

The descent of rochester in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea and his ascent in Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre

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ABSTRACT

This study, grounded on the presumption that Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the "post-dated prequel" to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, explores how the positive force succeeds in guiding Mr. Rochester toward redemption in *Jane Eyre* and how the negative one on the other hand pulls his counterpart downward in *Wide Sargasso Sea*; it also examines how their different destinies are geared to their character development. Rhys's re-visionary novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* fills the blanks of Mr. Rochester's unknown life in the West Indies in his youth. This study tries to trace the mental development of the unloved and suppressed second son in his earlier formative years, his life in his twenties and in his late thirties back in his family estates. While in Rhys's novel the nameless Rochester is degraded from an innocent youth to a brutal devil after his journey on the West Indies islands of hybridized cultures; the more mature Rochester at the end of *Jane Eyre* is vouchsafed a blissful matrimony, which can be interpreted as signifying that he is redeemed from his destruction by God. The values of the Victorian gentry's family and the rigid social conventions and systems supposedly contribute to shaping Rochester's patterns of thinking and behavior and in turn influencing his attitudes and choices when it comes to coping with predicaments in an alien cultural context. Exploring the whole life course of Rochester helps to discover that the deeply hidden sense of vulnerability and helplessness lurks beneath the proud appearance. We can also observe that the root of negative worldview has usually been implanted since childhood. Incessant endeavor and passage of years cannot easily change an individual's life unless his habitual thoughts and behaviors can change. When an individual is willing to learn to love, to share and to forgive, his true self can thus be restored.

Keywords : prequel、 re-visionary novel、 hybridized cultures、 negative worldview

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