

Sandra drake

Politics



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Andrea November 17 2010 Race and Caribbean Culture Sandra Drake addresses three issues in her excerpt "Race and Caribbean Culture as Thematic of Liberation in Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea". First we have the effects of the abolishment of slavery on the ex-slave owners and the Afro-Caribbean ex-slaves. Second we see the loss of identity that Antoinette had as she struggle to fit in the Caribbean culture and the English culture as well. At last, Drake turns her attention into the social tension that increasingly grows on Wide Sargasso Sea.

The unexpected abolishment of slavery left Antoinette's family in a bad social and economic situation. Her mother's marriage and her own seem to be the only viable solution for their problems. Somewhat helpful but Antoinette still had to "struggle against the survival of the Caribbean and European patriarchy and empire" (Drake 195). The European colonialism and patriarchy on Antoinette is a mirroring image of what European Colonialism did to the Afro-Caribbean people.

In her struggle to find an identity she became a "zombie", a "ghost", according to the ex-slaves or an "Antoinette-marionette", according to Rochester (Drake 200). Her dependence on others, specifically, Rochester lead to her "real death" eventually by his English like suppression of her; just as the colonizers did to the Afro-Caribbean people. His inevitable English controlling personality is parallel to the subjugation of Coco by her English stepfather when he clipped his wings; which became a foreshadowing of her fate.

In her pursuit for an identity "she betrays herself", as she fervently tries to fit into the English culture by means of the Caribbean obeahs. Paying

Christophine reflects her “ denial of belonging to the Caribbean culture but rather wants to use the spell to complete her assimilation to England and to whiteness” (198), and a cock crew as a signal of betrayal. Ironically later on we find her calling out for Christophine to come and help her and protect her (202), she has flashbacks of her red dress and sees her Caribbean identity in it when she is in Thornfield Hall (WSS 86-187). This continuous struggles lead to her loss of identity; having recurring dreams about the fire at Coulibri Estate and the persistent questions “ Qui est la? ” and You frightened? “ leave Antoinette with fear” (195). The answers to both of these questions are “ Bertha, Bertha” (204) from the man that hated her. Alan Gordon suggests “ Antoinette feels anguish at Rochester for subjugating her as her stepfather, another Englishman, subjugated Coco by clipping his wings.

Antoinette's inability to recognize her voice as the source of the scream also reflects her loss of identity. Her perception of Rochester's calls to “ Bertha,” an identity he imposed upon Antoinette, suggest Rochester's role in this loss. A clear comparison of what “ English colonizers did to black slaves by changing their African names or giving them surnames” (198). In the midst of this conflict there is a strong social tension among ex-slave owners and ex-slaves. These conflicts were stronger than the friendship that Antoinette thought she had with Tia.

When she realizes that Tia is part of the revolt she “ bolts towards the natives, intuits that that is the direction not just of her past but of her future”. She doesn't even see the stone in Tia's hand, but she feels the blood running down her face (203). Such a brutal and heart breaking scene shows what the tension was in the Caribbean at that time; not even two innocent

girls could see pass it. Drake clearly states the effects of the Emancipation Act at a personal, cultural and individual level as we read on *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

The similarities of what English colonizers did to women and to black slaves are vast for us to compare. The power and subjugation in which they applied their authority was almost "total", making them "clever like the Devil, more clever than God. Aint's so?" (206). Work Cited Gordon, Alan. *Dreams in Wide Sargasso Sea*. 2006. 17 Nov. 2010 <http://www.victorianweb.org/neovictorian/rhys/gordon14.html>. Drake, Sandra. Criticism. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. By Jean Rhys. New York: W. W. Norton ; amp; Company Inc. , 1982. 193-206.