

The struggles of the heroines in wide sargasso sea and jane eyre

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Antoinette Cosway in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jane Eyre in *Jane Eyre* are both relatively isolated women struggling to survive in a male-dominated society. Although both women are striving to attain similar goals of happiness, equality, and a sense of selfhood or identity, the former fails and the latter succeeds. Their divergent outcomes are due to the contrasting manners in which they attempt to achieve their goals and the different amounts of self-motivation and independence which they possess. Firstly, Jane and Antoinette are both in pursuit of the same Mr. Rochester, in addition to their similar goals of self-completion. The manner in which each woman attempts to achieve her goals, however, contrasts greatly. Antoinette attempts to achieve three qualities via Mr. Rochester. She is unhappy from her childhood, and at one point during her marriage to Mr. Rochester, she states that if he were to love her, she would be happy. Happiness, in turn, would help her to gain a sense of selfhood and equality, because it would give her the confidence to assert her identity and the courage to make herself Rochester's equal. So, Antoinette tries to force him to love her by drugging him and seducing him. Unfortunately, this act angers him so greatly that he becomes incapable of feeling love for her, and so she is rejected by him. This is her downfall – she makes the mistake of becoming dependent on another person to complete herself and make her happy. In this way, she loses her independence. The loss of her independence, in addition to his rejection of her, causes her to lose her happiness, sense of selfhood, and equality. The way in which Jane attempts to achieve her goals is quite unlike the way in which Antoinette does. Instead of depending on another person to reach her goals, Jane depends on herself. She has an enormous amount of

independence, which she has gained from her childhood. When she is very small, she is neglected by the family that raises her. During this time, she learns to satisfy herself by reading, drawing, and thinking. In this way she gains independence. During her time at Lowood she gains a sense of selfhood, because she begins to realize who she is as she grows and learns and becomes someone who people acknowledge as important, as opposed to someone who is ignored and mistreated, as she was in her former environment. When she becomes a governess and befriends Mr. Rochester, who treats her as an equal, she gains a sense of equality. Finally, when she is engaged and in love with Mr. Rochester, she has gained happiness – this is implied the morning after he confesses his love for her, as she is dressing: “ I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain : there was hope in its aspect, and life in its colour.” (259) Also, Mr. Rochester asks her repeatedly, “ Are you happy, Jane?” and she answers repeatedly, “ Yes.” (258) However, when it is revealed that Mr. Rochester has a wife already and, in a way, would be cheating Jane to marry her, Jane’s happiness, sense of selfhood, and equality are all challenged. This is because, if Jane were to marry Rochester while knowing the marriage would not be real, she would not be happy; she would lose her faith in herself because she would have abandoned her morals, and she would have felt inferior to Mr. Rochester by doing whatever she had to do, giving up her values in this case, in order to be with him. This same thing happens to Antoinette when she fears that Mr. Rochester is not going to love her – her happiness, sense of selfhood, and equality are all on the brink of being destroyed, so she looks to another person, Mr. Rochester, to restore them to her. This is why she fails to

maintain them. Jane, however, does not. She knows that if her identity and self-satisfaction are in danger of being destroyed, she must get away from the thing which is challenging them. In the case of both women the thing that challenges them is Mr. Rochester – Antoinette goes to him for a solution, but Jane leaves him for a solution. Jane goes on a sort of journey to rediscover herself – she builds a new life in another town, where she unexpectedly finds a family and a place where she is content. She therefore completely regains whatever happiness, equality, and sense of selfhood which she has lost. Once she is fully recovered, she returns to Mr. Rochester, who no longer poses a threat to her feelings of pride and self-worth. The success of Jane and the failure of Antoinette are not solely based on the manners in which they attempt to achieve their goals. They are also based on the different amounts of self-motivation and independence which the women possess. The reason they possess different amounts of these qualities is due to their past experiences. The self-reliant and independent qualities which Jane gained from her childhood isolation caused her to become very self-motivated as well – she believed she could achieve what she wanted, and so she did. Antoinette, on the other hand, experienced the same sort of isolation when she was young – her mother ignored her and her father was dead. This situation was similar to Jane's, but Antoinette had a different reaction to it. Whereas Jane became independent and self-reliant, Antoinette became lonely and discouraged, and came to believe that she was destined to be unhappy. She never really believed that she could really be happy, and though she tried to be with Mr. Rochester, she knew deep inside that she could never truly be. She, therefore, had barely any self-

motivation due to unhappiness, and this was a component in her failure to achieve her goals. On the other hand, Jane's self-motivation leads her to achieve her goals. She has the motivation to leave Lowood to become a governess, to win over Mr. Rochester, and then to leave him and find another place where she will be happy. When she is wandering with nowhere to go after leaving Thornfield, she does not give up – she is motivated to push on and find a place that will take her in. She has great self-motivation, most of which is due to the fact that she believes she can be and deserves to be happy, that she succeeds in achieving her goals. Jane succeeds in achieving her goals of happiness, equality, and a sense of selfhood because she possesses independence and self-motivation gained from childhood experiences. She therefore goes about achieving her goals in a manner different from Antoinette's. Antoinette lacks the necessary amount of self-motivation and independence needed to achieve her goals.