

# Wide sargasso sea animals essay



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Wide Sargasso Sea. Jane Rhys portrays the life of a young creole woman, named Antoinette, who lives on the Caribbean island of Martinique.

Throughout the novel, Antoinette experiences much difficulty with her identity.

Antoinette looks like a white woman, and the majority of the people who live on the Island of Martinique are black, so Antoinette feels like an outcast. She has conflicted feelings because she is half black, and half white, and therefore does not know how to fit in.

Not only does Antoinette struggle with her feelings of isolation, but so does her creole mother Annette, and her English husband, Rochester. In order to portray this In Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys uses animals to symbolize the characters feelings of alienation and captivity.

The parrot, Coco, is one of the animals that Rhys uses to symbolize Annette's feelings of fear and confinement. In the beginning of the novel, Annette, Antoinette, Mr. Mason and Pierre live in Coulibri, the former plantation. One night, a riot occurs outside their home.

The black servants are outside revolting, including one of their own servants, Myra, who joins the chaos.

Their house catches on fire, and they all escape outdoors. In the midst of all the craziness, Annette runs back inside the house to rescue her green parrot, Coco. Antoinette, from outdoors, witnesses her mother's parrot fall off the railing. Antoinette says, " I opened my eyes, everybody was looking up and pointing at Coco on the glacial railings with his feathers alight. He made an

effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire” (p.

39). Mr.

Mason previously clipped the parrot’s wings to prevent his flying ff The parrot symbolizes Annette’s boundless freedom and captivity. Coco can be compared directly to Annette and how she is stuck on the island of Martinique. She wants to escape from all the hatred from being a Creole woman, but she cannot. The fact that Coco falls to her death from the balcony suggests an unhappy ending for Annette as well.

Jane Rhys depicts Rochester’s similar feelings of captivity through the goat. Rochester is on his way home after visiting with Daniel Cosway when he encounters this black and white goat on the path. A black and white goat tethered near by was taring at me and for what seemed minutes I stared back Into its slanting yellow- green eyes. Then I walked to the tree where I’d left my horse and rode away as quickly as I could” (p.

114). Rochester does not seem to recognize the symbolic value of this face-off with the goat. The goat seems to represent a number of different things. The black and white color of the goat is symbolic of the black and white color issues that exist on the island. In *Wide Sargasso sea*, all the drama seems to stem from the ethnicities of the characters, and the goat is a reiteration of this.

The goat also seems to represent Rochester in the sense that goats are not native to the island of Martinique, they are brought in. Rochester, too, is not

a native Islander, but he is a white Englishman who came to the island. Rhys uses the goat's "yellow-green eyes" to symbolize Rochester's sickness of the island, and his feelings of confinement. He too feels suffocated on the island and wants to get out.

hatred that Antoinette experiences. One day when Antoinette walks home, a young, native black girl approaches her and calls her a "white cockroach." "I never looked at any strange negro.

They hated us. They called us white cockroaches. Let sleeping dogs lie.

One day a little girl followed me singing, "Go away white cockroach, go away, go away" (p. 23). This shows how Antoinette and her family constantly have to deal with the threats and abuse from the black community on the island. The use of the cockroach is to symbolize the idea of race, and the infestation that is Antoinette.

Rhys compares her to a cockroach because she does not belong on the island. She is not welcome by the people of the island either. If you fight cockroaches, then they often get worse.

This symbolizes the fact that Antoinette cannot do much about the alienation that she experiences on Martinique. She can't fight the abuse. The white cockroach symbolizes her feelings of captivity.

Later in the novel, Rhys mentions the white cockroach again. "It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers.

So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was ever born at all” (p. 2). Antoinette seems to be suggesting that she does not belong to the white race or the black race. She feels very lost because she cannot identify with either of these races. Rhys seems to be suggesting, with the use of these animals throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, that alienation and captivity are motifs of the novel.

Not only does Rhys use a wide array of animals to express this idea, but also, she uses the animals to symbolize the feelings of multiple characters. The parrot seems to represent Annette’s feelings of fear and confinement on the island of Martinique.

The goat symbolizes not only the evident racial problems that exist throughout the book, but also Rochester’s feelings of isolation and sickness from the island. The word white cockroach seems to symbolize the infestation and curse of being a Creole on an island filled with blacks. All of these animals are used to represent the main idea of isolation, captivity and alienation.

Antoinette, Annette, and Rochester are all very different characters but they are all similar in that they have the same ideas about the torture they experience on the island, and they all have the desire to get out.