottle” (*Sargasso* 95). The attack of Antoinette marks a turning point in the course of the narrative. As a matter of fact, it precipitates Rochester’s preparations to leave Dominica with his wife. Immediately after the aggression, the internal narrator recalls the oft-quoted oppressing power of the island:

My arm was bleeding and painful and I wrapped my handkerchief round it, but it seemed to me that everything round me was hostile. The telescope drew away and said don’t touch me. The trees were threatening and the shadows of the trees moving slowly over the floor menaced me. That green menace. I had felt it ever since I saw this place. There was nothing I knew, nothing to comfort me. (96)

This tainted impression of the internal narrator mirrors Rochester’s acrimonious confession that he felt a stranger in Dominica in front of his wife and his somehow being a mad man in his feeling. In this occasion, the hackneyed emphasis on the menacing nature of the island is an excuse to hasten the impending journey to England. Actually, he starts drafting a letter to his father informing him about his forthcoming departure. At this point, there is a memory of the internal narrator that is of great relevance for understanding how Rochester attempts to uproot Antoinette: “All the time I was writing this letter a cock crowed persistently outside” (105). The crow of the cockerel is a sound that has previously appeared in the novel: Antoinette hears it before Rochester retakes the narration and interprets it as a sign of betrayal. The suspicion of treason implied by this symbol is confirmed by the remembrance of this perception on the part of Rochester-as-narrator. Not coincidentally, the crow is foregrounded in a context of actual betrayal, since Rochester is corroborating that he will leave Dominica. Furthermore, the narrator explains the following: “I drew a house surrounded by trees. A large house. I divided the third floor into rooms and in one room I drew a standing woman (...) But it was an *English* house” (105-

106; emphasis added). The sketch of the house is anticipatory of Antoinette's doom: she will be confined to a room in the attic of an English manor, her state of alienation being doubly enhanced by her incarceration and her deracination.

The euphoria that Rochester feels prior to leaving the island is reflected in the following instance of interior monologue:

She said she loved this place. This is the last she'll see of it. I'll watch for one tear, one human tear. Not that blank hating moonstruck face. I'll listen ... If she says good-bye perhaps adieu. (...) If she too says it, or weeps, I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad but *mine, mine*. What will I care for gods or devils or for Fate itself. If she smiles or weeps or both. *For me*". (107)

The tone of Rochester is categorical and enhances his joy at performing his empowering plan. His emphasis on the personal pronoun *mine* reflects his narcissistic happiness stemming from his success in controlling his subordinate wife. The unequivocal mood of Rochester can be clearly seen in his statement that his wife will no longer see the place to which she feels attached. Provided that the Creole is deprived of a setting which has dwarfed Rochester, he will have no obstacles to benumb his wife. In this context, Rochester-as-character covertly alludes to Antoinette's paralysis: he will observe his wife say goodbye, but he is fully aware that she will not speak, as implied by the conditional sentences.

Not surprisingly, the Creole remains emotionless during her journey. This sense of indifference runs parallel to the overarching silence which she has shown in virtually the totality of Part II in the novel. Save for the narratorial interruption in the middle of the section, Antoinette has been almost entirely silent as a narrator and as a character. However, the hierarchical position of Rochester in terms of voice is reversed from this moment onwards, since it will be Antoinette's perspective that gains prominence in Part III. In this sense, the Creole interrupts once again the narrative of her dominant husband. Such an interruption demonstrates that Rhys's concern is to fully explore the figure of the hitherto silenced Creole wife of Rochester. As regards such a matter, Tammy Lai-Ming Ho contends: "Rhys' attempt to narrate the story of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* blocks the narration of ... Mr. Rochester, who is reduced to a marginal character and only appears, cameo-like, in the last part of the book" (29). Accordingly, the overview of Part III in the novel that will be presented in the following chapter contributes to better

understanding the evolution in Antoinette's Creole consciousness, since this section in the novel is narrated by the female protagonist. As a matter of fact, the degree of connection between Antoinette and her native island while in England is unveiled by the close analysis of three key elements in Part III: the association between a tapestry and Annette, the links that Antoinette establishes between her red dress and the Caribbean, and her final dream.

6. The Affirmation of Antoinette's Strong Connection with Her Native Land

Before Antoinette retakes the internal narration of the novel, there is an opening passage in italics where the servant Grace Pool explains how she came to terms with her task of caring for the Creole at Thornfield Hall. The insertion of Grace in the novel is a clear reference to the status of Rhys's novel as a rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, since this character was the caregiver of Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's novel. On the opening lines of Part III, Rhys's Grace Pool reconstructs an encounter with Mrs. Eff (Mrs. Fairfax in *Jane Eyre*), who complains about the gossip on the newly arrived woman and delivers her a letter. The sender of the letter, who is Mr Rochester as master of the house, urges Grace to nurse Antoinette. However, at first Poole is suspicious about the origins of the employer since she is not acquainted with him. As she argues, "*I don't serve the devil for no money*" (*Sargasso* 115; italics as in the original). Nevertheless, Mrs. Eff provides a sympathetic portrayal of the master by contending the following: "*His stay in the West Indies has changed him out of all knowledge. He has grey in his hair and misery in his eyes*" (115; italics as in the original). Such a description of Rochester conveys that he is a victim of his stay in the West Indies, thus suggesting that the Caribbean is a dangerous setting. However, the portrait is undoubtedly deficient, since it is verbalised by an English woman who has never travelled to Dominica and knows nothing about Antoinette's story. As a consequence of this lack of knowledge, the imprisoned woman is seen as a lunatic through the eyes of the one-sided Grace Poole, who finally accepts her role as caretaker but who is wary of the apparently uncivilised Creole: "I'll say one thing for her, she hasn't lost her spirit. She's still fierce. I don't turn my back on her when her eyes have that look. I know it" (116). Given that the Creole's story is erased in the speech of the English characters in the novel, Rhys lends the narrative to Antoinette so that more sympathy for this mistreated character can be built and, most importantly, so that her point of view can be narrativised. Along the same lines, Katherine Henderson notes: "As a physical trace of the colonization

preservationists often sought to erase, Antoinette provides an alternate view of what constitutes “real” England when Rochester enacts his drawing and incarcerates her in Thornfield Hall” (99). Accordingly, in the ten pages remaining Antoinette will no longer be interrupted so that her story, which has been temporarily silenced by the colonising narrator of Part II, is the one that prevails in the novel.

Antoinette starts her narration in Part III in the present tense, providing an account of her dull routine at the attic. She finds herself puzzled because she does not understand the reason why she has been incarcerated: “In the end flames shoot up and they are beautiful. I get out of bed and go close to watch them and to wonder why I have been brought here. For what reason? There must be a reason” (116). This gap of knowledge points to the isolation of this character-narrator, who has no contact whatsoever with people except for her distant custodian. Her solitude is enhanced by the fact that there are no accessible windows or mirrors in the room. As regards the former, the lack of accessible windows prevents Antoinette from getting a snapshot of the outside and hence giving free rein to her imagination so as to fathom what England may look like. As for the mirror, its absence entails that this female character cannot see her appearance in the present moment. Hence, her physical detachment provokes a deep sense of displacement that is reflected in the following narratorial remark: “Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I?” (117). In this context, the reflection highlights the unfamiliarity surrounding the Creole at Thornfield Hall. Antoinette is unable to realise the purpose of her stay at the attic, and her confusion contributes to her puzzlement as to her identity. Since she cannot grasp a physical reflection of the outside or even of her countenance, she resorts to a tool that has proved powerful for her aim of making her (hi)story visible: her imagination.

The imaginative attribute of Antoinette enables her to provide an account of her identity even if she finds herself perplexed. The first association that the Creole makes is that between a tapestry and her mother: “The dressing-room is very small, the room next to this one is hung with tapestry. Looking at the tapestry one day I recognized my mother dressed in an evening gown but with bare feet. She looked away from me, over my head just as she used to do” (117). The creativity of this character-narrator makes it possible for her to elucidate an image of her mother in the fabric pattern. This figment of her imagination triggers a memory that foregrounds Annette’s refusal to have contact with her daughter after the attacks prompting her fall into insanity. The issue of miscommunication

might be recalled at this point because, at the time of narration, Antoinette has grown isolated in the same way as she feels displaced in Part I of the novel. As Barbara Ann Schapiro observes, “Antoinette’s thought of her mother looking away and typically not “seeing” her leads to her feeling of withdrawal” (101). However, such a recollection is not as negative as it might seem. Antoinette is resorting to a memory that, though being painful, is also invigorating because it connects the neglected subordinate of the Empire to her native place. Dominica is a setting to which Antoinette has grown more connected by the end of Part II and of which she has been deprived for Rochester’s purpose of controlling her. Despite her despondency at sometimes in her previous recollection, Antoinette’s connection with Caribbean landscape—and thus her acceptance of her Creole identity—has been both reported and expressed. Therefore, at Thornfield Hall she might have unconsciously identified the figure of her mother in the tapestry because, as expressed in her rhetorical question, she is in search of an identity, and it is by reconstructing her past in Dominica that she might be weaving that identity which she seeks. Hence, the association between the tapestry and Annette is the first of three elements that reveal that Antoinette has embraced her Creole identity and, most importantly, that she favours her native land to the detriment of the British lands from where her whiteness comes.

The second element to which Antoinette gives prominence in the last part of the novel is her red dress. This item of clothing is brought to notice by the Creole after she receives the visit of her stepbrother Richard Mason, whom she fiercely attacks by biting him and by flying at him with a knife on her hand. Antoinette scolds Grace Poole because she suspects that the caretaker is hiding her red dress: “Have you hidden my red dress too? If I’d been wearing that he’d have known me” (120). Such an assertion entails that the red dress is a distinctive emblem of Antoinette while in Dominica, and hence her stepbrother would have easily recognised the savage-looking woman trapped in the attic had she been wearing it. As Maroula Joannou argues, “the red dress of Part Three is used to connect Antoinette’s unhappy state of diasporic exile in England to her life in the Caribbean and to show how her experience of the present is ineluctably haunted by her memories of the past” (138). As is the case with the tapestry, the character-narrator focuses on a symbolic item that enables her to reconstruct her identity in the midst of her puzzlement. In this occasion, she remembers an element from her Caribbean past that is nowhere near as throbbing as the lack of communication with her mother.

As suggested by Joannu, the red dress provides a link between Antoinette's unhappiness at Thornfield with her past, and the past that will be remembered in connection with this apparel is a source of joy for the Creole. When the protagonist opens the wardrobe where the dress is hanging, she recalls its smell in the following terms: "The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vetivert and frangipani, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain" (120). The sensory experience of this character-narrator brings her closer to her faraway native island, since the dress smells of an array of elements from the Caribbean landscape. This connection with the natural world of Dominica is, as has been explored throughout the dissertation, of great relevance for understanding the evolution in Antoinette's identity: the threatening trees and the strong-smelling orchids in Part I have given way to an enchanting nature that emits a pleasing scent, and this change reflects that the Creole feels attached to Dominica and at ease with her hybridity.

This gratifying experience is strengthened by the memory that the dress helps the narrator evoke: "I was wearing a dress of that colour when Sandi came to see me for the last time" (120). This scene is symptomatic for the character-narrator because Sandi can be said to be her only true lover, so his companionship enables the widely neglected Creole realise that she is not completely alone and that her whiteness is not a source of enmity. Indeed, Sandi is a coloured character that bears no grudge whatsoever against Antoinette for being the daughter of former slaveholders. Rather, in this figment of the protagonist's memory he grows aware that his beloved is unhappy and thus he proposes her leaving with him. This positive portrayal of Sandi is interspersed with the pleasant scent of the red dress with a view to showing that the Caribbean was bound to become a setting which guaranteed Antoinette's welfare provided that Rochester was absent. This idea is enhanced by the following explanation of the internal narrator: "Sandi often came to see me when that man was away and when I went out driving I would meet him" (120-121). The recurrent flights of Antoinette confirm the suspicion of Rochester that his wife was in love with Sandi, as suggested by Amélie and Daniel Cosway.

Further, Antoinette highlights that in her meetings with her lover they kissed each other. The act of kissing is linked to the passion symbolised by the colour red of the dress. Not coincidentally, red is described by Antoinette-as-narrator as "the colour of fire and sunset" (120). Moreover, this ardent gesture points to the Creole wife's temporary triumph

over his dominant husband: just as he has betrayed her, she has been able to have an extra-marital relationship with a man whom she truly loves. This symbolic act is of great importance for understanding the Creole's transition from inaction to decisiveness. In words of Joannou, "the dress that stands in a metonymic relationship to Antoinette also comes to represent an important milestone in her journey to understand who she is and to live by her own standards rather than by the alien standards imposed upon her by uncomprehending outsiders" (138). This means that, her subordination to the English coloniser notwithstanding, Antoinette shows traits of self-determination that are revealing of a change in terms of behaviour. Likewise, there has been a variation in terms of identity. While she used to fear the black population of Dominica due to her Creoleness, now that she has been loved by a coloured man she does not feel at odds with her Englishness in terms of genealogy. At the same time, her apparent inferiority as a member of the colonised from the point of view of the metropolis has been reversed through the symbolic act of kissing Sandi and, most importantly, through the juxtaposition of the red dress and sensory elements that evoke the landscape and colours of her native land.

Among the elements associated to this specific colour, it is the fire that gains more prominence in this final section of the novel. The internal narrator recalls a highly relevant act of looking: "I let the dress fall on the floor, and looked from the fire to the dress and from the dress to the fire" (121). By means of her gaze, Antoinette draws an imaginary line that links the red dress and the fire, hence strengthening the bonds between the two elements. This intermittent look might convey a degree of alertness on the part of the character-narrator: it seems that the Creole has recently noticed a further connection between both components. Such a relationship is insinuated in the following passage: "But I looked at the 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. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now" (121-122). The imaginative Creole perceives the dress that she has let fall is an extension of the flames on the hearth, and this brightly-hued show reminds her of a duty that she has to perform. This means that Antoinette mentally brings together the red dress and the flames. As Veronica Marie Gregg remarks, "the red (of the dress) also suggests passion, anger, and ultimately a death-defying leap into the flames, which will liberate her from the prison" ("Symbolic Imagery" 164). Such an association is anticipatory of the third element which Antoinette highlights in Part III with the aim of asserting her attachment to Dominica and hence showing a successful evolution towards a

positive hybrid identity. This third ingredient is her final dream, which will be analysed in the paragraphs below.

Antoinette provides an in-depth account of her final dream, and the vividness of such a memory entails that it is a significant reverie for the Creole. As is the case with the memories about her past in Dominica, this specific recollection enables the internal narrator to represent the evolution in her psychological maturation and, above all, in her identity. In the dream, Antoinette takes advantage of Grace's heavy sleep so as to take her keys and leave the room. She moves forward until she arrives at a hall where a lamp is burning: "At last I was in the hall where a lamp was burning" (*Sargasso* 122). As has been explained above, the glowing element that powers the lamp is highly relevant from a symbolic point of view, since fire is connected with the red colour which Antoinette associates to her native land. Not coincidentally, the door to the right of the hall leads to a room described as follows: "It was a large room with a red carpet and red curtains. Everything else was white" (122). Such a portrayal of the chamber suggests that white is the predominant colour, while there are some elements characterised by their redness. Given that the room is located in an English manor, the room could be symbolically interpreted as a microcosm that mirrors Thornfield Hall. In a way, the overarching whiteness implies that it is governed by an English master whose orders the servants and Antoinette herself should comply with. By contrast, the red props would be revealing of the Creole's presence in the house, since it is a colour that is clearly associated with her. This interpretation could be said to be strengthened by the free association made by the creative dreamer: "Suddenly I was in Aunt Cora's room. I saw the sunlight coming through the window, the tree outside and the shadows of the leaves on the floor, but I saw the wax candles too and I hated them" (122-123). Through this unconscious leap in terms of setting, Antoinette shows her tendency to mentally return to her native place in an attempt to affirm that she feels identified with it. Actually, as Paula Le Gallez marks, "it was Aunt Cora who, as well as Christophine, filled a maternal role in Antoinette's life" (170). Once again, the elements of Caribbean landscape gain ground in her recollection so as to mark such a strong attachment: the sunlight, the tree and the shadows of the leaves could be related to the colour red which, though being less prominent in the English room, is more relevant for the Creole. Conversely, she rejects the wax candles which make her feel uneasy. Indeed, the colour of the candles is likely to be whitish, so Antoinette's hatred towards this prop enhances her loath of the ruling whiteness of England.

The chromatic arrangement of the oneiric room at Thornfield can also be said to reflect Antoinette's Creole consciousness. She is aware that she partakes of two cultures and that, from a colonial point of view, it is the white/English one that is more prominent. However, as has been previously argued, Antoinette's main idiosyncrasy is favouring her Caribbean side to the detriment of the English one, which she has been shown to reject and even mock at some parts in the novel. In the dream, the Creole's disdain for England is enacted in her act of demolishing the pile of candles: "So I knocked them down. Most of them went out but one caught the thin curtains that were behind the red ones. I laughed when I saw the lovely colour spreading so fast, but I did not stay to watch it" (123). As the narrator explains, the result of this act is an emerging fire that will eventually spread across the manor. The origin of this fire lies in the contact between the flame of a white candle and a curtain that is not red. Judging from the symbolism of colours in this narrative, the potentially devastating friction between both white elements mirrors the detrimental effects that both Rochester and Thornfield Hall have had on the already troubled psyche of the Creole. Hence, Antoinette is fascinated by the fire whose first sacrifice is a curtain of a colour different from red. Such a fascination runs parallel to the previously mentioned analogy between the red dress lying on the floor and the flames: Antoinette is attracted by the redness of both elements, so the fire and the dress become entangled to such an extent that the fire could be seen as an ally to Antoinette. This alliance is suggested by the following observation: "There was a wall of fire protecting me but it was too hot, it scorched me and I went away from it" (123). At the beginning of the remark, the fire is presented as an element that protects Antoinette from being harmed. Actually, a link between the flames and the Caribbean natural world could be established: both of them have bright colours in contrast with the coldness and dullness of England and, most importantly, prove to bring comfort to the alienated Creole. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that at some times both the Caribbean landscape and the conflagration can be threatening: just as the thorny garden in Part I is a wild zone for the protagonist, the fire in Part III is likely to be hazardous provided that it is excessive, and this is suggested by the narrator's use of the phrase "too hot". Accordingly, the protagonist of the dream leaves the room and goes upstairs towards the battlements.

Once the narrator makes it clear that the oneiric Creole has reached the parapet, she describes what the character perceives when looking at the sky:

Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. (123)

In Antoinette's dream, the sky is represented as an all-encompassing element that amalgamates the different items comprising her life. It is interesting to note that in this visual compendium of her life there is no room for her present situation as a prisoner in the attic. Rather, the sky is entirely red, so the totality of its components alludes to Dominica. As can be seen in the catalogue provided by the character-narrator, there is an emphasis on the landscape of Dominica; different plant species are in flames, and the previously mentioned attraction of Antoinette to the colour red enhances that the Creole has grown attached to the landscape which she used to fear. However, there is an entity that partially breaches the supremacy of colour red: "I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* And the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha!" (123). At this point in the vision, the familiarity evoked by the family's parrot is put in sharp opposition to the emergence of Rochester, who is somehow provoking a degree of defamiliarisation by calling her Bertha. The appearance of the English coloniser in the midst of the red sky points to Antoinette's hybrid identity as a white Creole. Unconsciously, Antoinette is acknowledging that she partakes of both cultures as a woman of British origin who was born in the West Indies. Nonetheless, there is a predominance of the red-looking landscape to the detriment of the virtually marginality of Rochester in the reverie. This reinforces the idea that, though Antoinette is fully aware of her hybridity and thus has embraced both of her cultural sides, she feels more identified with the Caribbean landscape and people.

Antoinette's attachment to her native land is confirmed by the sudden appearance of Tia, a black childhood friend of Antoinette's. The internal narrator reconstructs such an encounter as follows:

But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man's voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, *Why did I scream?* I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke. (124)

The setting that Antoinette notices from the basements is the pool of her presently derelict mansion at Coulibri. Prior to the set of attacks leading to the arson provoked by a group of black Dominicans, Coulibri was a paradisiac setting which could be said to provide a homely shelter for Antoinette and her family. The pool might be considered an extension of the family's garden, since it is an outdoor space surrounded by vegetation and certain animal species such as ants and snakes. In this context, Antoinette's identification of the pool contributes to enhancing her attachment to Dominica and her longing for a return to the island. In such an outdoor setting, the Creole will no longer be afraid of interacting with the landscape because at present it is by no means dangerous. Indeed, the black character who is calling her from the pool is not hostile, but is beckoning to her because she wants the Creole to join her. At this point in the dream, it could be argued that the Creole has a dilemma in terms of identity. As a consequence of her Creoleness, she has to make a crucial choice as to what of her two sides she favours. Such a conflict is suggested by the intertwining of Tia's utterance and that of Rochester in the dream. Having to choose between two conflicting sides of her psyche, the redness of the sky proves pivotal for her decision. As Heta Pyrhönen observes, "the red sky and the pool of water become the one mirror in which Antoinette can truly recognise herself. They merge with her memories, and together they become the reflecting surface that enables self-recognition on her own terms" (103). Pyrhönen's assertion brings to the fore the importance that the combination of memory and symbolism have in reflecting the process of Antoinette's identity formation. Lacking a mirror in which to see her reflection, the Creole has started her recollection of Thornfield with the concern that she does not know who she is. However, the final image in the dream enables the protagonist to recognise herself and eventually make a decision as to her Creoleness. Although Antoinette has been evidently puzzled as to her identity throughout the novel, she finally makes the decision to jump from the battlements at Thornfield so as to join Tia. Therefore, she unconsciously leaves behind her English origins and clings to her Caribbean culture, where she is likely to find the protection and companionship that she lacks in her oppressing room.

Antoinette's inaction as a prisoner locked in the attic of an unfamiliar country house undergoes a great change after the final dream. When Grace Poole falls asleep, the protagonist takes the initiative to take a candle and leave the room: "I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (*Sargasso* 124). After explaining that she is holding a candle, the internal narrator literally reproduces

the ruminations of the Creole through interior monologue with a view to highlighting her decisiveness. As Pyrhönen claims, Antoinette “is referring to her resolve to become mistress of herself, decide upon her fate, and go "home"” (103). Taking such an endeavour into account, the ending of this novel contributes to putting an end to the physical numbness of a character whose concern about her liminal status as a white Creole of British origin had turned her increasingly paralysed. Having been able to dreamily join a representative of the hitherto antagonistic black Dominicans, she seems not to carry the historical burden of the perpetration of slavery. Likewise, her strong attachment to the red landscape and her final jump into the pool are a proclamation that she belongs in Dominica. Having such a manifesto in mind, Sandra Drake argues that this novel is “a victory over death itself by changing the cultural and belief system from a European to an Afro-Caribbean one” (205). What Drake suggests is that the Creole sets her heart on changing the perspective from the Eurocentric one to that of a member of the colonies. The enactment of such a desire is her taking the role of an internal narrator that recollects of her past in Dominica and, most importantly, of her psychological maturation. In doing so, she does not fall prey to the suicidal drive which precipitates the end of Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha Mason during the arson at Thornfield Hall. Instead, Rhys’s Antoinette Cosway uses the mastery of her own destiny for the purpose of giving voice to a story which had been silenced by the dominant imperial discourse and which is revealing of her complex but fascinating identity.

7. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the narrativisation of Antoinette’s memories provides an insight into the process of identity formation that this white Creole of British origin undergoes throughout the novel. A key element that the character-narrator highlights in her (his)story is the natural world of Dominica. This setting has been proved to be revealing of how the protagonist feels with regard to her Creoleness. Hence, the verbalised memories of Antoinette have been shown to put a strong focus on her different degrees of attachment with the natural world of Dominica. In this process of making visible her story as a white Creole from the West Indian colonies, the account of such a link between character and place is aimed at asserting the hybridity and complexity of the Creole’s identity.

At an initial stage, Antoinette feels displaced in her own native country due to the attacks inflicted by the grudging black Dominicans. As a child, Antoinette is initially unable to understand the causes of the attacks. However, when her mother gradually falls into madness Antoinette starts growing aware of her Creoleness. This change in terms of consciousness is reflected in the sudden change undergone by the family garden. Being aware that Dominica has become a dangerous place for her due to the practices developed by members of her British lineage, Antoinette grows reluctant to interacting with the island's landscape. The initial sense of emotional paralysis gives way to a troubled unconscious that mirrors Antoinette's puzzlement as to her identity: at some times, the Creole feels protected while at others she distances herself from any contact whatsoever with the inhabitants of the island. The protagonist's fears are projected in two nightmares where Caribbean forests are described as suffocating and menacing. The second dream is anticipatory of an event that will trigger a growing consciousness with Antoinette's Caribbean side: she will marry Mr. Rochester, an English acquaintance of her stepfather's that interrupts her narration in Part II.

Rochester's seizure of the narrative voice is revealing of his colonial scheme: he wants to control both the natural world of the island and his wife, who is nothing more than a member of the colonised. However, his attempts to exert his power prove futile for two main reasons: the disempowering effect that Caribbean landscape has on him and, above all, his wife's growing attachment to Dominica. This stronger link is suggested by the Creole's physical and emotional approach to the island's natural world. In order to show how Antoinette's change from distancing to approaching mirrors her identity formation, Rhys momentarily lends her the narration. In this interrupting narrative, Antoinette recalls her visit to Christophine's house and puts the focus on the comfort provided by the landscape. In this context, the female protagonist asserts that Dominica is the place where she belongs. Such a declaration shows that Antoinette no longer feels utterly displaced in the island and, most importantly, that the culture with which she is more identified is the Caribbean one. Since Antoinette is rooted in her native land, Rochester elaborates a stratagem with the purpose of controlling his wife and ultimately taking the lead in the marriage. This plan culminates in the forceful relocation of the Creole to England, whereby Rochester uproots his wife from the only place that can be said to be her home.

Incarcerated in the attic of an unfamiliar house and unable to establish rapport with people other than her caretaker, Antoinette resorts to her imagination. The imaginative

power of the character-narrator is reflected in the links that she establishes between three specific elements —the tapestry, the red dress and her final dreams— and her past. Such associations enable her to fully explore her Creole consciousness and to assert that she feels more identified with her Caribbean side than with her British origins. Such a manifesto is marked by her unconscious jump into the pool where her friend Tia is calling her, hence showing that she desires to return to her homeland.

Antoinette's final decision to cling to her Caribbean side and to become the main internal narrator of the novel aims to provide a deconstructionist view of the relationship between metropolis and colony. Given that Antoinette's recollections take place during the colonial period, her narrative calls for a dialogue between cultures in an attempt to deconstruct reductionist views of identity that neglect her Caribbean side in order to perpetuate the prominence of her British lineage. Hence, this dissertation's concern with the role of memory in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is of great importance for literary and cultural studies. Indeed, this study casts light on how the process of remembering enables a Creole woman that had been silenced by the dominant imperial discourse to tell her (his)story and to provide an account of her edgy relationship with such a complex identity as her Creoleness. At the same time, the interest of the present dissertation lies in its primary endeavour to address the emphasis on Caribbean landscape as a setting that reflects the evolution in the identity formation of a character. Accordingly, it has been shown that the link between people and the natural world may shape the construction of their identity and can provide interesting insights into the characters' psyche. With a view to widening the bulk of literature on the relationship between characters and place in Jean Rhys's fiction, a future line of research might be assessing to what extent Rhysian heroines reflect their (dis)connection with their respective native places through their movements of approaching and distancing as they interact with natural elements such as the sea or forests. This analysis could be enriched by an examination of how stream-of-consciousness techniques and internal narration contributes to enhancing such an attachment in Rhys's modernist novels and short stories.

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