Re-Reading the Weak Other
- An Interpretation of the Husband in Wide Sargasso Sea

Paula Friström
# Table Of Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. Theoretical Framework 2
   2.1 The ‘Other’ and ‘Otherness’ 2
   2.2 Re-Reading and Re-Writing 3
   2.3 Manichean Allegory 5
   2.4 Reversal of Binary Oppositions 5

3. Analysis 7
   3.1 A Postcolonial View of *Wide Sargasso Sea* 7
      3.1.1 *Jane Eyre* 7
      3.1.2 West Indian Identity 11
      3.1.3 Alienation 13
   3.2 Marginalisation 17
      3.2.1 Zombification 17
      3.2.2 Feminisation 19
      3.2.3 Objectification 23

Conclusion 25

Notes 28

Works Cited 29
1. Introduction

The unnamed husband in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a character that has not often been examined in his own right. Many works have been written about how he marginalises his poor, lunatic wife Antoinette, but the ways in which the husband is marginalised may have been forgotten. This essay regards *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a re-write and a critique of *Jane Eyre*. Furthermore it will focus on the depiction of the character that supposedly is Rochester. The husband is an Englishman who comes to the West Indies to marry a Creole heiress by order of his father. Unfortunately nothing in the West Indies seems to be on his side; he gets sick, dislikes the Caribbean people and is lurked into marrying a madwoman. When Antoinette takes charge over her husband, he loses his authority. In this way the husband is depicted as the Weak Other.

Cultural identity is very important to postcolonial theory. The former colonies needed new ways in which they could identify themselves with, since they could not and did not want to identify themselves with its former masters. Literature is one way to establish a cultural identity of its own. This essay will analyse *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a West Indian novel that alienates the English husband.

The husband is furthermore marginalised through the reversal of binary oppositions, which reverses the roles of the binaries, and turns the strong into the weak and the weak into the strong. Through Jean Rhys' description of the unnamed husband she accomplishes a reversal of binary oppositions that avenges Charlotte Brontë's depiction of the Caribbean Creole. This essay will moreover analyse how the husband is marginalised by how he is depicted as an alien, a zombie, as feminised and as objectified.

Most common in essays on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is probably to focus on the objectification of Antoinette and the oppression of her from a feminist perspective, that is to say how *she* becomes the Weak Other. Thus, the theme of the marginalised white Creole is
obsolete since it has been discussed to great extent. The heroine can be seen as a mirror image of the author herself where the author has projected her self-pity onto Antoinette. However, this essay takes particular interest in the depicting of the English husband as “Other” in a West Indian novel since the relationship between English, coloniser and especially white Creole is very interesting.

The thesis continues with a theoretical framework that discusses the notion of re-writing from a postcolonial perspective in particular but also explains the importance and difference between classic English literature and imperial colonialist literature. Moreover, the theoretical framework will give a survey of Abdul JanMohamed’s Manichean allegory and Hélène Cixous’ reversal of binary oppositions. Other critics who focus on *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jean Rhys from a postcolonial perspective are John McLeod, Gayatri Spivak, and Judith Raiskin. Finally this essay will apply some feminist criticism on *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Maria Olaussen. The essay will conclude by offering an idea that may provide a starting point for further research on Otherness in Rhys’ works.

2. Theoretical Framework

The literary theories that this essay will focus on are, as already mentioned, some aspects of postcolonial theory and feminist theory. Within the field of postcolonial theory this essay will focus on re-reading and re-writing on the one hand and to the concept of Manichean allegory on the other. Within the field of feminist theory the focus will lay on Hélène Cixous’ theory the reversal of binary oppositions. First of all, the essay will define the concept of “other” and “otherness”.

2.1 The “Other” and “Otherness”

“Otherness” is according to the Oxford English Dictionary “the quality or fact of being other
... from an expected norm" (Web). It also puts emphasis on words such as "difference", "separateness from", "oppositeness to" and "diversity" ("Otherness" Ox. Eng. Dic.). To claim someone as "Other" is to "conceptualize (a people, a group, etc.) as excluded and intrinsically different from oneself" ("Other" Ox. Eng. Dic.).

2.2 Re-Reading and Re-Writing

In order to fully understand re-reading and re-writing it is necessary to explain the differences that might exist between classic English literature and colonialist literature. The classic English literature, or colonialist literature, that is of immediate interest to this essay is of course the novel Jane Eyre, since a particular re-reading of it resulted in the novel of this investigation: that is to say, Wide Sargasso Sea.

John McLeod argues, in Beginning Postcolonialism, that classic English literature was important to the "colonizing enterprise", since it "manifest(ed) English culture" in the colonies (142). In brief, this literature supposedly guided the native onto the 'right' path of Christianity, chastity and moral values of the English society, which the 'savages' were supposed to internalize. If classic English literature was supposed to represent England in the colonies, colonialist literature, on the other hand, was supposed to represent the colonised people of the colonies back in Europe and England. Its main task was "to justify imperial occupation and exploitation" of the colonies, according to Abdul JanMohamed in his article "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" (62). Therefore, the colonised people were depicted as 'savages' that needed to be redeemed, something that in Jane Eyre is represented by the Creole 'savage' Bertha and by Jane's cousin John, who becomes a missionary in India. This gave "the imperialist" a motif to follow "his desire to conquer and dominate" (64) according to JanMohamed since wealth and power were the real reasons for the enterprise, not charity. Colonialist literature assumes it is
“morally” superior, and because of this it does not explore its “racial Other”, argues JanMohamed, just as Bertha, “the racial Other” is not explored in Jane Eyre (65). He also points out that in “colonialist discourse”, the “native subject” is turned into a “stereotyped object” and is not allowed to have its own “individuality” and “subjectivity” (64). In Jane Eyre, Bertha represents this “stereotyped object”, the “savage”, and, as will be argued in this essay, the colonised. Thus, colonialist literature pictured the English as superior to the natives in the colonies and classic English literature pictured the natives of the colonies as inferior and as “savages” in England. A novel such as Jane Eyre may therefore be considered to belong both to the genre of Colonialist literature and classic English literature, depending on if the novel is read in an English or a postcolonial context. This form of binary opposition, superior – inferior, is worthy of further investigation by means of JanMohamed’s Manichean allegory, but first it is important to elucidate the concepts of re-reading and re-writing.

In postcolonial theory, McLeod argues, re-reading and re-writing are practiced to re-interpret classic European literature such as Jane Eyre from another point of view than the European, and are thus used as “points of departure” just as Wide Sargasso Sea takes its ‘point of departure’ in Jane Eyre (143). A re-reading of Jane Eyre from a Caribbean postcolonial point of view may therefore aggravate some readers since the Caribbean Islands are depicted as an infested location and the Caribbean woman as a lunatic pyromaniac. In certain cases, the re-reading of an English classic may result in a re-write of the same; this is the case of Wide Sargasso Sea. Hence, a postcolonial re-write is a response to the European classical novel; it is giving a voice to the oppressed and colonised that did not have a voice before, it is “the empire writing back” as in the title of the book by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. Furthermore, this thesis argues that Wide Sargasso Sea employs reversals of binary oppositions in order to “write back” to Jane Eyre. Within postcolonial theory the concept of binary oppositions are also known as Manichean allegory as the next topic will unfold,
whereas Hélène Cixous develops the theory of reversal of binary oppositions within French feminist theory in chapter 2.4.

2.3 Manichean Allegory

JanMohamed, as has been said, discusses how colonialist literature employs the Manichean allegory. As he explains, “Manichean allegory” is a binary opposition “between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object” (63). These “power relations” in the Manichean allegory are so deeply rooted that “the writer” who might be “highly critical of imperial exploitation” uses them unconsciously (63). He argues that the “power and interest relations” that are these “Manichean oppositions” are reflected in the “putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native” (63). In *Jane Eyre* Jane is depicted as pale and civilised whereas Bertha is depicted as dark and savage; Bertha is the object that is “Other” to Jane - the subject. However, Rhys quite ingeniously reverses these oppositions in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and, as the main argument of this essay claims, transforms the coloniser into the colonised, the strong into the weak, and thus makes the husband into the “Other”. This reversal of Manichean oppositions is more closely explained in the next section.

2.4 Reversal of Binary Oppositions

Hélène Cixous lists opposing words into binary oppositions in her work “The Newly Born Woman”. The difference is that Cixous’ binaries are not connected to race as JanMohamed’s are, but instead connected to gender. “Where is she?” in the binary oppositions asks Cixous, is she in “activity/passivity, sun/moon, culture/nature, day/night, father/mother, head/heart, intelligible/palpable, logos/pathos … man/woman”? (37). Cixous believes that binary
“oppositions are couples” that are dependant of each other just as the couple ‘man/woman’ is. And like JanMohamed she concludes that they are in power-relations to each other, “relations of authority ... master/slave ... repression” (38). In Cixous’ power-relations Man is the dominant whereas Woman is the submissive. She confirms her theory by arguing that “traditionally ... sexual difference” was seen in the “opposition (of) activity/passivity” and that “woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy” (38). Cixous argues that it does not matter how women fight for their equal rights as long as society keeps its binary oppositions: men stand for activity as women stand for passivity, and as long as women are passive they can never win because victory is not fulfilled without activity. Cixous believes that there must be a solution to the problem of the binary oppositions and argues that this solution is the “revolutionary / feminine writing” that may “exceed the binary logic that informs our present system and thus create the framework for a new ‘language’ and culture” (xxix). Cixous’ “solution” is further interpreted by Toril Moi in Sexual/Textual Politics.

Moi argues that Cixous’ purpose is to deconstruct these systems of binary oppositions which she feels are so unfavourable to the female gender and instead construct new binary oppositions which favours female gender by giving women properties as "life, power and energy" (103). Besides, Moi points out that binary oppositions need each other: the word ‘“masculine’ would be meaningless without its direct opposite ‘feminine’ and vice versa” (104). Moi argues, on behalf of Cixous, that society has taken on a patriarchal language, a “dominant phallogocentric logic” (106) when it comes to binary oppositions, that imprisons women since women adopt the male language into their own writing and therefore produce masculine writing. Furthermore it holds women within patriarchal structures and the same binary systems that she tries to change, and shall therefore be avoided by female writers.

In order to change the binary oppositions of the Freudian “phallic authority” societies, Cixous believes that the “subjectivity” has to become “feminine” since women are almost
always depicted as ‘other’ in “phallocentric narcissist(ic)” literature (43–44). When woman becomes the subject, man becomes the object. According to Peter Barry in his *Beginning Theory - An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Cixous wants to “deconstruct binary oppositions” by “[...] revers(ing)e the hierarchy within” (138) since opposing words like day/night need each-other it must also be possible to make the second word night into the privileged word. Thus, since women give birth they must represent life. In Cixous’ reversed binary opposition she argues that women nurture their babies, therefore they represent energy. As the Earth itself is female (mother Earth), the female gender must be the privileged one just as women are giving and generous and does not “revolve around a sun that is more star than the stars”, whereas men are afraid of accepting gifts that may bring them into positions of dependence since he supposedly “still has something to lose” (43–44).

3. Analysis

This analysis is divided into two parts. The first part concentrates on a postcolonial reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and how this affects the character of the unnamed husband, whereas the second part of the analysis concentrates on the ways in which it is possible to distinguish a marginalisation of the husband and how this may be expressed through the reversal of binary oppositions.

3.1 A Postcolonial View of *Wide Sargasso Sea*

This first part will discuss Jean Rhys’ West Indian identity and the relationship between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, and why the alienation of the husband is important in this context.

3.1.1 *Jane Eyre*
As mentioned above, this essay will treat *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a re-write (or a re-inscription) of *Jane Eyre*. Therefore it is necessary to investigate the sequences in *Jane Eyre* that are of importance in the re-write *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which will support the theory that the husband is represented as ‘Other’ and perhaps also why he is exhibited as such.

The re-reading of *Jane Eyre* from a postcolonial view may change the reader’s opinion of the novel somewhat. This essay argues that Rhys’ view of *Jane Eyre* was postcolonial since she was West Indian, which is reinforced by her statement here below: “Of course Charlotte Brontë makes her own world, of course she convinces you, and that makes the poor Creole lunatic all the more dreadful. I remember being quite shocked, and when I re-read it rather annoyed. ‘That’s only one side – the English side’ sort of thing.” (qtd. in Raiskin 113).

Furthermore, the English character Jane is the Victorian woman with the right moral views whereas the Caribbean Bertha, according to McLeod, is reduced to a savage creature with no moral values, as this passage from *Jane Eyre* shows: “whether beast or human being, one could not at first sight tell” (qtd. in McLeod 152). McLeod also states that the Caribbean Islands is the colony where Mr. Rochester and Jane both get their wealth, as this quotation will show:

> Without the money made from colonialism, Rochester could not enjoy the luxuries of Thornfield Hall, nor could Jane secure a life with Rochester and facilitate the happy and respectable marriages of her cousins Diana and Mary, who were otherwise destined to live as humble governesses for wealthy families in the southeast of England. So ... at the end of the novel Jane and Rochester settle down to a happy married life on the proceeds of the Empire. (McLeod 151)

An underlying message in *Jane Eyre* seems ultimately to be that it is acceptable to exploit the colony, that the people in the colonies were not as human as people were in England, and that the English had all the right values and the creoles did not. Jane for example, is morally
superior to other characters within *Jane Eyre* according to Suvir Kaul: "the story of Jane's emancipatory struggle positions her as the guarantor of the social and moral superiority of British culture" so "the text produces cultural, sexual, and domestic values for the ideal English woman by delineating and disavowing competing options, which are marked as colonial and foreign" (84). It seems as if the re-reading of *Jane Eyre* from a postcolonial perspective would then upset the reader since Jane "disavows" cultural perspectives that are not English (especially Caribbean and Indian cultures) and suggests which are the right English values. Rhys' re-reading of *Jane Eyre* focuses on the Caribbean as 'Other’ and her rewriting of it in her own novel attributes a certain intention that Rhys aims to reverse the roles, to make the English into the 'Other'. What becomes other, as is yet to be discussed, is the husband along with his country England. The analysis will now continue to focus on *Jane Eyre* and the description of the Caribbean landscape in it.

From a postcolonial perspective, it is interesting to note how the landscape of the Caribbean is represented in *Jane Eyre*. As McLeod states, *Jane Eyre* engages with "Manichean aesthetics", which is the same as Manichean allegory or Manichean oppositions (155). The binary oppositions that 'couples' terms of racialist significance such as McLeod exemplifies, "light and darkness, and good and evil. ... all that is light is orderly, tractable, rational, angelic and ultimately good; whereas all that is dark is degenerate, chaotic, transgressive, lunatic, satanic and hence evil" (155–156). The Caribbean nature in *Jane Eyre* is described in negative terms, "the air was like sulphur-streams ... no refreshment anywhere ... the sea ... rumbled dull like an earthquake - black clouds were casting up over it: the moon ... threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest" (qtd. in McLeod 154). A conclusion McLeod reaches in his postcolonial analysis of *Jane Eyre* is that this Caribbean landscape almost drives Rochester insane, "Rochester ... depict(s) Jamaica as a satanic and apocalyptic location ... The crazed world outside is responsible for driving
Rochester wild, and his decision to shoot himself shows how much his mind has been
deranged by the stormy environment” (154). Luckily, he is saved by ”the sweet wind from
Europe” that comes through the Atlantic Ocean where “clear prospects opened” to him
(McLeod 155). This description of the Caribbean environment emphasizes a diabolic picture
of the Caribbean, while it simultaneously pictures England as angelical. This, as will be
shown, is not to stand unchallenged by Jean Rhys.

This pessimistic view of the Caribbean is reversed in Wide Sargasso Sea, in which the
Caribbean is depicted as a lovely place, and where England on the other hand, is depicted as a
cold, dull, imaginary “cardboard” location. When Antoinette arrives at Granbois for the first
time with her husband, this is what they encounter: ”...the most beautiful place in the world”
(Rhys 83) “We came to a little river. ... A bamboo spout jutted from the cliff, the water
coming from it was silver blue. ... ‘Taste. This is mountain water.’ ... It was cold, pure and
sweet, a beautiful colour against the thick green leaf. ... the mountains (were) purple against a
very blue sky” (Rhys 40). In this passage the positive binary oppositions “pure”, “sweet”,
“beautiful” and “blue sky” are bestowed the Caribbean, while on the other hand Antoinette
pictures England as a nightmare: “one of my friends who married an Englishman ... said this
place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up” (Rhys 47). Here the
negative binary oppositions “cold” and “dark” are associated with England. When
Christophine and Antoinette talks about England it becomes clear that England is “Other” to
them: “England ... do you think there is such a place? ... I never see the damn place, (so) how
I know?” “You don’t believe that there is a country called England? ’I don’t say I don’t
believe, I say I don’t know ... I hear it cold to freeze your bones and they thief your money ...
this cold thief place”’ (Rhys 69). When Antoinette in part three is kept imprisoned, she still
pictures England as Other, even if she supposedly has been there for approximately ten years¹:

“‘They tell me I am in England but I don’t believe them’ ... ‘their world ... is ... made of
cardboard" (Rhys 116–117, italics mine), where their English world is depicted as other to her Caribbean world. In this way Wide Sargasso Sea "refuses Jane Eyre as an authoritative source" (McLeod 162) of what Caribbean environment is like. Simultaneously it makes a reversal of binary oppositions and thus brings out the beauty of the Caribbean milieu while it dismisses England in the same manner Jane Eyre rejects the West Indies. Furthermore, Gayatri Spivak writes in "Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" that the cardboard-house Antoinette resides in at the end of Wide Sargasso Sea is "a book between cardboard covers" (Spivak 269–270). Supposedly Antoinette has entered Jane’s world, and her world is not England, but a cardboard-world. Obviously Wide Sargasso Sea pictures the Caribbean as the real world and England as an unreal ‘Other’; a nightmare crowded with thieves and coldness. In the next section Wide Sargasso Sea and Rhys’ writing will be examined as West Indian and a rejection of English fiction that pictures the colonised as “Other”.

3.1.2 West Indian Identity

According to Wally Look Lai, Wide Sargasso Sea “make(s) an artistic statement about West Indian Society” through the theme of “rejected womanhood” (qtd. in Raaskin 103). And Judith Raaskin argues in Snow on the Cane Fields that “cultural identification and alienation” (102) are important themes in Wide Sargasso Sea. Since the husband cannot identify himself culturally in the Caribbean milieu, he is alienated. Wide Sargasso Sea is often considered to be an English novel, although this thesis claims that it is a West Indian novel since Jean Rhys was born and spent her childhood in the West Indies.

Rhys was born into an awkward position in the West Indian society since she was white unlike the majority of the West Indian population and her ancestors were slave-owners. Besides, her family-background also resulted problematic in England where she was
considered a foreigner and a direct link to the Europeans who traded with slaves. The ambivalence of her background encountered resistance to the possibility to establish her as a West Indian writer. According to Raiskin, some critics as for example Kenneth Ramchand, were not at first willing to accept Rhys as a West Indian writer, since she was white and lived most of her life in Europe: "(Ramchand's) hesitancy to claim Rhys as a Caribbean writer thus appears to be not only because of her longtime residency in England and Europe but because of her racial status as a white writer" (Raiskin 103). However, it is possible to claim Rhys as a West Indian writer since Wide Sargasso Sea distances itself from England and empathises the "Us" as Caribbean Creole and the "Other" as the English as will be shown in section 3.1.3 where alienation is discussed. Thus, the husband is made into the "Other" whereas Antoinette is made into the Creole subject. What's more, the same Ramchand that once rejected Rhys' writing as West Indian later acknowledges Wide Sargasso Sea as a West Indian novel. Moreover, Ramchand argues that Rhys' writing is a "critique of English life against the background of a West Indian existence full of warmth, colour and spontaneity" (qtd. in Raiskin 104). Moreover, according to Helen Carr, she often worked with postcolonial writing even though she might have belonged to the colonialist class, "Rhys was a colonial in terms of her history, even though she can be considered a postcolonial in her attitude to the Empire and in her employment of many postcolonial strategies" (qtd. in McLeod 161). Indeed, this supports that Rhys' writing is West Indian. Since the perspective of the writer of Wide Sargasso Sea is established to be Caribbean and not English, it reinforces the view of Caribbean as "Us" and England, and therefore also the English husband, as "Other".

Again, not only critics have established Rhys as a West Indian writer; Rhys also considered herself as such. According to Raiskin, Rhys not only identified herself as a West Indian writer, but she also "expressed distrust of British writers working on this (Caribbean) 'material'" (123). This might not be so difficult to understand since Rhys supposedly said that
she already as a girl, reading *Jane Eyre* for the first time, felt the unjust treatment of the West Indian madwoman Bertha:

The mad wife in *Jane Eyre* always interested me. I was convinced that Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies, and I was angry about it. Otherwise, why did she take a West Indian for the horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature? I hadn't really formulated the idea of vindicating the mad woman in a novel but when I was rediscovered I was encouraged to do so. (qtd. in Nunez-Harrell 287).

Evidently Rhys' re-write of *Jane Eyre* where the Creole may become the subject and the English may become the object indeed places her among other West Indian writers who may have reasons to portray the English, and in this case the husband, as “Other” which will further be examined in the next section Alienation.

3.1.3 Alienation

From a postcolonial perspective it is possible to sense how the West Indian story pictures the husband, the “coloniser”, and his English traditions as ‘Other’ and different. The English husband is “excluded and [made] intrinsically different from” the West Indian characters of *Wide Sargasso Sea*; he is alienated and made weak (“other” Ox. Eng. Dic.). In addition, argues Raiskin, “Rhys quite consciously complicates the dichotomy between the “colonizer” and the “colonized” by insisting on the fluidity of the categories and of the power relations inscribed in them” (102). As in this case where the husband is the narrator:

‘Her coffee is delicious [I said] but her language is horrible and she might hold her dress up. It must get very dirty, yards of it trailing on the floor.’ ‘When they don’t hold their dress up it’s for respect,’ said Antoinette. 'Or for feast days or going to Mass.' ‘And is this feast day?’ ‘She wanted it to be a feast day.’ ‘Whatever the reason it is not a clean habit.’ ‘It is. You don’t understand at all. They don’t care about getting a dress dirty
because it shows it isn’t the only dress they have.' (Rhys 50)

Antoinette distances her husband from "everybody else" by saying that he does not "understand at all". Hence, the power relations between coloniser (himself) and the colonised (Antoinette) are not fixed, something which weakens his position. So, the husband who plays the role of "coloniser" is simultaneously pictured as the Weak Other since he is the foreigner in the West Indies who does not understand; an intruder with a different view of the world.

The husband’s worldview as has been noted is challenged in the West Indies since his wife takes the side of the Caribbean servants and sees herself as "one of us" which makes the husband "one of them" or "Other", since he does not understand Caribbean customs. On several occasions Antoinette tells her husband right from wrong: "It is not called ‘Mountains’ here, it is an ugly word for ‘them’, we call it ‘Morne’" (Rhys 109 italics mine). When the couple talks about Christophine’s dirty dress trailing on the floor and the husband gets the answer ‘You don’t understand at all’ he persists to run down Christophine by saying, "(She) looks so lazy. She dawdles about" but Antoinette answers "Again you are mistaken" (Rhys 50–51). Antoinette even attributes the "quality" of laziness to herself, "I’m [on the other hand] very lazy you know" (Rhys 51), as if protecting Christophine of the accusation of laziness. The husband’s knowledge is often undermined in the West Indies, since Antoinette tells him what things are called, and why things are in a certain way. Antoinette’s decision to take Christophine’s side and thus the West Indian side alienates the English husband further away from her, something which makes him a stranger and different from her and the other West Indian characters in the novel. In the end this is what will make him into the Alien "Other".

When Antoinette answers “You don’t understand at all”, this does more than weaken the power relations between coloniser and colonised, it also alienates English culture. According to McLeod it also answers back to the colonialist novel Jane Eyre; “the
relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, with the latter answering back and critically challenging the views of Caribbean people and places in the former" (164). In brief, what McLeod states is that this shows that a major point in the re-writing of *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is to give the West Indies a voice, "Antoinette's husband lacks knowledge of local custom. His interpretation of events is not allowed to stand unchallenged" (163). For example, in this part where Antoinette asks her husband (the narrator): "'The earth is red here, do you notice?' 'It's red in parts of England too.' 'Oh England, England,' she called back mockingly, and the sound went on and on like a warning I did not choose to hear'" (Rhys 40) shows the estrangement of England and thus of the primordial source of inspiration *Jane Eyre*. Hence, the husband who does not understand Caribbean traditions is alienated and made into the "Other", almost as if he was not welcomed in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and should return to *Jane Eyre*. This is seen in several examples, one of them being his disrespect for frangipani, which will now be the subject of examination.

As soon as Antoinette and her husband arrives at Granbois the husband starts to oppose to West Indian culture. First he deliberately steps on the frangipani-wreath which seems to be a sign of disrespect for the West Indies, since frangipani are flowers that grow in warm countries and not in cold climates like the English. It is also a sign of disrespect towards Christophine who made and decorated the bed with the flower-wreaths. In contrast, Raiskin discusses the role of daffodils (the yellow narcissus flower) in British colonies, and she says that the "British" flower daffodil and poetry about daffodils was taught to children in the colonies as the most beautiful and delicate flower in the world in order to impose British culture to the inhabitants of the British colonies. Rhys' use of frangipani instead of daffodils can be seen as a sign of her position as a West Indian writer and a rejection of what is English, since according to Raiskin another of her characters in other of her fiction "claims his Caribbean identity by rejecting the daffodils" (124) and that "Rhys' choice of daffodils as the
symbol of English cultural hegemony has become ... a touchstone in contemporary postcolonial fiction” (122). What’s more, the Latin name of daffodil is Narcissus, a key word in the description of the narcissistic husband. “I crowned myself with one of the wreaths and made a face in the glass. ‘I hardly think it suits my handsome face, do you?’ ‘You look like a king, an emperor’” (Rhys 42). Spivak confirms that “Rhys utilizes the thematics of Narcissus” (270) through her use of “the looking glass”, just as the husband looks at himself “in the glass”. In Wide Sargasso Sea though, it is the English husband who by stepping on the frangipani, alienates himself from all that is Caribbean. It is also a sign of discontent and insecurity: “The feeling of security had left me. I looked around suspiciously” (Rhys 43). Since he is in another continent he cannot feel at ease, and the disrespect and discontent for his wife and her culture shows that he does not appreciate the West Indies and that he turns out to be an antipathetic character: a foreigner who does not adapt to local traditions, an alien, a weak figure who is frightened by the female negro heroine Christophine’s warning to him, “Take care, no slip on the flowers, young master” (Rhys 50). The English husband does not respect the Caribbean since he steps on the flowers, one narcissus amongst several frangipanis. The Narcissus decorates his head with an array of frangipani-flowers, which he almost instantly rejects, simultaneously rejecting the Caribbean culture the frangipani represents.

As will now be investigated the husband’s voice gets driven out of competition by the West Indian voice, just as a single flower in the wild tends to get driven out of competition by the surrounding nature. The ending of Wide Sargasso Sea, which alludes to the sacrifice of Bertha in Jane Eyre, gives the West Indies a voice through Antoinette while it silences the ‘British’ voice of the husband. As McLeod points out, Antoinette is Wide Sargasso Sea’s “first and last narrator ... (and) her husband’s narrative (is) contained inside hers” (165), leaving her with the first and last word. As a result, the alien in Jane Eyre, Bertha, who is not
allowed a voice, is in the re-write _Wide Sargasso Sea_ reversed, leaving the alien husband voiceless in the third and last part of the novel, which obviously is final. The one that gets the last word usually wins, and in _Wide Sargasso Sea_ the winner is Antoinette whereas the husband is estranged.

Another interesting detail about the end of _Wide Sargasso Sea_ comes from Jenny Stringer in her article “Wide Sargasso Sea”. At the end of the story one may sense a reversal of binary oppositions through the re-writing of _Jane Eyre_ since Antoinette, the white Creole from the family of ex-planters ‘burns down’ her husband’s house. The way in which Antoinette supposedly is going to burn down the English cardboard-mansion resembles, according to Stringer, the way in which Caribbean slaves rebelled against their plantation-owners: “Antoinette’s tools of rebellion have been borrowed from the black insurgents of her own islands” (_Ox. Ref. Online_). The weak, victimised, lunatic female takes the matter in her own hands and becomes the strong binary; the subject, whereas the husband who “should” be the strong male character, is instead made into the victim since his home is burnt down and he is made a cripple³. The result is that the female character takes charge of the male character: Antoinette embodies the slave who rebels against her master. So the English husband is depicted as an alien in the West Indian novel _Wide Sargasso Sea_ and made into the Weak Other; different and marginalised as will be examined in the second part of the essay.

3.2 Marginalisation

This second part of the thesis will analyse how the husband is marginalised through zombification, feminisation and objectification.

3.2.1 Zombification

One way in which the husband is made inferior is by the intimation of the narrative that he is
a zombie. As an illustration of what a zombie is, the husband reads in "The Glittering Coronet of Isles" that "[a] zombi is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead" (Rhys 66). The zombification of the husband reveals in this scene of Wide Sargasso Sea that Raiskin has observed:

It was all very brightly coloured, very strange, but it meant nothing to me. Nor did she, the girl I was to marry. When at last I met her I bowed, smiled, kissed her hand, danced with her. I played the part I was expected to play. She never had anything to do with me at all. Every movement I made was an effort of will and sometimes I wondered that no one noticed this. I would listen to my own voice and marvel at it, calm, correct but toneless, surely. But I must have given a faultless performance. If I saw an expression of doubt or curiosity it was on a black face not a white one. (Rhys 44)

Raiskin argues that the husband is in a "zombielle state" and that he "lacks the autonomy and self-knowledge that could save him" (134). His lack of willpower and his toneless voice suggests that he already before his marriage is turned into a zombie; "the wedding takes place between two already dead people" (Raiskin 134). Furthermore, the "expression of doubt or curiosity" the black people had on their faces when they saw him suggests that he is turned into a zombie since the practitioners of Obeah are bound to notice a zombie if it stands before them. When his wife later speaks to him about the "two deaths" he concludes that there are two deaths "at least ... for the fortunate" (Rhys 81, italics mine), again suggesting his own unfortunate luck to become a zombie, a living dead. Moreover, Raiskin argues that the "reversal of power ... and degradation of European properties ... attracts Rhys to the symbology of Obeah and zombiism" (Raiskin 130). Raiskin states that Rhys was interested in Obeah, the religion of the former slaves on the Caribbean Islands. White people were afraid of Obeah, which they used to refer to as "black magic". The oppressed former slaves discovered that "black magic" was of "powerful political significance" since they learnt that they could
control their oppressors through it (Raiskin 131). In this way Rhys succeeds to turn the oppressive coloniser into the oppressed. The husband is controlled by Caribbean "black magic", and is thus made into the Weak Other.

Previously it has been concluded that the husband became a zombie even before his marriage. Furthermore, Raiskin claims that his "zombielike state ... began long before they met each other" (134). According to Raiskin "his zombielike state began" when his father sold the husband’s soul, which was when the father closed the deal with Mr. Mason to marry the husband to Antoinette: "Dear Father. ... I have sold my soul or you have sold it" (Rhys 39). The reason for this deal is the husband’s inferior position as the second son, the victim of the British legal system, which leaves him disinherited. According to Raiskin the husband "occupies ... a privileged and an exploited position in the imperialist economy" (133–134).

Besides, argues Raiskin, this system taught the husband how to silence himself: "How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted" (Rhys 63). This is the husband’s first death, where he loses his soul, since “there are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about” (Rhys 81). When he loses his soul he is turned into a zombie, since a zombie is, as already established a, “dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead" (Rhys 66). Evidently the husband must be a person who has gone through his first death and thereby lost his soul and been made into a zombie. As the penultimate section will show, being made into a zombie is not the only way in which the husband is marginalised and depicted as the Weak Other.

3.2.2 Feminisation

Another way in which the husband is marginalised is through feminisation. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out in *The Empire Writes Back*, Rhys has "drawn an analogy
between the relationships of men and women and those of the imperial power and the colony” (31–32). Rhys wrote about the relationship between the colonial power England and the colonised Caribbean in the same way that she wrote about the relationship between men and women where England represents the male and the colonisers and the Caribbean represents the female and the colonised. With the theory of binary oppositions it is possible to compare England as the Male and the West Indies as the Female, where England represents the husband and the West Indies represents Antoinette. According to Maria Olausssen in Three Types of Feminist Criticism and Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea, England is strong, it has got the “gold money and beautiful clothes” (98) whereas the West Indies is the weak, the needy “white nigger” who is worth less than “black nigger” and she has “no power to demand anything in return” (98) when England decides to prohibit slavery through the Emancipation Act. Nevertheless, when the husband arrives to the Caribbean Islands he gets sick, “I was down with fever for two weeks after I got to Spanish Town” (Rhys 43–44) and is feminised since he becomes scared, “I was lost and afraid ... so certain of danger” (Rhys 64). However, Antoinette’s notion of England must also be examined: “Is it true ... 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” (Rhys 47). “A cold dark dream” sounds very much like a nightmare. The words “cold” and “dark” are used in Cixous’ binary oppositions: the positive words “warm” and “light” are here associated with the Caribbean while England is associated with the negative words of the binary opposition “cold” and “dark”. In Cixous’ original theory of binary oppositions “man” is the “sun”, and the “sun” is “light” and “warm”, but here the “light” and “warmth” is associated with the Caribbean which we already have associated with the “feminine”. Now, the reversal of binary oppositions makes England the “feminine” and the Caribbean the “male”. So the husband who identifies himself with his country now becomes the “female” whereas Antoinette who
identifies herself with the West Indies is turned into the "male". Since the theory of binary oppositions suggests that "to be brave" and "to be scared" stand in contrast, this leads to the reversal of binary oppositions since the strong male is made into the weak and feminised character. Therefore it may be suggested that his status as coloniser, English and male is undermined in Rhys' West Indian novel where he is depicted as the Weak Other.

Another way in which the husband is feminised is by Christophine, when she offers him some of her coffee: "Taste my bull’s blood master ... no horse piss like the English madams drink" (Rhys 50). According to Mona Fayad in her work "Unquiet Ghosts: The Struggle for Representation in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea", this is a "mockery to his manhood" (447) since this is the husband's interpretation of what Christophine tells him: "I could feel the dislike and contempt ... The same contempt as that devil's when she said, 'Taste my bull's blood.' Meaning that will make you a man. Perhaps. Much I cared for what they thought of me!" (Rhys 109, italics mine). "What they thought of” him, is here construed as the Caribbean people which includes Christophine. They believe that he is not a real man. In fact, Christophine's comment on him feminises him and separates him from the West Indians since he is not used to drink “real strong coffee”.

The husband is again feminised by Christophine when she tells him that Antoinette "won’t be satisfy. She is Creole girl, and she have the sun in her" (Rhys 102). The Sun is here employed to describe Antoinette's character according to Cixous' reversed binary opposition. Christophine seems to be saying that the husband is not man enough to satisfy Antoinette. If Antoinette in this reversed binary opposition represents the Sun, her husband must automatically represent the Moon, and thus, the feminine since the theory of binary oppositions suggests that “sun” and “moon” are binary oppositions where the sun is bright and male and the moon is mysterious and female. Furthermore, Fayad argues that the first time the husband met Christophine at Granbois he thought of her as a “phallic mother who
castrates him” (447) since she looks “very imposing” (Rhys 49) and their first encounter ends in the following manner: “I looked at her sharply but she seemed insignificant. ... She looked at me steadily, not with approval, I thought. We stared at each other for quite a minute. I looked away first and she smiled to herself” (Rhys 41). By being the first to look away, the husband uncovers that he is weaker than her. Besides, with Fayad’s argument that Christophine figuratively speaking castrates him, the conclusion reached hereby is that she feminises him.

Unfortunately for the husband, Rhys is not yet satisfied with the humiliation of her main male character. The husband’s own narrative indicates that the new Caribbean environment feminises him. According to Olaussen the husband is frightened and confused by the nature of their Caribbean honeymoon island, by the servants and by Antoinette’s sexual desires. This, according to Olaussen, indicates to him that “there might be another way of looking at things which would no longer take his authority for granted” (110). Olaussen also claims that the husband “loses his authority, his language, his sanity” (110) since the society-rules he is used to do not apply in Granbois where Antoinette is the Master and treats her old servants as family. Apparently, the husband’s world-order is reversed since servants are treated as family and women as masters. When the husband loses his male authority he is effeminated.

A third way in that the husband is feminised is through the love-brew Antoinette gives him, prepared for her by Christophine who is also an Obeah-sorceress. For instance, Olaussen claims that Obeah gives Antoinette “sexual power over” the husband, and she continues by arguing that “this is a further treat to his identity, which is built on the subjection of women to him as a man” (111). That is, the husband loses his virility since Antoinette takes charge over their lovemaking and is thereby feminised but also objectified as will be explored more closely in the next chapter.

Ultimately, the husband is marginalised and feminised in the construction of the
narrative in the first and last chapter of the novel. The husband, after all, is the one who ends in tragedy whereas Antoinette victoriously lightens her way "along the dark passage" (Rhys 123), frees herself from her imprisonment and thereby wins the final battle. According to Fayad, Antoinette "reappropriates the narrative" (449) through sneaking away and buying a knife the one and only time she is let out of her prison in Part Three, which indicates that the husband is feminised through the marginalisation of him in the narrative, since the marginalised woman "reappropriates" her place in the story and pushes him out of the narrative. Thus, in this case the marginalised becomes the husband since the female re-appropriates the voice of the novel and leaves him voiceless. Another critic that has observed this is Spivak, who observes that the husband's voice and "narrative is framed by ... (a crying) boy, whose emotions infuriate 'Rochester' both when he arrives and when he leaves the island" (134). Thereby Rhys "frames his narrative" that is contained within not only the crying boy, but within the narrative of Antoinette. Consequently, the husband is deprived of his authoritative male voice since Antoinette both opens up the story as well as "concludes" it. When the husband loses his authoritative male voice he is simultaneously effeminised. The making of the husband into an effeminate character is not the last way in which he is depicted as the Weak Other; as will be examined in the final chapter of this essay he is also portrayed as an object to female subject.

3.2.3 Objectification

It is interesting to find out how Rhys has depicted the colonial "superior" husband as an object in Wide Sargasso Sea, turning the tables, and reversing the binary oppositions as will be shown in this final chapter.

A curious fact is that the husband remains nameless throughout the novel. This is arguably a sign that he is marginalised and objectified. According to McLeod, "names are
often central to our sense of identity” (167). Therefore the husband is made into an object without a name since all human beings normally have names they can identify themselves with. Spivak asserts that “Rhys denies to Brontë’s Rochester the one thing that is supposed to be secured in the Oedipal relay: The name of the Father, or the patronymic” (271). Indeed, Rhys’ West Indian novel makes a statement by leaving the husband nameless. Or as Nancy R. Harrison states in Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women’s Text, “If ... [the husband] has any identification by name here, it is as Antoinette’s husband, or at least as the man whose ‘wife’ is Antoinette” (201–202). Thus, since he lacks a name, he becomes an object while Antoinette (Bertha) Cosway Mason (Rochester) is the subject, since she certainly is not left nameless. As for Antoinette’s names, Raiskin argues that the husband is “responsible for stealing or changing Antoinette’s name when she becomes his wife and metaphorical slave, (but) Rhys leaves him completely nameless in the text as well” (133). The oppression of Antoinette by “stealing or changing her name” is not the ultimate form of oppression in Wide Sargasso Sea since the husband is left “completely nameless”. The fact that the husband does not have a name can be seen as worse than the patronising game he plays with Antoinette’s name when he refers to her as an object, a marionette: “Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta” (Rhys 100), since he is left without an identity of his own and is only seen as an object of Antoinette.

But Rhys complicates it even further, for she actually lets the husband understand that he is the objectified victim. Women usually are considered as objects, but the husband believes he is a bought object and that Antoinette has bought him, “I have not bought her, she has bought me” (Rhys 39) and he believes that Antoinette is complicit, “They bought me, me with your paltry money. You helped them do it. You deceived me, betrayed me, and you’ll do worse if you get the chance” (Rhys 111). This is confirmed by Spivak that claims, “Rhys makes it clear that he is a victim of the patriarchal inheritance law of entailment” (270). On
the other hand Olaussen argues that Antoinette is "used as an object of exchange" (99) since
the husband is given Antoinette’s fortune when they marry. This makes the husband the
subject and the wife the object. But, as has been shown, the husband feels that he is the object
of exchange, since he believes she pays him to become her husband, so the binary oppositions
are turned around making the husband feel like he is the object of his wife. This is reinforced
by Olaussen’s conclusion that Antoinette’s mother planned to marry her daughter to "a
wealthy man" (104) ever since the day she found Antoinette in Tia’s dirty dress and decided
she did not want her daughter to grow up like a white nigger. Moreover, according to the
husband, his father also sees his son as an object whose soul is for sale, “I have sold my soul
or you have sold it” (Rhys 39). Which turns the son and husband into merchandise in his own
eyes. This shows that the husband considers himself to be used as means to an end, which
makes him into the object of which Antoinette is the subject.7

Conclusion

Through a postcolonial view of Wide Sargasso Sea it has been examined how Jane Eyre may
be re-read and how the West Indian novel distances itself from the English novel until it
finally alienates the husband who is pictured as the Weak Other. Furthermore it has been
examined three ways in which the husband is marginalised by: zombification, feminisation,
and objectification.

As I hope to have shown through the interpretation of Wide Sargasso Sea that has been
carried out in the analysis, Rhys’ novel pictures the English unnamed husband as ‘Other’ to
the West Indian characters, separating him and making him different, weak and antipathetic.
This essay asserts that Rhys vindicates the Creole woman through the reversal of binary
oppositions: Bertha, the object “Other” in Jane Eyre, is made into the subject in Wide
Sargasso Sea whereas Jane’s Mr. Rochester becomes the unnamed object “Other” in Rhys’
story. Through the re-writing of *Wide Sargasso Sea* the atrocious Caribbean nature in *Jane Eyre* is reversed. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* it is the English nature that is described in negative terms. The former picture of the Caribbean as “Other” is turned around, making England into the “Other” as an answer to *Jane Eyre*. Hence, the English husband is made into the “Other” along with his country; in the same way Bertha is made into the “Other” in *Jane Eyre*. Since *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a West Indian novel, the coloniser is depicted as the European who wants to have the ultimate power, but, of course is “Other” to the West Indies, and is as part of a colonising nation destined to be weak.

From a postcolonial perspective the husband’s high status as a white Englishman is reversed with the help of the theories of the Manichean allegory and the reversal of binary oppositions. The husband is marginalised into a mere alien, “Other” to everybody else residing at Granbois. Again, to be made into a zombie is to be dehumanised which further is to be marginalised since he is outdistanced from the other characters surrounding him. England and the West Indies are projected into the characters of the husband and Antoinette and is with the theory of binary oppositions reversed, feminising what is masculine and vice versa. With this tactic the husband is presented in negative terms, an effeminate man who is the Weak Other to the people on the island just as he is made passive when his wife re-appropriates the narrative. In a binary opposition “passivity” is the negative binary of “activity”, which in its turn according to Cixous’ philosophical theory is related to man. In this case the husband represents passivity and is thus feminised. Evidently, if Antoinette as a woman is seen as a subject, in a reversed binary opposition, he as a man is considered to be the object, and the object is “Other” to the subject Antoinette and all other subject characters within *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Power relations are questioned and binary oppositions are turned around in the Caribbean, the destination of the unnamed husband, thus, turning him into the Weak Other binary.
The essay will now conclude with an idea for further research on the “Other” within the postcolonial field. It would be an interesting follow-up to this thesis to study how Jean Rhys’ self-pity as a marginalised white Creole in Europe might appear in *Wide Sargasso Sea* or in other of her fiction and how *she* might have considered herself as a different, excluded and marginalised “Other” both in the West Indies and in Europe. A good starting-point to this angle of approach is for example the all-embracing biography *Jean Rhys* by Carole Angier.
Notes

1 In *Jane Eyre* the mad Creole woman Bertha, who Rhys wanted to write a life and named Antoinette, has been locked up for ten years.

2 The British as colonisers and the Caribbean people as colonised. Antoinette is defined as West Indian and thus belong to the Colonised group, even if her ancestors actually belonged to the group of colonisers.

3 In *Jane Eyre* though, not in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

4 According to Antoinette “there are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about” (Rhys 81), meaning that in the first death the soul dies, and in the second death the body dies.

5 According to Antoinette “English women” called white Creole “white niggers” (Rhys 63).

6 Since he looses his sight in *Jane Eyre* just as Christophine predicts, ("I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place") 'You choose what you give, eh? Then you choose.' (Rhys 104).

7 In a subject/object binary opposition where the subject represents man and where object represent woman. Though this case is a reversed binary opposition where the female stands as subject to man as object.
Works Cited


