

Critique of "woman as storyteller in wide sargasso sea assignment

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Source Roper, Valerie. Woman as Storyteller in Wide Sargasso Sea.

Caribbean Quarterly, 34: 1/2 (1988: Mar. /June) p. 19 URL: <http://pao.chadwyck.com/PDF/1319462795559.pdf>

Summary In her article, " Woman as Storyteller in Wide Sargasso Sea" Valerie Roper asserts that Antoinette is much more than just a narrator. Antoinette tells the story of her life but also illuminates the plight and circumstances of women as increasing self awareness dawns. The duality of Antoinette's identity represents the war within women as they struggle to assimilate their own desires, beliefs, and values with those of the paternalistic society in which they live.

Roper asserts that Wide Sargasso Sea is an attempt by Antoinette to look back and figure out where things went wrong. When did her downward spiral begin? As Antoinette tells her story, she does so with insight and understanding than can only come from time and reflection. Antoinette does not just recount her life, she also relives it. " Through her consciousness she retraces with brutal honesty her psychological journey from isolation to disintegration," (Roper 19).

Roper further contends that Antoinette as the storyteller enabled Rhys to use varying degrees of consciousness to illustrate Antoinette's journey and revelations. According to Roper, Antoinette's relationship with her mother is the crux of her illness both genetically and psychologically. Her withdrawal, like her mother's was a catalyst for her mental instability, but other factors existed as well. Roper discusses elements and scenes that Antoinette revisits which were important in her development, and ultimately in her unraveling.

The road to insanity was much more insidious for Antoinette than it had been for Annette. There were tragic, life-altering events that obviously impacted Annette's mental condition; the death of her husband, isolation from Creole society, and ultimately Pierre's diagnosis. For Antoinette, her mother and childhood, cultural background, psychological invasion, disorientation, and entrapment all played a pivotal role in Antoinette's insanity. Response Roper provides an interesting context in which to interpret Rhys' novel. Perhaps one of the more striking assertions by Roper was regarding point of view.

Roper maintains that the parts of the story told from the male point-of-view are a different level of Antoinette's consciousness. I had not looked at it that way before and it certainly gives me pause. I had looked at it as a writing technique used by Rhys to deepen meaning and create a more balanced picture. Considering the information provided as revelations made by Antoinette on her search for answers injects a new level of complexity to the story and to Antoinette's character. As a reader, I immediately picked up on the connection between Antoinette's relationship with her mother and mental state. Roper, however, dove much deeper.

She makes a compelling case that "the society, and her husband, acting on their assumptions, created conditions which aggravated the existing ones and contributed to her disorientation," (Roper 30). The genetic predisposition for insanity was there, but it was the environment around Antoinette that pushed her over the edge. Antoinette struggled not only for love and acceptance, but also for psychological independence and her own voice. The more she struggles to claim these, the deeper she drifted into abyss. Roper's

most significant argument, for me, is the purpose of Antoinette as storyteller and the role of Rhys.

She writes, “ behind Antoinette’s dramatic re-experiencing is Rhys the producer and director, the puppeteer who manipulates her puppet to tell the tragic story of a woman who was aware of complexity but was unable to realize her real feminine personality” (Roper 33). While there were similarities between the lives of Rhys and the character she created, Roper’s argument made me consider the more universal story Rhys was telling. Through Antoinette, Rhys challenges the impact of patriarchy on women. It reveals far more than simply rule by men; it illuminates the internal struggle to find self.

Further Research Since a great deal of Antoinette’s struggle’s deal with her search for identity and acceptance, additional research on Creole society and emancipation add another layer of comprehension to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It would further develop the sense of society and the interaction of whites and blacks, but it would also provide context for the journey of discovery and self-awareness that Roper asserts is a vital part of the underlying theme throughout the novel. Historical information would fill in the blanks about the role of England on Jamaican society and the natives’ reaction to it.