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**Bakalařská práce
ZOBRAZENÍ BRITSKÉHO IMPÉRIA V
ROMÁNECH JANA EYROVÁ A ŠIRÉ SARGASOVÉ
MOŘE**

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Bachelor Thesis
**REPRESENTATION OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE
IN JANE EYRE AND WIDE SARGASSO SEA**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

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ABSTRACT

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Representation of The British Empire in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Supervisor: PhDr. Magdaléna Potočňáková, Ph.D.

This thesis mainly focuses on the comparison of the main characters in two famous novels *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. In the novel *Jane Eyre*, the thesis will analyze the characters of Jane Eyre, Bertha Mason Rochester and the character of Mr. Rochester and in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* the characters of Antoinette Cosway and Mr. Rochester as well as in the novel *Jane Eyre* and it will introduce side characters as well. Both authors used numerous associations that concern The British Empire in their books following the most distinguished which are imperialism and colonialism. Both imperialism and colonialism can be found in the plot itself, in the main characters and side characters and their surroundings. The thesis focuses on the characters and their role in the stereotypical imperialist and colonized world and how the side character's behaviour affected the behaviour of the main characters who are Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway. This thesis also proves that the characters in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* happen to be linked a lot more with the main focus which is imperialism and colonialism.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis focuses on the comparison of the main characters in the novel *Jane Eyre* and their connection to the British Empire mainly colonialism and imperialism. In this novel, the thesis mainly focuses on the aspects of the characters that connects them with the second novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. These two novels are out of many novels that were influenced by the existence of the Empire. The author of this thesis selected this specific topic because of personal interests in the history and at the same time in the feminism and female rights. This attraction to the topic had helped to set the goal of the project: Which of these two novels contains characters that are more connected to The British Empire?

The thesis is divided into three main parts. The first part serves as an introduction of The British Empire itself. This part of the thesis is divided into the first phase of The British Empire, which is the period of time that ends in 1763 and into the second phase of The British Empire, which starts after the year of 1763.

The goal of the second part of this thesis is to introduce the novel *Jane Eyre*, author of this novel Charlotte Brontë and the plot of the novel. It focuses on the introduction of the main characters Jane Eyre, Mr. Rochester, Bertha Mason and St. John and their connection to the British Empire mainly colonialism and imperialism.

The third main part of the thesis is trying to outline not as famous novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This part presents the author of this novel as well as its main plot, but it mainly focuses on the characters such as Antoinette and Mr. Rochester and significant side characters. In this part, author of this thesis tried to compare Antoinette and Mr. Rochester with the main characters from the novel *Jane Eyre*.

When we look on England as a country, we will find the success the country had as one of the northwestern European colonizers on the Spanish possessions. As the article from Britannica suggests:

In 1623 the English occupied part of Saint Christopher (Saint Kitts), and in 1625 they occupied Barbados. By 1655, when Jamaica was captured from a small Spanish garrison, English colonies had been established in Nevis, Antigua, and Montserrat. France occupied the rest of Saint Kitts, took control of Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1635, and in 1697 formally annexed Saint-Domingue (Haiti), the western third of Hispaniola, which for about half a century had been occupied by buccaneers and French settlers. Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire, off the coast of present-day Venezuela,

and Sint Eustatius, Saba, and half of Saint Martin (Sint Maarten), in the northern group of the Lesser Antilles, became Dutch possessions in the 1630s, but more as part of the military strategy of the Dutch war of independence against Spain than in expectation of agricultural riches.

What played the most important role in European settlements in the West Indies was a transitory nature. England was not going to stay only and indelibly in the West Indian colonies, but the country took it as an adventure to return to Europe with fortunes that they made there. According to the article from Britannica:

Absenteeism became well established during the early 18th century, when many successful planters retired to Britain, leaving representatives in charge of their estates. These absentees were a crucial element in the West India Interest, a powerful lobby that brought together merchants from the major ports, planters, and parliamentarians. It was the West India Interest that engineered the Molasses and Sugar acts in the first half of the 18th century. These acts protected British West Indian sugar in the British market and increased the prosperity of the planters.

Hierarchical society that was built on “racial” differences and law was created upon the plantations and slavery. The most expanded population during the 17th century in West Indian society happened to be Europeans and their descendants which means “whites”. These people lived mainly freely, however some of them were workers that distributed a period of contract labour and enslaved Africans.

Miscegenation became more common in the 18th century society. Freedom became a reality for many children that were of mixed ethnicity. This turned out to be an intermediate sphere that obtained freedom for the “people of colour” and liberated “Blacks” (people of African descent). However, things were not black and white at that time. Only white people could enjoy full civil rights (by law and custom). People of African descent suffered a lot of legal mistakes that made almost impossible conditions for them. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022)

2 BRITISH EMPIRE AND ITS PHASES

2.1.1 The first phase of The British Empire

In a book by Kitchen (1996) we can find that Britain's colonies were mainly in America and the Caribbean but after the Treaty of Paris (this Treaty ended Seven Year's War) in 1763, these colonies were distributed worldwide. We can separate the periods into the "first" empire, which is the empire before 1763 and into the "second" empire, which is the empire after the year 1763. However, this dividing is artificial and somewhat misleading, but these terms can serve as shorthand reference.

Geography was the reason between the differences of the plantation colonies which were on the south and the Caribbean and the settlement colonies on north. These differences were not due to political institutions. Each and every American colony was treated as "dominion".

This category was based on the ancient distinction between the "realm" of England, Wales, and later Scotland and the "dominions" of Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands. Dominions were dependencies of the Crown that had their own assemblies, legal systems, and finances. Parliament in Westminster, however, legislated for them, even though they were not represented in it. (Kitchen, 1996, p. 1)

As we can read further in a book by Kitchen (1996), if we take this fact from a theoretical point of view, the citizens of the American colonies had the same status as the citizens of Ireland or Manx. The crown strengthened its power by transforming many colonies into fiefdoms. Charles I. for example granted Maryland to Lord Baltimore. Joint-stock companies have established some of the colonies, but soon after that were most of these colonies proved unprofitable and they started to be soon managed directly by the Crown.

In Britain there was no reasonable thought regarding how to manage the present circumstance. The Crown was surely answerable for the organization and safeguard of the settlements, yet unfortunately they did not choose minister or department of state to do as such. The Board of Trade and Plantations, set up in 1696, was intended to offer guidance to the Privy Council. Its president did not become a member of the Cabinet until 1768. No endeavor was put forth to co-ordinate the attempts of different divisions worried about provincial undertakings, like the Admiralty or the War Office, the Treasury or the Commissioners of Customs, the Board of Trade or the Post Office. Parliament never directed its concentration toward drafting a pilgrim constitution; truth be told, it only from time to time

meddled in provincial undertakings. Demonstrations of Parliament did not have any significant bearing to the states except if they were explicitly included, not even the prejudicial laws against Roman Catholics and Dissenters, so they delighted in far more religious toleration abroad than in Britain. In 1768 a Colonial Department was established. However, in an effort to save money the Colonial Department was then abolished. That the states had been left essentially to their own devices is the significant motivation behind why there was such a response in them when Parliament attempted to affirm its clout in 1763.

2.1.2 The second phase of The British Empire

As we can see in the article by Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2020, December 2), slave exchanging had started before Sierra Leone, yet that district did not turn into a British belonging until 1787. England procured the Cape of Good Hope (presently in South Africa) in 1806, and the South African inside was opened up by Boer and British pioneers under British control.

Practically all these early settlements emerged from the endeavor of specific organizations and magnates as opposed to from any exertion with respect to the English crown. The crown practiced a few privileges of arrangement and management, yet the states were basically self-overseeing ventures. The development of the domain was consequently a sloppy cycle dependent on piecemeal securing, now and then with the British government being the most un-willing accomplice in the undertaking.

According to this article, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the crown practiced power over its settlements predominantly in the territories of exchange and delivery. As per the mercantilist reasoning of the time, the provinces were viewed as a wellspring of fundamental crude materials for England and were conceded imposing business models for their items, like tobacco and sugar, in the British market. Consequently, they were required to lead all their exchange by methods for English boats and to fill in as business sectors for British fabricated products. The Navigation Act of 1651 and ensuing demonstrations set up a shut economy among Britain and its settlements; all provincial fares must be transported on English boats to the British market, and all frontier imports needed to stop via England. This plan went on until the joined impacts of the Scottish financial expert Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, the deficiency of the American provinces, and the development of a

streamlined commerce development in Britain gradually finished in the principal half of the nineteenth century.

The slave exchange procured a curious significance to Britain's pioneer economy in the Americas, and it turned into a financial need for the Caribbean settlements and for the southern parts of the United States, which they were to become in the future. Developments for the finish of bondage happened as expected in British provincial belongings some time before the comparative development in the United States; the exchange was canceled in 1807 and subjugation itself in Britain's domains in 1833.

3 JANE EYRE

This chapter will represent the impact that British Empire had on the characters and to their surroundings in the novel *Jane Eyre*. In the beginning of this chapter, we will look at the author of the novel *Jane Eyre* herself and summarize plot of this famous novel.

Charlotte Brontë (born on April 21, 1816, in Thornton in Yorkshire, England) was one of three English sisters (Anne and Emily) who had books published in the mid-1800s.

Her writing was, at that time, something utterly new for that society, it contained conflicts between “choosing freedom or love” and it touched issues such as struggles of the individual to preserve her or himself.

Charlotte Brontë’s second novel, *Jane Eyre*, was published in 1847 and it was an immediate success of the year. Charlotte at first used a pseudonym Currer Bell, however after some time people could find out the real author of the book.

While *Jane Eyre* is a work of fiction, there are many autobiographical aspects embedded within the story. Jane Eyre’s upbringing parallels of faith in many ways interweave with Charlotte Brontë’s. Both had incredibly difficult childhoods, Jane’s parents died when she was very young, while Brontë, at the age of five, lost her mother to cancer.

Despite her success as a writer, Charlotte Brontë continued to live a quiet life at home in Yorkshire. In 1854 she married Arthur Nicholls, a man who had once worked as an assistant to her father, but she died within a year of their marriage on March 31, 1855.

Brontë’s most significant novel tells the story of a young girl named Jane Eyre. Her whole life is something unpredictable, overwhelming situations are exchanged by happy news on daily basis for Jane.

Jane’s parents died when she was very young, so she became an orphan raised by her aunt, Mrs. Reed. However, Mrs. Reed didn’t love her very much, so she soon sent her to a Lowood school. Here, Jane met a girl named Helen Burns, who became her only friend. Unfortunately, Helen was seriously ill and died at Lowood School. Jane later becomes a teacher and finds a job in Thornfield, where she taught Mr. Rochester’s little girl named Adèle. Jane falls in love with Mr. Rochester and is supposed to have a wedding with him. But Mr. Rochester is unfortunately already married. That is where we first learn about Bertha Mason Rochester. Jane escapes and takes refuge from the priest St. John, who coincidentally is also her cousin. She still thinks about Mr. Rochester, so she goes to visit him. She is very

happy to see him again after a long time. Unfortunately, he lost his eye and hand in a fire in Thornfield, started by his mad wife Bertha, who died in the fire. The two were very happy to be together again and soon became a married couple.

Jane Eyre is a character who is never subjugated physically; however, she encounters psychological subjection for the duration of her life. We can see an example in the quote which is at the beginning of the novel. This quote suggests that Jane encountered subjection from early age of her life:

You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, Mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg; and not to live here with gentleman's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes that our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you the rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows. (Brontë, 2012, p. 8)

In this quote, Mrs. Reed (Mrs. Reed will be analyzed later in this chapter) is trying to humiliate Jane however, she is a very strong character who is only trying to “endure the blow” (Brontë, 2012, p. 8)

Jane is a character, who never lets her surroundings dictate her what she is supposed or not supposed to do, even though they are very persistent in doing so throughout the novel. Jane tries to oppose her mistreatment, and she is not that easily humiliated.

After Jane's uncle who lived in Madeira died, he left Jane twenty thousand pounds. Jane inherits it and she immediately decides to share her money evenly with all of her cousins. This allows Jane to limit the amount of fortune that her future husband will obtain. Her newfound wealth resolves in Jane's independence. Jane transforms a patriarchal inheritance into a means of establishing and sustaining kinship outside of conventional marriage and closer than bloodlines or common law would otherwise dictate. (Rappoport, J., 2014).

After Jane learns about Bertha, she loses both her inheritance and her groom for a moment and runs away from Thornfield. Only by inheriting her fortune between weddings, when the prospect of marriage is dim, is Jane able to distribute her uncle's wealth. (Rappoport, J., 2014)

As Jill Rappoport argues:

By redistributing her fortune, Jane challenges the primacy of her uncle's legal document and reverses his decision to amass family property for one heir. She also opposes the general cultural imperative to accumulate, rather than share, fortune during one's life; "it is contrary to all custom. (Rappoport, J., 2014).

Jane invests in three possible domestic arrangements before returning to the one she will share with Rochester. Instead of endowing her (future) husband with a fortune, she secures a "competency" for her cousins, allowing Mary and Diana to quit their positions as governesses, and subsidizing St. John's future missionary work. (Rappoport, J., 2014)

3.1.1 The character of Bertha Mason Rochester

When you read *Jane Eyre* for the first time, at the beginning of the novel (or even from the actual title of the novel) your thoughts are going to be set on the idea that the novel is about a lady named Jane Eyre and that the story is therefore about Jane Eyre only. This statement is not however completely true or correct. According to Thomas Tracy, "The centrality of the colonial motif in *Jane Eyre* has been well established. The figure of Bertha Mason Rochester haunting the text has made this centrality undeniable . . ." (Tracy, 2004)

Bertha should and must be the in a center of attention, if we want to address the British Empire and its effect on the novel. Bertha is a woman from West Indies, more accurately from Jamaica. However, the novel introduces this character after about a third of its action has taken place, and when she appears, anxieties which have been found somewhere else, prominently in the personality of Jane herself, started to be concentrated in the figure of Bertha.

What is essential is that Bertha Mason is Rochester's first wife and is presented as a violent and mad woman who came from an exotic land and could be considered by other "proper" English characters as a "wild animal". However, she is only portrayed through Rochester's eyes and Jane has distorted perception of Bertha, "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell." (Brontë, 2012, p. 215)

The words "it" and "beast" could be taken as an indication of a queerly imagery that English people had about "exotic" people living in, according to them, completely different worlds.

In order to get to know Bertha more, we need to see more details that surround her. She was raised in aristocratic British environment in, as was earlier mentioned, Jamaica. She was displayed to culture differences for almost entire of her life and that might have effected her mental health from an early age. Her identity is split between English woman and “Creole” and even she herself is not able to distinguish these two roles from each other.

She has been depicted as a "dark" or "swarthy" white lady and the story connects her with black population, especially with the black Jamaican abolitionist revolts, the Maroons. Nonetheless she is considered as someone who can be married to a proper English husband.

In Rochester's past before their marriage, when Bertha Mason was "a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark, and majestic," (Brontë, 2012, p. 223) there are traces of her race that could be understood as “not acceptable”. Following Rochester who sees Bertha as “tall, dark, and majestic (as already mentioned),” he proceeds "her family wished to secure me because I was of a good race" (Brontë, 2012, p. 223).

And as Tracy argues:

With regards to a settlement where blacks outnumbered whites by twelve to one, where it was a daily schedule and acknowledged practice for white farmers to drive female captives to turn into their "concubines," and where whites were thusly precariously mindful of the huge populace of mulattoes, Rochester's expression gathers an importance past its nearby reference to his old family name. (Tracy, T., 2004, p. 252)

Bertha’s characteristic as a “dark” woman arises in the novel several of times. Her darkness is made more direct when Jane sees her, and Rochester is trying to persuade her (and maybe briefly himself) that it was all in Jane’s mind.

Fearful and ghastly to me – oh sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face – it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!

“Ghosts are usually pale, Jane.”

“This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brows furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over bloodshot eyes.” (Brontë, 2012, p. 208).

Brontë does not portray Bertha as human being. In *Jane Eyre* we can only see Bertha as an inferior and violent savage. We cannot see her sufferings; Brontë only considered her madness as the result of her genetic heritage. She only represents British fears of both foreigners and women. Rochester is firstly attracted to her exotic sensuality but soon repulsed by it.

3.1.2 The character of Mr. Rochester

Rochester is a character whom Brontë presents as an example of proper Englishman. He is the master of Thornfield Hall and fosters a young girl named Adele Varens.

However, Brontë characterizes Rochester also as a manipulative individual who tells stories of how he was poor, innocent man who did not know what he was supposed to do with a woman such as his first wife Bertha. He is also portrayed as unpredictable because of his “games” that he often plays with Blanche Ingram and Jane. He makes them to believe he is interested in both of them and manipulates them. He often makes Jane feel like she is less than him, yet on the other hand often shows her his vulnerable side, “You-you strange, you almost unearthly thing!-I love as my own flesh. You-poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are-I entreat to accept me as a husband.” (Brontë, 2012, p. 187). “Good-night, my-‘ He stopped, bit his lip, and abruptly left me.” (Brontë, 2012, p. 131)

The parallels which can be then find between Rochester and British imperial history are once more recognizable in a scene which happens right before Jane finds out of Bertha’s existence, when he tries to justify his own behaviour:

Well then, Jane ... suppose you were ... a wild boy ... imagine yourself in a remote foreign land; conceive that you there commit a capital error, no matter of what nature or from what motives, but one whose consequences must follow you through life and taint all your existence. Mind I don't say a crime ... my word is error. The result of what you have done become in time to utterly insupportable; you take measures to obtain relief. (Brontë, 2012, p. 159)

Even in Jamaica, the setting of Rochester’s journey to “espouse his bride,” Rochester describes the country as being bizarre and unpleasant, almost like another planet.

Jamaica for him seems as something inferior to Britain because it is foreign and different.

... it was a fiery West Indian night; one of the description that frequently precede the hurricanes of those climates. Being unable to sleep in bed, I got up and opened the

window. The air was like sulphur-stream – I could find no refreshment anywhere. Mosquitoes came buzzing in and hummed sullenly round the room; the sea, which I could hear from thence, rumbled dull like an earthquake-black clouds were casting up over it; the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red, like a hot cannon-ball – she threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest. I was physically influenced by the atmosphere. (Brontë, 2012, p. 224)

Rochester resolves to go back to his England to “be clean” in his own eyes by leaving the site of colonial oppression, under the influence of “the sweet wind from Europe,”

A wind fresh from Europe blew over the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, streamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure. I then framed and fixed a resolution. (Brontë, 2012, p. 225)

The idea of conquering is shown in the novel as well, and we can perceive Rochester’s character as some kind of “conqueror” and he can be seen as “conquered” at the same time. Brontë utilizes Mr. Rochester and Jane's relationship to stress the common control every individual applies on the other, to accentuate the uniformity of the relationship.

I never met your likeness. Jane, you please me, and you master me-you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twinning the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. **I am influenced – conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win.** (Brontë, 2012, p. 191)

In this quote, we can find Mr. Rochester’s confession. He is saying that even though he himself is considered to be a conqueror, he can also be conquered by others, in this case by Jane. She conquered his heart, she conquered him.

3.1.3 The character of St. John

The real name of St. John, which is a name he is often referred to, is John Rivers. He helps Jane during her later sufferings and for that, he is rather important character in this novel and when we read onwards to the book, we learn that he is also a cousin of Jane. At first, St. John seems as a genuine and sincere person but later we can find out, he is rather cold than warm in heart.

St. John is a “pretty” looking man, some would even say handsome, therefore his looks suggest moral and intellectual superiority, “St. John dresses well. He is a handsome man: tall, fair, with blue eyes, and a Grecian profile.” (Brontë, 2012, p. 320)

His character seems almost perfect at first glance however, Jane is not completely fooled by him from the start and soon she spots his coldness that is hidden under his calm appearance, “To me, he was in reality become no longer flesh, but marble; his eye was a cold, bright, blue gem; his tongue a speaking instrument – nothing more.” (Brontë, 2012, p. 298)

At the end he decides to become a missionary and wants Jane to accompany him on the mission. Jane, however, refuses his offer, both to accompany him and to marry him.

As readers we can say that the character of St. John is a clear example of the imperialistic ideal of his time. Saint John’s mission to India is where we can, for example, experience colonial theme in the novel *Jane Eyre*.

In India, his main aim is to reform the values of the pagans. He bases his colonialist impulses on violence, brutality, and power and not on mutual understanding or compassion. As Thomas Tracy states:

St John’s relationship with Jane is doubly oppressive because she not only lives under his roof, but in his position as clergyman he is also her spiritual guide (and in this his relationship to Jane parallels that which England hoped to establish with India through evangelising missions such as the one upon which he embarks). Their relationship is thus marked by his outright lies, misrepresentations and bullying attempts to subjugate her. (Tracy, T., 2004, p. 69)

And we can also see an example in a quote from the novel:

He wants to simply oppress other populations. His cold temper is giving the impression of his view of Imperialism. Jane even describes his nature as “austere and despotic”. (Brontë, 2012, p. 297)

In the next quote, which we can find on the page 259, we can see another example in Diana’s saying. Diana is one of the sisters of St. John and she is also Jane’s cousin:

St. John looks quiet, Jane; but he hides a fever in his vitals. You would think him gentle, yet in some things he is inexorable as death; and the worst of it is, my conscience will hardly permit me to dissuade him from his severe decision: certainly, I

cannot for a moment blame him for it. It is right, noble, Christian: yet it breaks my heart! (Brontë, 2012, p. 259)

We can see another example in a quote on the page 263, which is directly from a mouth of St. John himself:

A year ago I was myself intensely miserable, because I thought I had made a mistake in entering the ministry; its uniform duties wearied me to death. I burned for the more active life of the world—for the more exciting toils of a literary career—for the destiny of an artist, author, orator; anything rather than that of a priest...After a season of darkness and struggling, light broke and relief fell; my cramped existence all at once spread out to a plain without bounds—my powers heard a call from Heaven to rise...God had an errand for me... (Brontë, 2012, p. 263)

St. John is a perfect example of a person who has the British empire believes and views of the world even though he is at the end misguided by his own eager sense of Christianity. St. John sees the Indians as someone he can apply his British values on, and he sees them as an inferior race and with that, he lacks attentiveness and sympathy towards the people he is allegedly helping, “Firm, faithful, and devoted, full of energy, and zeal, and truth, he labor’s for his race; he clears their painful way to improvement...” (Brontë, 2012, p. 329)

In these next quotes by St. John we can feel his intentions which are more or less influenced by the British Empire because as it was mentioned, people who were a part of The British Empire where religious and had many religious opinions, or in another words, they were influenced by their religion:

I am the servant of an infallible Master. I am not going under human guidance...It seems strange to me that all round me do not burn to enlist under the same banner, – to join in the same enterprise. (Brontë, 2012, p. 291)

God and nature intended you for a missionary’s wife. It is not personal but mental endowments they have given you; you are formed for labor, not love. A missionary’s wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine; I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service. (Brontë, 2012, p. 292)

Jane believes his Christian views are firm and that his faithfulness outpaces what his faith requires him to do. Susa L. Meyer argues:

St. John, who wants to force Jane into an unequal marriage and to take her to the unhealthy atmosphere of British India (both of which she says would kill her), to help him preach his rather different values of hierarchy and domination to dark-skinned people. Jane recognizes this difference in mentality and their incompatibility when St. John fails to appreciate (for example) her house-cleaning: “this parkour is not his sphere,” she realizes, “the Himalayan ridge, or Caffre bush, even the plague-cursed Guinea Coast swamp, would suit him better. (Brontë, 2012, p. 285; Meyer, 1990, p. 265)

Jane thinks that these views are the reason for his wishes of an obliging and submissive wife, however she refuses his proposal to become his wife, so he goes to India as I mentioned earlier.

4 WIDE SARGASSO SEA

This chapter will focus on the representation of the British Empire in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, more importantly on the characters in which the direct representation of it occurs. Furthermore, we will once again discuss the life of the author Jean Rhys herself and we will talk about the plot of *Wide Sargasso Sea* more thoroughly.

Jean Rhys was born to a Creole mother of Scottish and Irish descent and to a Welsh doctor on 24 August 1890 as Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams in Roseau, Dominica, the West Indies.

In her later work she included her memories from her childhood, and it had a big influence on the development of her most famous book *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

In 1907 she moved to England with her aunt so she could attend a school in Cambridge, and for her it was a rather radical change in life. Later she wanted to pursue her dream which was an acting school and she eventually made it happen and started to attend academy of Dramatic Arts.

In 1908 her father died, (because of him she could attend this school due to his financial support) and she had to leave the Academy and began to work as a chorus girl in a theatrical group.

Later in her life she moved to Paris with her husband and started to pursue a writing career. She met an English writer and editor Ford Madox Ford there and he helped her renew her love for books. She was later introduced to French literature and eventually started her writing career.

As it was mentioned earlier, Rhys drew an inspiration from her colourful life full of unsettlement, she was always on the move, with no roots to return to, she always felt like a foreigner everywhere. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a primary example of this topic and although Jean Rhys is known to be an author of many considerably important novels, such as *Good Morning, Midnight, Voyage in the Dark* and others, *Wide Sargasso Sea* became the most debated and successful one. The direct association with the story of *Jane Eyre*, that was written by an author with such significance as Charlotte Brontë, caused recognition of the novel throughout the whole world. However, *Wide Sargasso Sea* established itself well as a stand-alone novel in literary history.

It is known that the initial attempt to write *Wide Sargasso Sea* is dated to the time after release of *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1939 when Jean Rhys got a copy of the novel *Jane Eyre* from her husband. *Jane Eyre* reminded her of her memories from her past and she got the urge and reason to write about Bertha Mason.

However, in 1939 Jean Rhys disappeared from the literary world but she never stopped writing her novel and during the Second World War she wrote almost a whole planned version which was titled *Le Revenant*. This version was however burnt because of a fight which happened with her husband and unfortunately, the story was neglected for a while.

In 1957 she decided to step into the light of the world again. She answered to a “calling” from the BBC who asked for information about her. *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published in 1966 and despite the initial obstacles that Rhys unfortunately had to undergo during her life, (it took her years to be published as we can see) it was eventually finished successfully.

Wide Sargasso Sea is a novel which can be read in so many approaches, we can understand it as feminist, post-colonial or other, however the most distinct approach to understand the book is as a reflection of an author’s life that can be seen in the story. *Wide Sargasso Sea* can influence further generations and it carries a remarkable legacy.

Jean Rhys died on 14 May 1979, she was 88 years old. She never completed her autobiography which was later then, nevertheless, posthumously published under the title *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*.

Wide Sargasso Sea is a novel that discusses Antoinette Cosway who is inspired by Charlotte Brontë’s Bertha Mason who is one of the characters in one of the key works of the 19th century, *Jane Eyre*. Rhys masterfully processes the story that “preceded” the romantic bond between the owner of the Thornfield estate, Rochester, and the poor teacher Jane. The hazy figure of the “crazy woman in the attic” hidden from the eyes of the world here takes the form of the charming and passionate creole Antoinette Cosway, who is forced by circumstances to marry a man with whom he has little in common. Against the background of captivating tropical nature, the story of alienation stemming from the insurmountable traumas of childhood, mutual misunderstanding and emotional cruelty, a story that also tells of the clash of cultures at the turn of historical epochs and which ultimately results in tragedy.

To completely understand the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, let's firstly have a look on a historical context that guides the plot. Firstly, Sargasso Sea is located in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle in the central North Atlantic and it has colorful history, both full of tormented society and nourishing civilization.

The transatlantic slave trade was increased in the Caribbean in between the years 1518 and 1870 and the agriculture business of the Caribbean started to be dominated by sugarcane. This situation escalated into shipping of numerous African citizens to the island to replace those who had come before them (as a fact between the years 1811 and 1834, the slave trade accounted for about thirty-two thousand additional people being brought to the islands each year) (Encyclopedia.com., 2022) the aim for these unfortunate people was to provide free labor for the white population which resulted in chances to gather more money for them. Beside these factors, this situation created a majority of people of black origins in the Caribbean islands

In 1807 a bill to abolish the slave trade was established because of antislavery societies in Britain, however slavery was not abolished until 1834 in the British Empire also including the Caribbean islands. To replace the free slave labor, many landowners imported indentured workers from Asia and India. Although these people had legal contracts, they fared not much better than the African slaves they replaced. In the meantime, sugar prices fell due to competition from other countries, and a large population of freed slaves was unemployed. Many freed slaves formed their own villages, some of them squatting on abandoned lands and growing the same crops their former owners had raised in addition to new crops such as coconuts, rice, and bananas. (Encyclopedia.com., 2022).

In 1833 the Emancipation Act proclaimed the possible and eventual opportunity of freedom of the slaves in the entirety of the British colonies and the racial conflict and social and economic turmoil that encompassed it

In 1834 slavery was finally abolished in the British Empire as mentioned above and unfortunately white people became minority in the Caribbean, and they were being divided according to their wealth (rich whites and poor whites). Plantations were the primary source of wealth, so their owners became the elite of the rich whites, they were the former slave owners. Next came the white merchants, government officials, and professionals such as doctors. The poor whites included owners of small farms, laborers, and service people, such as policemen. No matter how much money a white person had, any white person of European

descent gained a privileged position over black people. The black population consisted of free persons of color, freed slaves, and slaves. Economically, most black people during this time found themselves at the bottom of the list. (Encyclopedia.com., 2022).

The British Empire and its signs can be found all throughout the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It is a book about a girl who is of white ancestors and lives in a land full of people of color after all. *Wide Sargasso Sea* symbolizes social and political worries that got vital to postcolonial hypothesis during the 1980s and at the same time this novel is offering voice to the mad Creole Bertha Mason, a character which is depicted in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. This reworking of the famous novel by Brontë became a vital illustration of how the “Empire writes back” to the imperial centres of Europe.

In the culture of the 19th century, there were two essential purposes, to have children and to take care of the family. However, Rhys rewrites literary history because she preserved Bertha’s values as a critique of imperialism. Imperialism can rob people of their cultural identity and even of their entire identity as a person.

The main character Antoinette does not think the same way as a culture in the 19th century wants her to think (the correct way of thinking is mentioned above). (Even though she was supposed to become Bertha who is a “good wife” to her husband, she fails to fulfill this task, and this brings Jane Eyre into the whole picture. Jane is supposed to fill-out the role Bertha was supposed to fulfill.)

This Creole girl who grew up in Jamaica during Emancipation is trapped between English settler and black native. She lacks identity and is unfortunately direct embodiment of many stereotypes that the British had towards the families who worked on plantations and Creole individuals. Her absence of identity mirrors the disarray and confusion that people who owned the plantations and Creole people experienced after the emancipation.

Rhys tries to “cancel” the idea of possible binary black-white relations and it is depicted through insults. One is on the page 21 as “white cockroach” and other we can find on page 39 as “black Englishmen”.

Since Bertha is an illustration of a nation that has been forcefully taken over by imperialist nations, we can also describe, as almost beastly, it is an interpretation that is used in *Jane Eyre*. She is more like an animal or creature to the Europeans, than human.

In these next subchapters a few characters will be introduced to bring the issue of British Empire closer.

4.1.1 Antoinette the “mad” woman

To put this chapter into motion and precisely define the race of the main character, let's start with what can catch your attention first. It was the people of white skin who are labeled in this novel as “white cockroaches” (Rhys, 2007, p. 20). When we first start to read this text, we can be confused with the racial status of this main character Antoinette. She is a little mystery. However, after reading this “label”, readers can establish their thoughts. According to John J. Su, readers may have difficulty in recognizing the storyteller's position inside the social and racial hierarchies. Now that we have an abrupt idea of the main character, let's talk a little more about her.

The character that Antoinette represents, is confusing but at the same time alarming. She is connected to wealth but on the other hand to madness. Her mother was a mad woman but what makes people think she is going to be mad too.

As it was once mentioned she does not think the same way as women in the 19th century. It is being mentioned again because Antoinette is the exact opposite of this stereotype which is very important for this novel. She is free-spirited and her soul breathes dreamer to the air, which means she would not be probably able to fulfill this task properly even if she wanted to.

After her husband is determined though, her aura starts to change. She starts to become Bertha who is a “good wife” to her husband. She starts to be trapped between English settler and black native as well as starts to lack identity. She makes fun of England on one hand ““Oh, England, England,’ she called back mockingly” (Rhys, 2007, p. 65) on the other hand claims that she is “glad to be like an English girl” (Rhys, 2007, p. 33).

Antoinette is unfortunately direct embodiment of many other stereotypes that the British had towards the families who worked on plantations and Creole people. Her absence of identity mirrors the disarray and confusion that people who owned the plantations and Creole people experienced after the emancipation.

Let's mention Coco the bird as well in this chapter because it can make a mark in some and it is connected to Antoinette. His wings are clipped, and he is imprisoned like

Antoinette will soon be. Even before she became Bertha, she felt imprisoned in Coulibri Estate. The bird could be a metaphor for Antoinette's feelings and faith.

4.1.2 Rochester the "saviour"

Now let's turn the attention to the character of Mr. Rochester. He is not unfortunately properly introduced in this novel and the understanding of his character can be difficult.

To briefly introduce this character, he is Antoinette's English husband, and he is the youngest son of a rich Englishman. His older brother inherits his father's estate and that is why Rochester travels to the West Indies.

From the first mentions of the husband of Antoinette one can say that this character is relatable as well as Antoinette's character is. For someone who is white and lives in Europe, this character is very familiar and not that much of a "bad guy". However, he is supposed to mimic the ideal of a British man, the colonizer, who is always in control of the situation and this role that hangs upon him is sooner or later unfortunately fulfilled.

After a while, when we get the chance to meet Rochester more thoroughly, we come across his tendency to own and control the land in Jamaica. This is the primer representation of the imperialist and colonial outlook in him. He sees everyone as not trustworthy, but rather as naïve savages.

As it was mentioned before, Antoinette is a dreamer, and almost an innocent girl at the beginning of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who does not know much about the cruel world that is around her and Mr. Rochester is aware of this fact. At the beginning of their relationship, some may come to thought, that he will change, that some of her innocents and pure spirit can, and will change his outlook on "proper Englishness". However, he does not appreciate Antoinette as his treatment, which Antoinette receives from him all through *Wide Sargasso Sea* demonstrates imperialistic force in him.

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, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did (Rhys, 2007, p. 86).

His outlook does not change a fact that Antoinette is different, and she could fall in love with him very easily.

Rochester in *Jane Eyre* is the only connection to Bertha, here known as Antoinette, and that could be taken as a manipulation from him towards her. Jane does not know anything about her and every little thing that is provided to her is through, like it was said, Rochester.

Bertha is not allowed to talk or to give her version of events or opinions in *Jane Eyre*. She is just a side character which we learn about later in the novel, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be read as a novel that is offering voice to Bertha. However, the problem further is that the novel features inconsistencies especially around Rhys' own potentially racist portrayals of Afro-Caribbeans. According to Veronica Marie Gregg, Rhys' novel fails in representation of colonized person because of her only one creole character. Same as *Jane Eyre*'s Afro-Caribbean Bertha Mason, Antoinette's narrative voice is being silenced in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as it was already mentioned.

Rochester also narrates part two of the novel, however as John J. Su suggests: "readers never know with complete certainty whether the second narrator is in fact Rochester." (Su, 2015, p. 179) As it was said at the beginning, Rochester is not properly introduced in the novel but if readers are familiar with the plot, this does not cause a big confusion.

Mr. Rochester is well known in the literary world and originally yes, he could be considered as a positive character. However, a direct example can be seen here in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and that is, he is more of a negative figure.

4.1.3 Significant Minor Female Characters

This chapter focuses on the significant minor female characters in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In this chapter, the connection between Antoinette and other characters will be provided as well as their own connection to The British Empire.

Christophine is the one whose voice opens the novel; she is the one who teaches Antoinette about the world and explains her to the readers. Same with Antoinette, readers can be confused at the beginning of the novel about what race Christophine belonged to. Only later are readers informed that Christophine is much blacker than the other Afro-Caribbeans in the island.

As pointed out by John J. Su, Christophine stands out in the novel in every respect – she is described as physically different (taller and darker), she possesses a strong voice from the first paragraph of the novel, she is an obeah practitioner treated with respect and fear and is seemingly unafraid of white authority.

Mentioning Christophine in this chapter can be considered wise because she is a representation of a character which opposes British Empire and its practices. She is a proud woman who does not like to be dictated what to do and what not to do.

Annette Cosway is a widow and more importantly Antoinette's mother. We get to know her right at the beginning of the novel. She is a white woman, and she was born on Martinique, Jamaica which caused her exclusion by the native black Jamaicans because her ancestry is slave-owners.

After her husband died, she began to sink in debt. With Annette we discover Antoinette's brother as well, he is sick and mentally handicapped and Annette gives him most of her attention, making her relationship with her daughter very distant and cold: "She pushed me away, not roughly, but coldly, calmly, without a word" (Rhys, 2007, p. 18). In this previous quote we can hear Antoinette's point of view on her mother.

Later in her life Annette married a very rich man Mr. Mason because she wanted to help her family in the wake of Emancipation. She feels lonely and persecuted most of the time. These feelings and partially Mr. Mason's failure to listen to her warnings about the anger of the black residents at his shows of wealth, causes her mental breakdown.

Annette tries to identify with the European whites and upper classes and as Li Luo said:

"The European whites estrange from them since their home countries consider them inferior, believing that their pure blood of the superior Europe has been contaminated by the natives on the island. They are regarded as outsiders by both the blacks and the whites and are caught in between" (Luo, 2018, p. 1224)

She never felt part of black nor white people. She felt, as I have already mentioned, excluded from society all her life.

Tia is Antoinette's Afro-Caribbean friend and playmate since their childhood and she is the daughter of Maillotte, black servant of Antoinette. One day, when Tia and Antoinette are swimming at the water pool, Tia steals Antoinette's dress and pennies and with that she betrays her trust. Antoinette then doesn't see her for a long time. Then finally after a big fire that occurs at Antoinette's home, two no longer friends see each other again. Antoinette tries to approach Tia, but Tia throws a jagged rock at her. As John Su says:

“... she [Antoinette] can articulate why she feels connected to Tia, but she cannot recognise that Tia might not share her feelings ... the discontinuity between what the novel uses a character to signal and what that character herself can discern become central to the reading experience. The poignancy of this discontinuity becomes acute when Tia responds to Antoinette by throwing a rock at her. Antoinette cannot register the act of violence immediately, noting: ‘I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass’ (Su, 2015, p. 45).”

Veronica Marie Gregg then continues:

“Tia functions in this scene not as a human being able to articulate her own needs or motivations but as a means to certify the genuineness of Antoinette’s feelings. But Antoinette’s feelings signal her limited perspective, against which readers are invited to interpret the text: the narrative focalises attention through the perspective of a girl who understands neither the rage felt by post-Emancipation Afro-Caribbeans nor even the abandonment felt by other Creoles.”

Tia for example reflects what we can call Antoinette’s black native side. The question is though, why is not Tia “selfed” and has to be mirrored. That can be a direct result of English Imperialism. A personality which Tia has, as a girl who is disloyal and manifesting the corrupting power of money, cannot be allowed in English Imperialism.

Amelie is a young, lovely, half-cast female servant who visits Granbois with Antoinette and Mr. Rochester which is their honeymoon. She also exudes mischievousness which unsettle Antoinette and Mr. Rochester. She gets slapped by Antoinette later on because of a witty remark, however Amelie slaps her back right away and calls her a “white cockroach”. She then sleeps with Mr. Rochester and according to Barbara Bush:

“In the West Indies, sexual relationships between black and coloured women and white men were widespread, commonplace and generally accepted by the plantocracy to be an integral part of the social structure of the islands” (Bush, 1990, p. 11).

and Laura E. Ciolkowski continues:

“And not all slave women remained illegitimate mistresses of white masters. Some actually married white plantation owners and, if the law allowed it. Were able to legitimize their children, ironically bastardizing the English “race” still further in the

eyes of the English community at home. When Rochester compares his wife to the “half-cast” (Rhys, 2007, p. 59) servant girl, Amelie – “For a moment she looked very much like Amelie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It’s possible, it’s even probable in this damned place” (Rhys, 2007, p. 115) – he puts his English horror of such couplings clearly on display.”

After that Amelie states that she will marry a rich man and leaves the newlyweds and goes to Rio by herself.

These side characters had a major role in the main character’s (Antoinette) life; therefore they are playing very important role in the whole novel. However, their significance does not stop here. Their connection with The British Empire is explicit, we can even say major for the plot, evolution and soul of the book’s main theme.

The characters mentioned above are established to represent British Empire and their “role” is well accomplished. They are believable and relatable. All in all, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is mapping out numerous fights over what will consider as the way things are and opposes English imperial common sense. Rhys plays out these fights on the “territory” of *Jane Eyre*, and simultaneously agrees and disagrees with Charlotte Brontë’s nineteenth-century canonical narrative of English womanhood. However, Rhys doing that is nothing unexpected, but more preferably, this explicitly intertextual battles have helped to place Rhys inside a postcolonial literary tradition that is explicitly keen on changing the fiction of English empire for Rhys’ critical readers. As Helen Tiffin contends:

Understandably, it has become the project of post-colonial writing to investigate European textual capture of places and peoples and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment. Post-colonial refusals of the interpellated subject position take place, appropriately, through that original avenue of interpellation-textuality-and a mapping and dismantling of particular, canonically enshrined imperial texts constitute a major part of post-colonial writing: re-writing of *The Tempest* by writers from Australia and particularly Canada, the West Indies, and Africa; of *Robinson Crusoe* by Marcus Clarke, J. M. Coetzee, and Samuel Selvon; of *Heart of Darkness* by many writers; and perhaps most famous of all, Jean Rhys’ re-writing of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. (Brydon, Tiffin, 1993, p. 20)

Wide Sargasso Sea is a solid occurrence of a mode of postcolonial literary opposition. Rhys writes back to the imperial logics and commonsense structures in which Brontë’s

content is delivered and consumed and not exclusively to Brontë. Her investigation into the historical backdrop of specific sorts of social differences and the processes by which English and colonial subjects are separated thusly agitates both the new liberal-feminist story of *Jane Eyre* and the bigger colonialist enterprise in which it is so vigorously contributed.

5 CONCLUSION

This thesis also offers an insight into a brilliant, creative, extraordinary, and remarkable life of each author whose backgrounds significantly affected both of the mentioned stories. Before that the thesis provides glance at the history of The British Empire and its phases.

The thesis also briefly introduces both of the novels and at the same time reveals the mutual bond, that is, the fact that *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be considered a story with a storyline which precedes Jane Eyre's own unique storyline, depicting the fate of Rochester's crazy wife Bertha. At the same time Rhys' intention in writing the novel, which she conceived as postcolonial, with mentioning Brontë's feminist response, through which she defends Bertha and questions her alleged madness and offers readers the opportunity to look at the story from the character's point of view, who is in the novel *Jane Eyre* forever silenced and critically condemned.

Then the thesis proceeds with the main analyses of both works, mainly focusing on the characters and their roles in The British Empire. The analysis emphasizes both main female characters as well as both main male characters, Jane Eyre and Bertha/Antoinette and Mr. Rochester and the thesis also compares all of these characters.

Charlotte Brontë is rightfully famous for her novels. Her characters contain believability and sense of empathy, and we can say the same about Jean Rhys. Jean Rhys took two very famous characters and showed their sides that were hidden to the world by Charlotte Brontë. Rhys's novel and overall approach that she took with the characters is something new and not common for contemporary authors.

Both Antoinette and Jane are inspirational female heroines that can both stand for themselves. Antoinette is an innocent girl whose dreams and ideals get crushed under the weight of the world. Bertha is, on the other hand, portrayed as a weak, lonely, and ill creature who cannot stand for herself or anybody else. She lost all her strength and thinking that times in Jamaica during The British Empire occupation gave her.

Mr. Rochester is a character who is painted as someone worthy of the title "hero" in the novel *Jane Eyre*. He is honorable and perfect gentleman. We cannot find as many signs of the influence that could The British Empire leave in him. However, in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we can find a change in his persona. He suddenly becomes a person no one

ever expected - rude, demanding and controlling. As readers, we are truly challenged to find similarities between these two characters.

To answer the main question of the thesis, characters in the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* are obviously more connected to The British Empire and their “effect” on the society at that time is very major for people who decided to read it. Especially female characters who are strong, and from the point of view of feminist, timeless. Jean Rhys made a major impression on many readers who are seeking history of colonialism, imperialism, strong female characters, racial and overall injustice in the society of that time. Needless to say, for those who are seeking answers for the history of the two famous characters Bertha and Mr. Rochester and their differences between Rhys’s portrayal and Brontë’s portrayal.

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SUMMARY IN CZECH

Tato práce se zaměřuje především na srovnání hlavních postav dvou slavných románů *Jana Eyrová* od Charlotte Brontëové a *Širé Sargasové moře* od Jean Rhysové. V románu *Jana Eyrová* bude práce analyzovat postavy Jany Eyrové, Berthy Mason Rochesterové a postavu pana Rochesterera. V románu *Širé Sargasové moře* budou analyzované postavy Antoinetty Coswayové a pana Rochesterera (stejně jako v románu *Jana Eyrová*) a budou zde také představeny vedlejší postavy románu. Obě autorky použily ve svých knihách četné asociace, které se týkají Britského impéria, kde nejvýraznějšími jsou imperialismus a kolonialismus. Imperialismus i kolonialismus nalezneme v samotné zápletce, také je můžeme pocítit v hlavních a vedlejších postavách a jejich okolí. Práce se zaměřuje na postavy a jejich roli ve stereotypním imperialistickém a kolonizovaném světě a na to, jak chování vedlejších postav ovlivnilo to hlavních postav, kterými jsou Jana Eyrová a Antoinette Coswayová. Tato práce také dokazuje, že postavy v románu *Širé Sargasové moře* jsou mnohem více spjaty s hlavním zaměřením práce, kterým je imperialismus a kolonialismus.