

"jane eyre" by charlotte bronte and "wide sargasso sea"



**ASSIGN
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Through your understanding of “ Jane Eyre” by Charlotte Bronte and “ Wide Sargasso Sea” and with reference to your understanding of the social contexts within which they were written, was it inevitable that the marriage between Bertha Mason and Edward Rochester would fail? I believe that the social rules and requirements of the time would never have allowed Rochester and Bertha to co exist happily. Rochester and Bertha were different in every way and this contributed greatly to the failure of the marriage. I believe that the marriage failure was inevitable.

The novel “ Wide Sargasso Sea” by Jean Rhys is told from Berthas point of view, this gives Bertha the voice she was denied in “ Jane Eyre”. It was written in the 1960’s benefits from Bertha’s demise having already been written in “ Jane Eyre” as we then know what happens to her once “ Wide Sargasso Sea” is over. I believe that the marriage failure was inevitable because the social rules and requirements of the time would never have allowed Bertha and Rochester to so exist happily. “ Jane Eyre” was written in 1847 when there was no gender or social equality.

Men of the time saw women as the “ other”, especially in Britain. Men were the total opposites of women and were considered to be superior. Women on the other hand were expected to be seen and not heard. Women had to be noble, chaste, talented and innocent. This male dominant dynamic between husband and wife was not present between Rochester and Bertha; this was why the marriage failure was inevitable.

In Victorian times men were taught to hide their feelings and repress their sexual urges, Rochester could not do this when he was around Bertha, she

was beautiful and provocative. I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw and inexperienced I thought I loved her. " This contributed the marriage failure because Bertha inspired in Rochester a behaviour which went against the rules of society. Basing the marriage upon nothing but lust and sexuality made the failure inevitable not only because they knew nothing about each other and had little else in common but also because it suggested according to Christian dogma of the time that Rochester would have to be punished.

In Victorian times Christianity was the religion which most if not all the Victorians followed. Victorians took the teachings of Christianity very seriously and put strict rules upon everything. They punished and considered inferior people who did not follow these rules. Rochester was brought up in this society and when he meets Bertha these Christian Ideals are ingrained in him. Bertha lived in a convent but still had an agnostic or even atheist view on religion and did not seem to care much about it.

In " Wide Sargasso Sea" when Rochester asks Bertha if she believes in god she says: " it doesn't matter what I believe or you believe because we can do nothing about it, we are like these. ' She flicked a dead moth off the table" To Bertha life just is, whereas Rochester needs something to explain the unexplained, and helps justify his sense of hierarchy. This shows also that they can't even be connected through a common belief. Christian dogma affects them also because in Victorian time's sex was meant only for procreation and feeling lust was strictly prohibited.

Rochester had such teachings ingrained in him and when he feels lust towards Bertha and loses his inhibitions he feels guilty about betraying his religion and society and so blames Bertha for her beauty. Men at this time were not supposed to give themselves over to women however Rochester finds himself doing just that, often. This means that both Bertha and Rochester were struggling for power in a relationship that required dominance from one person. Also Rochester resents Bertha for stripping him of the power that that should be his in a relationship he feels he must be in control of.

Power is also a major factor in the marriage failure. Throughout Bertha's relationship with Rochester in "Wide Sargasso Sea" there is a distinct impression that Bertha is an object for Rochester to own and possess. He frequently refers to her as "doll" and "marionette". This shows that to Rochester, Bertha is something he can control and manipulate in his quest for power in their relationship. It also foreshadows what will happen to Bertha when she is taken to England. When you finish with dolls you put them in the attic, Rochester is done playing so he puts Bertha out of sight.

Bertha's inability to escape her marriage and oppression by Rochester is shown in the imagery and powerful symbolism of Coco the parrot. Mr Mason has Coco the parrot's wings clipped in order to control the bird, however when the House is burnt to the ground Coco cannot fly from the burning building. This symbolises how Bertha is oppressed by Rochester and shows the marriage failure. It also foreshadows Bertha's fiery demise. Another reason the marriage was inevitable was because they were from completely different places with completely different attitudes and beliefs.

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Bertha was from the West Indies and was a French Caribbean. She represents the Colonial. Rochester was from England and was upper class. Rochester represents the Empire. This shows how Rochester wanted to control Bertha as the Empire did with the colonies. England and the West Indies are completely different places, and as such the attitudes of the inhabitants are also extremely different. In terms of atmosphere and landscape Britain and the West Indies are complete opposites. The intense heat and ultra green of the landscape contrast greatly with the cold, grey landscape of Britain.

Rochester hated the landscape of the West Indies and would never be happy there. " The air was like sulphur- steams I could find no refreshment anywhere. " Here Rochester describes the West Indies as insufferable and also describes the West Indies using words such as " Sulphur", " Fiery", " Red", " Hell" and " Heat". Words such as this make us think of hell and demons; it gives the impression that the West Indies are hellish. Rochester also shows his love of Britain. " 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.

The pure wind symbolises Europe and it shows that Rochester believes that Europe is the good that can win over the evil and echoes the destruction of himself in the fiery West Indies and his pure rebirth in Britain. It also shows how Rochester who represents the Empire and Bertha who represents the colonial " other" can not co exist happily because Rochester believes that Europe is pure and good and the West Indies is fiery and demonic, and in his

opinion good has to win over evil. At this time Bertha was living in a decaying society and the land was wild and extreme.

It is something completely different from what Rochester would have been used to. In "Wide Sargasso Sea" Rochester describes his inability to take in the landscape. "too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near." The vivid colours and extreme landscape are too much for Rochester, they are also a symbol of the passion and brightness of Jamaica and the contrast to British stiff upper lip attitude. Just as Rochester dislikes the West Indies and cannot take in its extreme landscape, Bertha felt as if she couldn't picture Britain. Yes a big city must be like a dream."

Bertha's inability to picture England and understand how it would look shows that she wouldn't be happy there. This shows that the failure of the marriage was inevitable because Rochester would never have been happy in the West Indies and Bertha would never have been happy living in Britain, therefore they could never live together in a place where they would both feel truly happy. In conclusion I think that the marriage failure was inevitable for many reasons.

Firstly Victorian society would not allow Rochester and Bertha to be together, they were too different. Bertha was too beautiful and Rochester was too lustful towards her. Secondly Bertha and Rochester were from completely different places. Rochester hated the West Indies it was too extreme and Bertha hated Britain, therefore Rochester couldn't be happy in the West Indies and Bertha couldn't be happy in England. Also during this period

Caribbean society was passionate and a little wild whereas Britain was more contained, in Victorian times opposites did not attract.

Thirdly Christian Dogma said that sex was meant strictly for procreation and that lust wasn't meant to be felt by either husband or wife, therefore Rochester and Bertha went against this ideal. Bertha was too beautiful for Rochester not to feel lustful, and for this Rochester resented Bertha. Finally Rochester and Bertha were in a relationship whereby neither of them had power. However both felt that there should be a power hierarchy in their relationship. It is for these reasons that the failure of the marriage was inevitable and not due to the madness of Bertha Mason or fate.