

The mad woman in the attic

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



In the character of Jane Eyre, Victorian-era women found a relatable everywoman who has been viewed by some as an emblem of early feminist characterizations. An orphaned and self-sufficient woman, moving forward in her life alone, first by abandonment and then by choice, she finds love in Mr. Rochester. However, in a disturbing turn of events she finds he is already married to a mad woman who resides in the attic of Thornfield unbeknownst to Jane and the general public. Fleeing the deceit of Rochester and the fracturing of her dreams of a familial happiness, she finds her own way with the same determination.

When her own fortune turns for the better and Rochester's to the worst she once more embraces him. All makes for a very dramatic and socially telling example of the Gothic novel but what of the madwoman in the attic? Rochester's insane Bertha, heard only through maniacal laughter and an eerie presence? She creeps around the peripheral of Bronte's masterpiece and though her importance as a device to provide an obstacle in Jane's otherwise seemingly paradisiacal future cannot be undermined, as a character she is shallow.

What little information that is gleaned about the woman is through the biased lips of Rochester. With Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* Bertha reverts to Antoinette, a young white West Indian Creole haunted and troubled by her family's past and trying to come to terms with her identity of being the colonizer and the colonized or rather as critic Elaine Savory has called this struggle, "Antoinette's dual location as oppressor and oppressed" (134). Married to young Edward Rochester, a nameless man in Rhys' version, her

essential self begins to deteriorate under the pressures of gossip and alienation within her marriage.

Through the three parts of the novel, Rhys attempts to tell the story behind the story; her tale weaving between the blanks in Bronte's *Jane Eyre* to give voice to Antoinette. With Rhys tale, the reader gains insight into the complexities of human relationships based on greed and the effects of the colonial structure on not only the oppressed but also the oppressor. Bronte's tale of romance is contrasted and given more depth with Rhys examination of the debasement and enslavement of Antoinette by colonial society, a conquering husband, and the prison of her mind.

Rochester is also recast, young and full of doubt and anger; in Rhys depiction we can see in him the strange and dark middle-aged man of *Jane Eyre*. In the similar backgrounds of Jane and Antoinette, the reader can see an overlapping of these two characters into a single woman both taking different paths but holding the hand of the same man. One thrown into hell and the other finding her salvation. With overlapping motifs and characters, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* become complimentary pieces each lending meaning to the other.

The chronology of the novels, both individually and taken as complimentary texts, is interesting in respect to the placement of the characters within their individual societies. In Charlotte's Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Jane's narrative follows a generally linear path from when the reader first meets her as a ward of the Reed's to her eventual reunion with Mr. Rochester. Jane's life is enmeshed in the social protocol of her time and dependent on the whim of others, she is thrown away only to find her strength and singularity in hardship.

Her story is largely peopled with Rochester and the other persons residing at Thornfield, while Wide Sargasso Sea provides a frame around and through Jane's tale using only relevant characters from the original text. The three parts of Rhys' book are positioned around and throughout Jane Eyre's chronology of events. Middle-aged when he meets Jane, Rochester is only a young man in Wide Sargasso Sea whose still living brother and father have cast their net (Edward) to the islands of the West Indies to see what riches they can attain.

Antoinette and Edward Rochester's story, in respect to Jane Eyre, takes place largely before Jane was born except for the third part which commences in the fire at Thornfield. The three parts of Rhys' book are divided between Antoinette's early life and childhood, Rochester's story, and Antoinette's rambling from her attic prison. The first allows for an understanding of the characters of Antoinette and Rochester as products and victims of imperialism.

With the Emancipation came an end to slavery but also brought a new era of profiteering and exploitation. At the center is Antoinette, her family having lost everything with the emancipation including the little respect and social placement they had once held. Her mother's marriage to Mr. Mason provided little reprieve as the seeds of hate had been heartily sown. However, Mr. Mason presented a new context for the hatred directed at Annette and Antoinette, a role that briefly would be overtaken by Richard Mason and finally in Edward Rochester.

As Veronica Marie Gregg notes, " Mr. Mason represents a new breed of English merchants and imperialists who still seek to dominate the economic

life of the colonies and to coerce the labor force into working to ensure their wealth, even after plantation slavery has formally ended" (91). The people know of his wealth and are not ignorant to profits he has made from the collapse of the system of slavery which left them third class citizens and deeply impoverished despite their freedom.

With her marriage to Rochester, which is told in the second part and picks up a short time after her own first part ends, Antoinette discovers her own uncertain place not only in the limited society of the West Indies that she will always belong to while never really belonging but also in the eyes of her opportunistic husband. In part two, Rhys lays the groundwork for Antoinette's later complete deterioration by showing the hatred and distrust of Rochester. Almost the whole of Jane Eyre could fit in the gap in years that is seen between parts two and three.

Jane is born, orphaned, cast aside, educated all within this space. Antoinette's jumbled narrative in part three illustrates the effects of Rochester's hatred and indifference, and the maddening effect of her imprisonment. There is no mention of Jane as Antoinette's world does not exist outside the small room that is her prison. The house around her is an unreal concept and its inhabitants figure little into her life as her struggle has now become completely internalized.

As Elaine Savory explains in examining the lack of Antoinette's grip on the reality of her prison, " An absence of attachment can be so severe that it makes the place seem unreal, as in the case of the house in England in which Antoinette is imprisoned" (Savory 142). Though we don't see or hear of Jane in Rhys' text, in taking Jane Eyre as the complimentary text it is a <https://assignbuster.com/the-mad-woman-in-the-attic/>

given that Jane is in the background of this third part just as Bertha/Antoinette exists largely outside Jane's own tale.

The two texts can easily be interwoven to provide insight where once there was none but the question remains if this was Rhys's true intention. In both stories, we see signifiers of the times. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the story takes place within the context of the West Indies in the 1830s and 1840s, following the Emancipation Act in 1833 (Gregg 83). In *Jane Eyre*, the signifiers are more subtle but still present. Towards the ending of *Jane Eyre*, Jane is given the newly published book *Marmion* which was published in 1808 (83).

By this relation of dates, the two texts cannot be connected chronologically because according to the dating of the stories, Antoinette, the first Mrs. Rochester, would have not even been born when Jane, the second Mrs. Rochester, is hearing her laughing like a loon from the attic. These subtle differences in dates call to question Rhys decision to relocate the overall tale decades into the future and the intention of these discrepancies. Her intention appears to be not to change the eventual story of *Jane Eyre* but rather to provide a different context for the reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Rhys was fully aware of the problems in depicting her Antoinette within the context of Bronte's mad Bertha, The West Indies was ... rich in those days for those days ... The girls [West Indian Creole women who married Englishmen] ... would soon once in kind England be Address Unknown. So gossip. So a legend. If Charlotte Bronte took her horrible Bertha from this legend I have the right to take lost Antoinette. And, how to reconcile the two and fix dates I do not know -- yet. But, I will" (qtd. In Gregg 83).

Rhys redefines Antoinette's basic struggle through this relocation in time, framing the tale within a context, that as Veronica Marie Gregg notes, "seeks to articulate the subjective and locational identity of the West Indian Creole of the post slavery period"(83). Antoinette's madness then becomes not a hereditary trait aggravated by alcoholism and promiscuity but a result of historical and social distinctions defining her as an Other, "Not quite English and not quite "native," Rhys's Creole woman straddles the embattled divide between human and savage, core and periphery, self and other" (Ciolkowski 340).

That history supports this characterization is no accident, Rhys used the "legend" loosely applied to Jane Eyre by Bronte and expanded it to the exploration of a single woman. As Rhys noted in a letter to a friend, "very wealthy planters did exist their daughters had very large dowries, there was no married woman's property act. So, a young man who was not too scrupulous could do very well for himself and very easily. He would marry the girl, grab her money, bring her to England [...] and in a year she would be [...] mad" (qtd.

In Gregg 84). While Bronte chose to use class and gender as a center for her story of Jane, Rhys uses the characters of Antoinette and Edward Rochester to illustrate the broader effects of colonialism. Antoinette is the primary character explored and expanded upon in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is her character that spurred Rhys to write the text. Rhys notes in a letter to Selma Vas Diaz in 1958, "The Creole in Charlotte Bronte's novel is a lay figure - repulsive which does not matter, and not once alive which does.

She's necessary to the plot, but always she shrieks, howls, laughs horribly, attacks all and sundry - off stage. For me ... she must be right on stage" (qtd. In Gregg 82). In Bronte's text, Antoinette is Bertha, and is as Rhys notes a shallow character revealed more for her usefulness in the larger context of Jane's life decisions than an independent character with distinct traits and history. The little information we learn about Bertha in Jane Eyre is through the dialogue of Edward Rochester and Jane's visual and auditory perceptions.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the story of Antoinette's early life and circumstances are explored so that we can more fully understand the events which led to her eventual decline into insanity while also viewing the larger concept of cultural disintegration. The novel begins with the first part of Antoinette's story and the stage is immediately set to show the class and racial issues particular to their experience of post emancipation and the new intrusiveness of colonialism, " They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did.

But we were not in their ranks" (Rhys 17). From the onset, Rhys establishes Antoinette as an outsider. Though she is white, she and her family are not considered part of white society due to her mother's French Creole heritage. In Rhys delving into the depths of Bertha's logic in madness and destructiveness, we find the reasons behind the shrieks and moans and fire that burns through Thornfield in Bronte's rendition. The crazy mother Rochester describes to Jane as the root of Bertha's own illness is rendered as a broken and ostracized woman in her inherited homeland.

After the death of her husband and fall of the old plantation system, Annette Cosway is not only left to raise her two children alone but is kept separate

from the support of the white class system which views her as an outsider, “ part of the hostility toward Annette stems from her being a French West Indian Woman in a British West Indian colony. This alludes to the centuries-long feud between the French and the English in the Eastern Caribbean” (Gregg 85). Unlike the British West Indian women, Annette came from Martinique as a trophy wife for old Mr.

Cosway. It is not so much his death that she mourns in the first section of the *Wide Sargasso Sea* but instead the end of the society that he represented. The collapse of this society rewrote the rules of race relations and class distinctions, since as Gregg explains “ The racial superiority of the whites depends upon the economic ascendancy achieved by unpaid black labor. Without money, Antoinette’s family become niggers, isolated from the rest of white society” (89).

Antoinette excuses her mother’s preoccupation with this change because of her youth and inexperience with a world that was any different than the established plantation society, “ She was young. How could she not try for all the things that had gone so suddenly, so without warning” (Rhys 18). However, while Antoinette is able to find reason in her mother’s psychological collapse, it gives the community outside of the walls of Coulibiri a chance to begin talking.

It is here that we see the beginning seeds of the gossip of madness that would later reach Rochester’s ears via Daniel Cosway. It was not only Annette who was effected by the West Indian constructs of race and class, before the Emancipation and after but also all those touched by the enterprises comprising the economic structure, “ All human relationships are

marked by slavery and the plantation society, and all are constructed, for the most part, within these parameters.

Christophine, we are reminded, was a wedding gift to Annette" (Gregg 86). " In this world, people are property, to be bought and sold, to be tied irreparably to their oppressors even when that oppressor is themselves. Annette's isolation is partly her own, she keeps herself sequestered and silent from the abuse that is hurled and directed at her family from the blacks and whites. Black society is much more forward in their feelings, while white society speaks softly and when they think no one is listening.

Antoinette sensed the animosity from the whites and was confronted daily with that of the blacks, " I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches" (Rhys 23). Elaine Savory in her examination of the politics of a racially charged society observes, " Displacement is a strong theme in the novel in relation to major characters such as Antoinette, her husband and Christophe [...] But substantial displacement across racial and class lines severely affects coherent self-definition.

Antoinette finds herself called white cockroach by black people, yet she has no place in white culture either" (139). " At the center of Antoinette's feelings of alienation is not only her relations with the other locals but also the lack of love she feels from her mother, " Rhys establishes a world in which everything rests on problematic and strained relationships: between people of different nationalities, race, languages, classes, against which the struggle to maintain connection even within a family can seem puny and defeated" (Savory 136).

Annette is distant from her daughter as she turns away from the outside world in the decaying of Coulibiri and she remains at a remove even as she shows more interest in Antoinette's imminent social position or lack thereof. First exposed to the renewed society, Antoinette's shabby dress makes her consciously aware of only her mother's judging eyes, " All that evening my mother didn't speak to me or look at me and I thought ' She is ashamed of me'"(Rhys 26). The judgment Antoinette feels from her mother seems, in light of her later fate, more a look of calculated understanding.

Annette understood from firsthand knowledge the path her daughter's life would inevitably take, " Both women's marriages are based on the economy of the slavery and post slavery societies, with their bodies as a site of negotiation in this economy" (Gregg 97). The shame Antoinette imagines in her mother's eyes is really the cool assessment knowing that her daughter will be judged as property, enslaved in marriage. The fire at Coulibiri provides a closure to Antoinette's jaded childhood, " When they had finished, there would be nothing left but blackened walls and the mounting stone.

That was always left" (Rhys 45). The " they" in Antoinette's narrative is the disenfranchised and angry black mob aggravated by the new elevation of their previous oppressors and a fear over the loss of work with the importation of foreign and indentured labor. As Veronica Marie Gregg explains, This intensely charged episode [...] emblemizes the post slavery disputes about labor conditions between the plutocracy and the working people in the West Indies.

In this historical moment, the ruling class, in order to secure its socioeconomic position and to control labor, sees punitive and coercive

measures such as immigration and Asian indentured servitude as a viable response to the "laziness" of the African people. The freed persons respond with material violence as part of their viable means of struggle and resistance at this point" (Gregg 95). The individuals of the mob form into a solid image in Antoinette's selective sight, "They all looked the same, it was the same face over and over" (Rhys 42).

The episode reinforces Antoinette's feeling of alienation and also solidifies the division between mother and daughter, as Annette finally descends completely into alcoholism and insanity. Worn out and beaten by the death of Pierre and the willful destruction of her home exemplified by her beloved parrot, she surrenders to her pain. Antoinette is at once orphaned completely, her stepfather serving on an absentee basis but still retaining guilt and thereby trying to secure Antoinette's future.

It is interesting to note the similarities in the lives of Antoinette and Jane during the periods of their lives when they were both housed in charity house or convent. Both still have living relatives but find themselves living independently of familial love and guidance and both are able to develop relationships which seems, particularly in Antoinette's case, in a much lighter tone than her previous interactions. Her friendships are far more equal, as the other young ladies at the convent are all white and themselves of upper class descendency.

Like Jane Eyre who finds her first examples of friendships as a charity ward where class distinctions do not exist as there is only one class, unwanted, Antoinette finds a similar niche, where she "soon forgot about happiness" (Rhys 56) and simply lived. It seems a contradiction to find comfort where

there is no happiness but for Antoinette whose life has been at the mercy of emotion, the lack of it would seem a relief. For both women, this time period of their lives was the one in which they had the most ease. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane experiences few of the belittling feelings directed at her by the Reeds.

After the death of Helen Burns, there is nothing else until Jane decides to leave Lowood, “ I am only bound to invoke memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence” (Bronte 77). Similarly, there is little of Antoinette’s life except the convent where “ Everything was brightness, or dark” (Rhys 57). There is a difference though in their views of their time spent secluded from the outside world. For Jane, Lowood is a temporary stop, a school and a home. For Antoinette the convent provides a solution to the outside world and not simply a new home.

In the predictability she has found solace, if not happiness, in the mundane routines. However, Antoinette knows that the refuge she has been allowed in the convent is only temporary, sensing the fate her mother had seen in her from the day she was born a girl. She is not only a daughter to Mr. Mason or a sister to Richard Mason, she is an asset with her beauty and upper class distinction. In her final meeting with Mr. Mason at the convent, she senses her future and is frightened anew, It may have been the way he smiled, but again a feeling of dismay, sadness, loss, almost choked me [...] It was like that morning when I found the dead horse.

Say nothing and it may not be true [...] The girls were very curious but I would not answer their questions and for the first time I resented the nuns’ cheerful faces. They are safe. How can they know what it can be like

outside? (59). She has learned from the example of her mother that the security Mr. Mason envisions for her is not a security against the uncertainties and animosities of the outside world she has so far experienced. As a sensitive child, she ascertained what it was to belong to the upper class, and knows that despite marriage or perceived respectability she will always be at the mercy of another's will.

As a woman she is destined for either the convent or marriage, understanding what marriage will mean she prefers the convent. While later she fights against the imprisonment of Rochester, it seems only because she has come to an understanding of a third alternative which is freedom from either, first hinted at by her Aunt Cora. That Antoinette only realizes her freedom through her own death brings her initial fear full circle, " Her fortune and her beauty make her a prized possession for him, an easy way to acquire his status as an " independent" gentleman" (Kendrik 236).

When he realizes that he cannot attain this status through Antoinette he turns against her. The embodiment of Antoinette's fear lies in Edward Rochester, seemingly different from Bronte's romantic hero but really an extension of his character, " not so much a wholesale revision of Bronte's existing creation as a reillumination and reemphasization of aspects that are present, though perhaps not stressed, in the Rochester of Jane Eyre" (Kendrik 239).

Unlike Antoinette, he plays an integral part in both Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea. Bronte's Rochester is a middle-aged man, cynical and lacking the attractiveness that would usually be found in a romantic hero. It is this lack of attractiveness that allows Jane to feel proper in first speaking with

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him, " Had he been a handsome, heroic looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked" (Bronte 105).

With Jane, Rochester is proud, jaded, inquisitive and crassly gentle; he is at once attracted to and inclined to suppress her independent streak but " Jane's ambiguous class status as a Governess prevents her from being an adequate mirror for Edward" (Kendrik 240). They are able to overcome this class distinction only through Rochester's loss of property and face and Jane's own inheritance. The largest distinctions between the Rhys and Bronte's Edward Rochester lies in experience and the women of their lives.

With Jane, Bronte's Rochester has a puritanically astute woman whose will largely matches his own strength of character but whose properness largely outweighs any true acts of rebellion. As Terry Eagleton notes in his Marxist exploration of Jane Eyre, Bronte's " protagonists are an extraordinary contradictory amalgam of smouldering rebelliousness and prim conventionalism, gushing Romantic fantasy and canny hard-headedness, quivering sensitivity, and blunt rationality. It is, in fact, a contradiction closely related to their roles as governesses or private tutors" (Eagleton 30).

Jane's contradictions are largely predictable, Antoinette's he discovers are not of any kind he has known. Rhys turns back the clock on middle-aged Rochester to reveal the personality and actions of a much younger, much angrier man. As Elaine Savory explains, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* " not only privileges the Caribbean but does a great deal to move Rochester out of the realm of the Gothic romance and explain his capacity for cruelty" (133). In part two of Rhys's text Rochester is left intentionally nameless (Rhys qtd.

In Gregg 100), as Gregg explains, “ His entrance in the novel is a beginning with no introduction [...] no thematic preparation or signal to the reader. This is an inscription of the structural origins of the narrative and history of imperial Europe, which designates the West Indies as a blank space on which to inscribe the desires of European man” (100). From the onset his acquiring of Antoinette is that of the conqueror, their marriage is no love story but an arrangement made between Richard Mason and Rochester’s father and brother.

Given this understanding, the opening lines of part two, which could be read as a description of courtship take on a darker meaning, “ So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations”(Rhys 65). In these lines we see not the mild flirtations of two young people but rather a hunter tracking its prey. In the beginning of their marriage it is notable that Rochester was not always seemingly against Antoinette but at first envisioned a real future with her despite her appearance of foreignness. On the road to Granbois he observes, “ She smiled at me.

It was the first time I had seen her smile simply and naturally. Or perhaps it was the first time I had felt simple and natural with her [...] Looking up smiling, she might have been any pretty English girl” (Rhys 71). He attempts to draw parallels between the alien West Indian landscape and his own country, “ Next time she spoke she said, ‘ The earth is red here, do you notice? ’/ ‘ It’s red in parts of England too’” (Rhys 71). By drawing this comparison he is at once dismissing Antoinette but also trying to locate himself within the larger world he finds himself.

Though it is not addressed, it is most likely that young Rochester has little experience with the world outside of England and no concept from which to draw on in the landscape and people that he now finds himself surrounded by. He is deeply aware of the fact that his betrothal was not his own choice but is nonetheless pleased from a collector's standpoint in the beauty and seeming malleability of his new wife, " She spoke hesitantly as if she expected me to refuse, so it was easy to do so" (Rhys 67). He asserts his dominance, even as the circumstances of his being " bought" undermine any goodwill.

Even from the beginning his feelings are unstable, " I have sold my soul or you have sold it, and after all is it such a bad bargain? The girl is thought to be beautiful, she is beautiful. And yet ..." (70). There is no chance for happiness to grow from this doubt because even as Rochester moves forward he holds himself back out of a sense of Englishness, " in *Wide Sargasso Sea* he is the immediate manifestation and enforcer of the network of patriarchal codes (sexism, colonialism, the English Law, and the " law" which demarcates and creates sanity and insanity)" (Kendrik 235).

Antoinette does not fit into the definition of any discourse Rochester understands and is therefore permanently located outside of Rochester's feelings of self. During this beginning section of part two, we see one of Rhys subtle correlation to Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. It is with this and other small concessions that Rhys connects the two texts in more than simply character names and geography. In his first days at Granbois, Rochester sits on the veranda with Antoinette making observations on the wilderness around them, in particular taking notice of a moth alighting by their candle,

A large moth, so large that I thought it was a bird, blundered into one of the candles, put it out and fell to the floor. [...] I took the beautiful creature up in my handkerchief and put it on the railing. For a moment it was still and by the dim candlelight I could see the soft brilliant colours, the intricate pattern on the wings. I shook the handkerchief gently and it flew away (Rhys 81).

In Jane Eyre, Bronte's Rochester while on a walk with Jane draws her attention to a moth's wings, "'Look at his wings,'" he said, ' he reminds me rather of a West Indian insect; one does not often see so large and gay a night-rover in England'" (Bronte 220). By including details on the moth in her telling of Rochester's early life, Rhys draws a subtle thread connecting the older and the younger experience and memories. He becomes a continuous character, present in both manifestations. Though the West Indian landscape harbors fond memories, it also embodies Rochester's doubts and growing hostility towards Antoinette.

In the brilliantly colored flowers and trees, the exotic scents, and unknown regions of the island's geography, Rochester finds a metaphor for his new wife's inaccessibility, " he has come to hate this landscape, because it signifies his wife and his failure to reach her, even to overpower or control her" (Savory 144). Like Antoinette, he cannot deny its beauty but also like his wife he cannot reconcile this type of beauty with his previous experience and knowledge, " It was a beautiful place - wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret.

I'd find myself thinking, ' What I see is nothing - I want what it hides - that is not nothing" (Rhys 87). In describing Antoinette, he is similarly disturbed, " She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of

pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either” (Rhys 67). He finds himself as unable to penetrate the unknown about her as he is the landscape. In his lust for Antoinette he makes his only connection and breaks down the barrier with which she has sought to protect herself, “ Very soon she was as eager for what’s called loving as I was - more lost and drowned afterwards”(Rhys 92).

Like Jane when questioning Rochester on how he will feel about her independence after the newness of the marriage has worn off, Antoinette is beset with doubts on her husband’s true feelings toward her, “ If one day you didn’t wish it. What should I do then? Suppose you took this happiness away when I wasn’t looking...” (Rhys 92). In this exchange Rhys draws another connection between the past and the future Edward Rochester. His similar conversation with Jane, though less emotionally fraught than his dialogue with Antoinette, brings into question his dominance,

For a little while you will perhaps be as you are now, - a very little while; and then you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I shall have much ado to please you: but then you will be well used to me, you will perhaps like me again, - like me, I say, not love me. I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less (Bronte 229). In this conversation, Jane senses that Rochester’s love and admiration are fickle in nature, “ Jane has doubts about Rochester the husband even before she learns about Bertha.

In her world, she senses, even the equality of love between true minds leads to the inequalities and minor despotisms of marriage” (Moglen 82). Antoinette discovers this through her own experience with him. Though

Antoinette brought wealth to the union, in doing so she forfeited that wealth, since by English law it becomes her husband's alone. Resigned to this, she lets down her guard and allows herself to love and lust after the man who becomes first her tormentor and finally her jailer. Jane Eyre knows a slightly different Rochester, less inclined to passion, but still fears for her own independence in a union under English law.

She knows that legally she will become the subordinate of her husband but Jane's nature prevents her from willingly giving into this precept. Without fortune of her own, Jane does not run the same risk as Antoinette but nor does she hold to same status socially, " as a younger son of the gentry, has suffered at the hands of social convention and so like Jane has a history of deprivation; but unlike her he has achieved worldly success, but a glamorous figure in county society, and so blends social desirability with a spice of thwarted passion and an underdog past (Eagleton 34).

With this combination of traits so at odds with Jane's own plainness it is easy to see the basis of her doubts. Just as Edward Rochester came to resent Antoinette for the society she represented and the wealth that bought, so also could he come to resent Jane for her lack of either class status or money.