The Concept of Pastoral in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

An analysis of identity, displacement, return and escape in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys

Anna Hermansson
Abstract

This essay will attempt to show how pastoral ambiguity is portrayed in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The essay will argue that the pastoral is presented through the characters’ idealisation of the former colonised and colonising cultures and countries, respectively. This is done by focusing on four recurring themes in the concept of pastoral, namely identity, displacement, refuge and return. Moreover, the essay claims that the ambiguity of the pastoral is strengthened by the symbolism and imagery used in the novel. The theoretical framework is mostly represented from Huggan and Tiffin’s work *Postcolonial ecocriticism: literature, animals, environment* and Gifford’s *Pastoral*. The former discusses the concept of pastoral and postcolonialism in terms of the aforementioned themes and the latter discusses the concept of pastoral. The conclusions drawn from the analysis are firstly that the protagonists in the novel represent the four themes of identity, displacement, refuge and return. Secondly, although Rhys shows both the pastoral and the antipastoral sides of the pastoral concept, she clearly conveys her standpoint of the traditional pastoral concept of idealising the rural area by ending the book with a return to the former colonised retreat of Coulibri.
Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 4
Theoretical Framework ..................................................................................................................... 5

1. Analysis .......................................................................................................................................... 10
   1.1 Lack of belonging and finding your identity in relation to the pastoral ................................. 10
   1.2 The terms of escape and return in relation to the concept of pastoral ....................................... 17
   1.3 Imagery and symbolism connected to the concept of pastoral .................................................. 18

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 23

Works Cited ......................................................................................................................................... 25
Introduction

Wide Sargasso Sea is a postcolonial novel written by Jean Rhys. This novel is an indicative example of Great Britain’s postcolonial era and how the pastoral discourse accounts for the prominence of discussions of identity, displacement and landscape in Caribbean literature.

The story is set partly in Jamaica, in Dominica and in England, where it ends. The novel portrays the life of Antoinette from a young age to adulthood. Since Antoinette’s mother turns insane, she is practically brought up by the Martinique slave Christophine, who was given as a wedding present to Antoinette’s mother. When Antoinette grows older she marries an English man who is kept unnamed during the whole novel. As their relationship develops, Antoinette also turns insane and after moving to England with her husband she commits suicide. Antoinette, being a Creole girl from a slave-owner family, the husband being English and Christophine a Martinique black slave, these characters as well as the relationship between them give great contrasts to the novel. Since the novel is postcolonial it brings up various perspectives and consequences that the British imperialism had caused. The novel is narrated mainly from two characters’ perspectives; Antoinette and the husband. Grace, the maid who takes care of Antoinette in England narrates a small part during the last section of the novel.

This essay will analyse how Rhys has portrayed the themes of displacement, identity, refuge and return through the concepts of the pastoral. It will argue that Rhys shows the complexity of postcolonialism by conveying both pastoral and antipastoral perspectives. The essay will also claim that the use of symbolism in the novel contributes to the emphasis on the four themes mentioned above. Earlier, critics have mostly analysed the fact that Wide Sargasso Sea was written as a background story to Charlotte Brontë’s character Bertha in Jane Eyre and Jean Rhys’ intentions by doing so. Other critics have also mentioned the postcolonial theme of loss of identity and displacement in Wide Sargasso Sea. This essay seeks to develop critical interpretation of the novel by analysing these themes through the concept of pastoral.
In order to illustrate in what way Rhys has portrayed these themes, the paper has been organised into four main sections. Firstly, there will be a presentation and definition of relevant concepts and terms which will later be discussed in the analysis. Secondly, there will be a presentation of an analysis of how the pastoral concept is connected to displacement and loss of identity. Thirdly, an analysis of how the concept of pastoral is related to the themes refuge and return will be presented. Fourth, a discussion of the involvement of symbolism and its importance in the representation of displacement and identity will follow. Finally, there will be a conclusion, summarising the most important ideas and concepts.

The research question thus is: In what way does the pastoral convey the postcolonial themes displacement, loss of identity, refuge and return? In addition, observations will be presented on which of the two pastoral form is more dominant; the pastoral or antipastoral.

Theoretical Framework

In this section the concepts postcolonialism and pastoral will be defined and discussed. In relation to these concepts, the terms alienation and ecocriticism will be given brief definitions. The essay will also illustrate in what way these terms connect to the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Gina Wisker defines the term postcolonialism by the time where colonial reign ends in the concerned countries, meaning that a country's literature is not postcolonial until after the colony is independent (Wisker 2). However, ”there is critical debate about the definitions of postcolonial writings in terms of whether it is ante-postcolonial and produced during colonial or imperial rule, or whether specific characteristics are related to being produced after the end of colonialism and imperialism” (Wisker 2). In case of the first-mentioned, the opposition towards ”belief, behaviour and writing” (2) are characteristics found in the text. With the second, Wisker argues that literature written in a postcolonial time could still contain the colonial influence (2). She argues that a postcolonial text concerns subjects such as “identity,
family/kinship, motherlands, nationhoods, and mother tongue” (7). Moreover, Wisker claims that writers like Rhys "foreground the ways in which colonial and imperial rule silenced, oppressed and marginalised the people whose lands it affected” (21-22). She argues that Rhys demonstrates that no matter how good the intentions of the ruler are, colonialism still leads to exploitation (21-22).

Rhys wrote the novel between 1950 and the 1960, a time where the West Indian immigration to Britain increased. During this time, a greater awareness of the problems of independence in colonised countries grew. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set right after the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833. According to Olaussen, Rhys concentrates on the white, indigenous people who benefited from slavery. In the middle of the 19th century, Britain no longer earned economic stability from their colonies and many land owners left and the slaves bought their land. The few land owners who stayed put were left impoverished. Olaussen states that Rhys’ main theme with this novel was "the fate of a woman belonging to a group which no longer has a place” (Olaussen 66). One term that is frequently discussed among theorists studying the concept of postcolonialism is ‘alienation’. This term sums up Olaussen’s statement regarding Rhys’ main theme of portraying belonging in a group that does not exist. The term involves the psychological aspect of colonialism and how slavery and imperialism might lead to a feeling of displacement and not belonging anywhere (Huggan & Tiffin 74-75).

Furthermore, Huggan & Tiffin explain that the term postcolonial ecocriticism has come to be because environmental issues as well as postcolonial questions have connected into similar fields.

The easy assertion, for instance, that the postcolonial field is inherently anthropocentric (human-centred) overlooks a long history of ecological concern in postcolonial criticism; while any number of examples could be mustered to fend off the counter-charge that eco/environmental studies privileges a white male western subject, or that it
fails to factor cultural difference into supposedly universal environmental and bioethical debates. (Huggan & Tiffin 3)

They argue that postcolonial ecocriticism often thematises territorial belonging (20). One major concept which pervades postcolonial ecocriticism is the concept of pastoral.

Gifford claims that there are three different ways in which the term pastoral is used. Between the early Greek and Roman times up until 1610, the term pastoral was used to refer to poetry. This type of poetry was characterised by displaying a dialogue between shepherds expressing their love for their work and the nature around them (Gifford 1). "For the reader or audience, this literary device involved some form of retreat and return, the fundamental pastoral movement, either within the text, or in the sense that the pastoral retreat 'returned' some insights relevant to the urban audience” (1-2).

Gifford’s second definition of the term pastoral is much wider and involves any type of literature that depicts the countryside while comparing and thus contrasting it with the city (2).

Furthermore, the third definition made by Gifford has similarities to the second definition for it does not allow for any descriptions of nature to get by that easy. The third definition is more critical in the way literature portrays the pastoral in relation to reality. Gifford uses an example of a farm worker saying “that a novel was pastoral if it celebrated a landscape as though no-one actually sweated to maintain it on a low income” (2-3). There is an ironic tone to this definition where the term ‘pastoral’ is viewed as a concept that has been simplified (3).

Nonetheless, the term pastoral has been analysed by many critics thus taking on several different definitions. Loughrey claims that the pastoral term should be seen as a "contested term”(qtd in Gifford 4). Loughrey, Bate, Gifford and Pattersson all agree that as literature, and society in general has changed with time, so has the definition of the term pastoral (qtd in Gifford 4, 5, 11 & 81). They claim that changes demand the term pastoral to be read yet again in order to be able to better define it accordingly to its current state (5). Pattersson exemplifies
this definition by stating that the pastoral might be an illustration of political opposition of today’s society (11.) Gifford states that "the pastoral construct always reveals the preoccupations and tensions of its time" (81-82). He therefore shows that the term pastoral changes according to age and year.

Furthermore, other relevant views on the definition of pastoral can be exemplified with Carolyn Merchant who makes a claim that females and nature have been complementary for a long time. She believes that in order to develop the term pastoral one also needs to look at genders occurring in nature and in the environment (Gifford 5).

Moreover, Roger Sales is a theorist who has defined the term by giving it, what he calls, the five R’s: refuge, reflection, rescue, requiem and reconstruction (qtd in Gifford 7). According to him, what is crucial in the term pastoral is someone who is "seeking refuge in the country and often also in the past; that is a selective ‘reflection’ on past country life in which old settled values are ’rescued’ by the text; and that all this functions as a simplified ‘reconstruction’ of what is, in fact, a more complex reality” (7-8). Sales claims that the term pastoral originally was made to preclude the opposition of power in terms of land ownership as well as to the structure of society (7-8).

In similarity, Marx (qtd in Gifford 10), Huggan & Tiffin and Gifford also bring up the subject of escaping when treating the term pastoral. Marx divides the term into two aspects. Firstly, there is "the sentimental kind of pastoralism” (qtd in Gifford 10). Secondly, there is "the pastoral of mind” (10). The sentimental pastoral is a simple form which is struck by a patronising usage of the term pastoral. Marx explains that there is often something that counteracts the idyllic aspect of the pastoral. He claims that the aspect of return is a necessity because it improves the aspect of the retreat (10). Furthermore, Huggan & Tiffin argue that the term pastoral often deals with the theme of escaping into the past (Huggan & Tiffin 84).
In addition, there is an opposite term to pastoral called antipastoral. A text becomes antipastoral when it reveals the gap between the authentic and the pastoral. This gap can be caused by economic, social and cultural aspects (Huggan & Tiffin 128). The anti-pastoral term means that the natural, often rural place is no longer glorified as it is in a pastoral text (120). Finally, Gifford sums the term pastoral up with following quote:

It is the very versatility of the pastoral to both contain and appear to evade tensions and contradictions – between country, art and nature, the human and the non-human, our social and our inner selves, our masculine and our feminine selves – that made the form so durable and so fascinating. (11)

Presented above are several definitions and perspectives on the concept of pastoral. The definition that is found most suitable when analysing the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* is Gifford’s definition of contrasting the rural area with the urban, thus highlighting the countryside. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the city will be represented by Britain and the countryside by Jamaica and Dominica. Moreover, the antipastoral is also visible in the novel as Britain is sometimes portrayed as an ideal in contrast to the Caribbean, thus contrasting Gifford’s definition of pastoral as a glorification of the countryside. This is also in agreement with Huggan & Tiffin’s definition of the antipastoral being the exposure of the contrast between countryside and city (128).

Furthermore, the definitions of concepts that will be used in the analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea* are Huggan & Tiffin’s, Gifford’s, Sales’ and Marx’ theories about the terms involving identity, displacement, escape and return. In the novel, the protagonist Antoinette struggles to find her identity. She wants to be English at the same time she wants to keep her Caribbean culture and she identifies with her childhood friend Tia and the former slave Christophine, both being locals. Huggan & Tiffin are clearly in agreement with these themes playing an important role in the concept of pastoral. Furthermore, Gifford, Sales as well as
Marx argue for the importance of escape and return. It could be said that both Antoinette and her husband escape and return in order to show the complexity of postcolonialism.

1. Analysis

1.1 Lack of belonging and finding your identity in relation to the pastoral

In this section, the postcolonial themes displacement and identity in relation to the pastoral in *Wide Sargasso Sea* will be treated.

Ciolkowski, argues that Antoinette’s narrative has the “impossible task in Wide Sargasso Sea to negotiate between the contradictory logics of British colonialism while also wending her way through the Creole culture and post emancipation” (Ciolkowski 340). This struggle of loss of identity and belonging in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is perhaps first represented in the relationship with Antoinette’s black childhood friend Tia. Antoinette’s reflection upon Tia’s betrayal when throwing a rock at her represents her views on her life and the social differences, that imperialism has brought.

When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (Rhys 23)

Antoinette’s struggle for identity is something that returns throughout the novel and it is understood that Antoinette never really comprehends the cultural and physical differences between herself and the former slaves. In her critical text, *Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism*, Gayatri Spivak claims that Antoinette is caught between the Creole and English culture and therefore is lost in her identity (250). Olaussen, too, makes observations on Antoinette’s struggle to find her identity. However, Olaussen’s explanation is further
developed than Spivak’s. She, Olaussen that is, claims that Antoinette struggles to find her place as a woman. She tries to find out whether she belongs to the black or the white community. Olaussen’s conclusion is that since Antoinette returns to Coulibri at the end of the novel she chooses the black community. Olaussen also claims that the husband’s name change of Antoinette is a way for Rhys to give Brontë’s character Bertha more substance. With two names, Antoinette/Bertha needs to make a choice as to where she belongs – thus finding her true identity (Olaussen 77).

When Antoinette is out playing with Tia, she describes the natural pool as ”a bright sparkling green in the sun” and “The water was so clear that you could see the pebbles at the bottom of the shallow part. Blue and white striped red. Very pretty” (Rhys 8). The fact that the three colours described are the three colours represented in the British flag could be seen as Rhys’s way to show Antoinette’s will to be English. According to me, this, then, suggests an antipastoral viewpoint where the idealised place is now.

At a later stage, when the heroine is married, her husband complains about her childish and romantic view of England (Rhys 56-57). Buell claims that the ”Pastoral is usually associated with nostalgic retreat into the past, but its idealism may also have an oppositional character, or – most notably in America – an imaginative potential for the assertion of a new, and better, world” (qtd in Huggan & Tiffin 84). Pastoral here could be said to be represented by the fact that Antoinette in the beginning believes that England is a better place than Jamaica.

If she was a child she was not a stupid child but an obstinate one. She often questioned me about England and listened attentively to answers, but I was certain that nothing I said made much difference. Her mind was already made up. Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song, a waltz, some note of music, and her ideas were fixed. About England and about Europe. (Rhys 56-57)
Since Rhys, through Antoinette’s fixation about England, is giving the picture of England as the ideal place the quote above is showing an anti-pastoral view of the postcolonial novel. This definition is according to Huggan & Tiffin’s definition of the term (128). Still, later on, when Antoinette is in England, she wishes to go back to the Caribbean where she belongs. The constant changing in pastoral has also been observed by Ciolkowski who states that “Wide Sargasso Sea is rocked by the disorienting textual motion between the colonial identification and disidentification with England” (Ciolkowski 341).

Antoinette seems to love her home more than anything in the world. ‘I love it more than anywhere in the world. As if it were a person. More than a person” (Rhys 152). Although this is true, she also continues to show a curiosity and longing towards England. Another example of Antoinette’s identity crisis is when Amélie, one of the servants, sings about Antoinette, calling her a white cockroach. Antoinette says that

That’s what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I’ve heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all. (Rhys 63)

It is evident that Antoinette is a confused character not knowing her true identity, something partly caused by the British imperialism and the emancipation of the slaves in Jamaica.

Throughout the novel, the duality between pastoral and anti-pastoral is evident. This is something Huggan & Tiffin discuss as well. They claim that even though it is common to focus on place and belonging, many authors, when writing postcolonial literature also emphasise on displacement and loss of possession. But more importantly, they also state that this ambiguity is closely connected with identity (118-119).

A bamboo spout jutted from the cliff, the water coming from it was silver blue. She dismounted quickly, picked a large shamrock-shaped leaf to make a cup, and drank. Then
she picked another leaf, folded it and brought it to me. ‘Taste. This is mountain water.’
Looking up smiling, she might have been any pretty English girl and to please her I drank. It was cold, pure and sweet, a beautiful colour against the thick green leaf.
She said, ‘After this we go down and then up again. Then we are there.’
Next time she spoke she said, ‘The earth is red here, do you notice?’
‘It’s red in parts of England too.’
‘Oh England, England,’ she called back mockingly, and the sound went on and on like a warning I did not choose to hear. (Rhys 40)
The paragraph above depicts the beauty of the Caribbean. However, at the same time, the husband compares the landscape with that of England, in a sense, idealising both places. Antoinette’s unwillingness to acknowledge the similarities between the Caribbean and England shows a more traditional pastoral view. The pastoral aspect, or perhaps the balance between pastoral and antipastoral, becomes vivid due to the fact that the two characters view the same landscape so differently, idealising the two counterparts in the novel, namely the Caribbean and England.

Another example of Antoinette’s confused personality and obvious sense of belonging is evident in her husband’s perspective. “She was undecided, uncertain about facts – any fact” (52). This is when she was answering his questions about the snakes in Jamaica, her answers were ambiguous and obfuscated (52). Her confused personality can be explained by the fact Spivak brings up about Antoinette not having found her true identity and where she belongs. Huggan and Tiffin also present the topic of lack of belonging and claims that it connects with the loss of land (Huggan & Tiffin 83). The fact that Antoinette loses her land when marrying her husband could further explain her confused and indecisive character (Rhys 68).

Similarly to Antoinette’s struggle to find her place, the husband, too, has a difficult time adapting to the new climate and culture in Jamaica. He struggles to fit in to the new world he
has entered. According to Huggan and Tiffin, what happens is that the character often tries to recreate the home they just left (Huggan & Tiffin 74). Perhaps this could be said to happen in the passage quoted above as the husband compares the landscape with England (Rhys 40). Ciolkowski elaborates this idea further claiming that the husband “sets out the proper relationship between English Self and ethnic Other by establishing and defending the moral and physical differences that are enlisted as the signifiers of English national identity” (343). An example of this, happening early in the husband’s narration is his reflection on the time of the serving of dinner. “After breakfast at noon there’d be silence till the evening meal which was served much later than in England” (Rhys 54). Nevertheless, the husband eventually adapts more into the new climate. For instance, from being a character who complains about Creole language (50) and demands English to be spoken correctly (84) he starts to speak in Creole himself: “Because his eyes were fixed on the bedroom I shouted at him, ‘Asleep, dormi, dormi.’” (106). These examples clearly show a slight adaptation to his new home and the impact that Creole life has had on him.

One important character that perhaps is not torn between two different places, or at least is not seemingly affected by it, is Christophine. Similarly to Antoinette and her husband, Christophine is portrayed as someone different from the rest:

She was much blacker – blue-black with a thin face and straight features. She wore a black dress, heavy gold earrings and a yellow handkerchief – carefully tied with two high points in front. No other negro woman wore black, or tied her handkerchief Martinique fashion. (Rhys 6)

Nixon claims in "Double Exile: Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea" that "Christophine is always seen as an outsider” (594). The fact that she practices the dark art of obeah also contributes to her outsidership.

14
Moreover, Huggan & Tiffin also discuss the pastoral in terms of ownership, loss of land and entitlement, something that could be said to occur in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. One topic that is brought up several times in the novel is Antoinette’s loss of land when marrying her husband. Christophine is strongly against the manner in which the settlement has been made and does not understand how Antoinette can agree to such a thing. This suggests that Christophine represents the pastoral while the husband represents the antipastoral.

‘He will not come after me. And you must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him.’

‘What you tell me there?’ she said sharply.

‘That is English law.’

‘Law! The Mason boy fix it, that boy worse than Satan and he burn in Hell one of these fine nights’. (Rhys 68)

Furthermore, another pastoral aspect which, according to Huggan & Tiffin, recurs in Caribbean literature is the ruining of the garden which symbolises an anti-pastoral view where the garden, the rural area, is portrayed as something that eventually will be, or at least might be, ruined (Huggan & Tiffin 115). In *Wide Sargasso Sea* this is perhaps most evident in the fire caused by the former colonised people. Before the fire breaks out, Antoinette depicts the garden as a safe place: "When I was safely home I sat to the old wall at the end of the garden. It was covered with green moss soft as velvet and I never wanted to move again. Everything would be worse if I moved” (Rhys 7). When returning after it has been restored Antoinette views the garden differently: "Coulibri looked the same when I saw it again, although it was clean and tidy, no grass between the flagstones, no leaks. But it didn’t feel the same” (13). The quote suggests a change in the sense of safety and eternity. Before the fire, Antoinette never wanted to leave the place and afterwards she does not feel as at home anymore. The ruining of the garden, in this sense, clearly has a great connection to the pastoral and the complexity it
brings. Antoinette’s family being former slave-owners and Antoinette being a white creole do not place them in a good position in the new society formed. Again the balance between anti-pastoral and pastoral is apparent in Rhys’s way to portray the postcolonial aspect of the novel. The answer to the question whether the novel is pastoral or antipastoral is perhaps most evident at the end of the novel. As stated earlier, Antoinette is struggling with her identity, not knowing if she belongs to England or Jamaica. When Christophine claims that she does not believe that England exists, Antoinette clearly shows her objections towards this way of thinking and starts to doubt Christophine and her friendship with her. “I stared at her, thinking, ‘but how can she know the best thing for me to do, this ignorant, obstinate old negro woman, who is not certain if there is such a place as England?’” (Rhys 69). In addition, she cannot believe that she is actually in England when she lives there since she is locked up in a room; a picture of England not agreeable with the one in Antoinette’s mind. “They tell me I am in England but I don’t believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don’t remember, but we lost it” (117). Up until this point, Antoinette is still idealising the concept of England, even though she is currently living there, locked up in an attic. The climax occurs when Antoinette sets the house on fire and commits suicide.

The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri, Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. (Rhys 123)

This passage suggests that Antoinette returns to Coulibri and that she finally found her place. Huggan & Tiffin claim that the concept of returning is a frequent feature in Caribbean literature (Huggan & Tiffin 117). Coulibri is where Antoinette belongs. By showing the complexity of the pastoral and displacement in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys gives the reader an idea of the internal struggle within the characters as well as aftermath of postcolonialism.
1.2 The terms of escape and return in relation to the concept of pastoral

Two themes that are frequently discussed within the concept of pastoral are escape and return. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* it could be said that both Antoinette and her husband make some sort of escape and return at some point in the plot. As proven earlier in this essay, Antoinette is constantly glorifying England and her image of Britain is clearly beautified. "Is it true,’ she said, ’that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so” (Rhys 47). When she realises that she is not loved by her husband she turns to Christophine for advice. Her solution is to go to England, however, she does not have the means to do so. When her husband takes her with him to England she still believes that England will improve her life. At the end of the novel, Antoinette commits suicide by setting fire to the house. In her mind she returns to Coulibri and her childhood.

The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I though, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man’s voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, *Why did I scream?* I called 'Tia!’ and jumped and woke. (Rhys 123)

Furthermore, the husband could be said to make an escape when he travels from England to the Caribbean. His father has put a lot of pressure on him in order to become a successfull man and he thinks the solution lies in the Caribbean. "Dear Father . . . I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it” (Rhys 39). However, after deep reflections he chooses to return to England. Already in the early pastoral poetry, the themes of refuge and return were evident (Gifford 1-2). Also, Sales
mentions refuge, claiming that the concept of pastoral almost always contains some form of escape (qtd in Gifford 7-8). Sales also mentions the term rescue. It could be said that Antoinette is actually rescuing herself when she commits suicide. According to her, this is the only way out from her imprisonment and the only way she could ever return to her beloved Coulibri. Olaussen has also made the observation that Antoinette is escaping to Coulibri as a last resort (Olaussen 77).

In Antoinette’s narrative, which continues in Part Three and fives the final meaning to the events taking place in Part One, the alternative vision is expressed. The vision can only exist if the reality of England and the meaning of being a white woman in the context is denied. An identification with blackness is established as the only possible escape (Olaussen 77). This, therefore shows that Wide Sargasso Sea clearly depicts the two themes of escaping and returning that are frequently observed in the concept of pastoral.

1.3 Imagery and symbolism connected to the concept of pastoral
Huggan & Tiffin claim that the use of animal imagery in order to belittle other characters, is often used in postcolonial literature (Huggan & Tiffin 135). This usage of symbolism and imagery is evident in Wide Sargasso Sea. For example, when Amélie calls Antoinette a white cockroach: ‘The white cockroach she marry” (Rhys 61), Rhys shows the complicated relationship, not only between coloniser and colonised, but also between native inhabitants, emphasising the complex subjects of postcolonialism and emancipation.

The history of human oppression of other humans is replete with instances of animal metaphors and animal categorisations frequently deployed to justify exploitation and objectification, slaughter and enslavement. (Huggan & Tiffin 135)
Huggan & Tiffin also connect the patronising animalistic imagery with the historical aspect of the novel. However, it is not only animals that are symbolically used in Wide Sargasso Sea and
other postcolonial literature. It is evident that the husband sees Antoinette as a possession and means to get wealthy. When having sex he calls her Marionette instead of Antoinette, referring to her as a puppet (99-100). This shows a relationship of power and subordinate often used in the pastoral concept (Huggan & Tiffin 84).

She tell me in the middle of all this you start calling her names. Marionette. Some words so.’

‘Yes, I remember, I did.’

(Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta)

‘That word mean doll, eh? Because she don’t speak. You want to force her to cry and to speak. (Rhys 100)

Furthermore, when deciding to bring Antoinette with him to England, against her will, he thinks “She’s mad but mine, mine” (Rhys 108). Huggan & Tiffin explain this objectification of Antoinette by claiming that "Pastoral freedom – from this negative view-point – turns out to be another form of servitude, while the traditional pastoral figure of the shepherd/gardener turns into a puppet in someone else’s fantasy of ‘refuge’, ‘peace’, ‘land’, ‘home’” (Huggan & Tiffin 106). This means that in order to feel safe and at home, the husband creates an image of Antoinette belonging to him. Moreover, the husband depicts Amélie as "a lovely little creature" (Rhys 36), implying that he does not see her as an equal. In a postcolonial perspective, it could be argued that the husband, as a white British man is having the old imperial feelings of being superior in Amélie’s presence and thus not considering her as a human being. Huggan & Tiffin state that:

human individuals and cultures at various times have been treated 'like animals' by dominant groups, and both human genocide and human slavery have been, and in some cases continue to be, predicated on the categorisation of other peoples as animals. (Huggan & Tiffin 135)
This quote suggests that the husband has not left the old ways of thinking when it comes to former slaves. It also connotes that Rhys wants to show the imbalance between coloniser and colonised and by using the word ‘creature’, hence an animalistic imagery, she succeeds to portray this relationship.

Moreover, another animal imagery that reoccurs in the novel is the cock. It first appears when Antoinette is a young girl and overhears the other servants talk about Christophine and her magical powers. Antoinette is in Christophine’s room waiting for her and she imagines “white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly” (Rhys 13). The second time the cock appears it is the husband who narrates. It is just when the couple leaves the village to go to the summer house in Coulibri.

A cock crowed loudly and I remembered the night before which we had spent in the town. Antoinette had a room to herself, she was exhausted. I lay awake listening to the cocks crowing all night, then got up very early and saw the women with trays covered with white cloths on their heads going to the kitchen. (Rhys 39)

When Antoinette pays Christophine a visit with the intention to convince Christophine to practice obeah in order for Antoinette to win back her husband, Antoinette observes a “heap of chicken feathers in one corner” (Rhys 73). This scene is of great similarity to the fantasy played out in Antoinette’s head when she is young and sits in Christophine’s room mentioned earlier. When she leaves Christophine’s home Antoinette hears a cock crow. She reflects on the symbolism of the cock. ’That is for betrayal, but who is the traitor?’ (Rhys 74). Later, when the husband is writing a letter to prepare for the journey home to England he hears another cock. He asks Baptiste, one of the servants, why it will not stop crowing and gets the answer “Crowing for change of weather.” (Rhys 106). As Antoinette herself reflects, the cock could be said to symbolise betrayal. Like the reader later notices it is not only the husband who commits adultery and hence betrays the marital vows but it is also revealed that Antoinette has had an
affair with another man during the whole time (120). Since the cock appears early in the novel and in such a threatening manner (obeah is seen as threatening for both Creole and English people), it could also be interpreted that the cock symbolises that something bad will occur and thus foreshadowing the outcome of the marriage. This is something that Baptiste reflects upon when the husband asks about the crowing cock. The fact that Baptiste expresses that the cock crows for “change of weather” (Rhys 106) could mean that weather and nature plays a great role in the novel. A common interpretation of the symbol of the cock is that it symbolises the “herald of dawn” (Ferber 45). However, Peter Wolfe has also come to the conclusion that the cock’s presence in Wide Sargasso Sea is a symbol of betrayal (qtd in Kubitschek 27).

In addition, there is another symbol used in the novel in order to portray the imbalance between Antoinette and her husband as a result of colonialism, namely, wreaths. The husband finds two wreaths on the bed on the couple’s wedding night:

Am I expected to wear one of these? And when?’
I crowned myself with one of the wreaths and made a face in the glass. ’I hardly think it suits my handsome face, do you?’
’You look like a king, an emperor.’
’God forbid,’ I said and took the wreath off. It fell on the floor and as I went towards the window I stepped on it. The room was full of scent of crushed flowers. I saw her reflection in the glass fanning herself with a small palm-leaf fan coloured blue and red at the edges. I felt sweat on my forehead and sat down, she knelt near me and wiped my face with her handkerchief. (Rhys 42).

This passage truly conveys the imbalance in power between the two characters. Antoinette resembles her husband with an emperor as well as kneeling down and wiping his face as if she would be his subordinate. However, the husband is not keen on possessing the title of an emperor and therefore quickly removes the wreath. This action shows that he is unwilling to be
portrayed as a coloniser. Again, Rhys uses symbolism in order to convey the postcolonial aspect which is something Huggan & Tiffin claim is recurring in postcolonial literature (135).

Moreover, the way the honeymoon estate Coulibri is depicted could be said to associate with Christianity and more specifically, the Garden of Eden. According to Huggan & Tiffin, the presence of biblical symbols as a way to emphasise the displacement and lack of belonging are frequent in the concept of pastoral (14).

In the beginning of the novel, Antoinette is hiding in the garden when eaves-dropping on two gossiping women talking ill of Coulibri. “And what about the stables and the coach house dark as pitch, and the servants’ quarters and the six-foot snake I saw with my own eyes curled up on the privy seat last time I was here” (Rhys 12). The presence of the snake obviously is a clear symbol of the snake in the Garden of Eden. Snakes are commonly a symbol for danger and poison (Ferber 186). The snakes reoccur in the novel once more when Antoinette and her husband are living in Coulibri. “When I asked her if the snakes we sometimes saw were poisonous, she said, ‘Not those, ‘but how can they be sure? Do you think they know?’ Then, ‘Our snakes are not poisonous. Of course not.” (Rhys 52). Even though the snake is a common Christian symbol for betrayal, Kubitschek, claims that “The voodoo-tradition, however, considers snakes not only sacred to Damballah, the mightiest of gods, but manifestations of him” (Kubitschek 25). This could be the reason as to why Antoinette replies in such an ambiguous way. The indistinctness in the way the symbol of snakes is present in the novel strengthen the notion of the ambiguous way the pastoral is portrayed. As already discussed earlier, Antoinette’s lack of belonging and loss of identity is portrayed through the pastoral and here we see it occur again, in the symbolism of the snake.
Conclusion

To conclude, the essay has found much proof of Antoinette’s identity crisis and lack of belonging. Her constant struggle between Creole and English is evident in the representation of her pastoral view. She is idealising both cultures and places, perhaps more dominantly England during the plot. However, at the end, which is more significant, Rhys’ obviously chooses ‘side’ and let the idea of rural tradition conquer. Moreover, the husband is trying to make himself at home in the Caribbean, a method said to be common in the concept of pastoral. Similarly to his spouse, he too, idealises both places, showing the ambiguous perspective of pastoral in the novel.

Moreover, the essay has given a description in what way the pastoral terms escape and return relate to Wide Sargasso Sea. Both Antoinette and her husband take refuge in their spouse’s home country and eventually, after some reflection return, in one way or another, to their respective homes.

Furthermore, the essay has proven the fact that imagery and symbolism has a great connection with pastoral and the ambiguity and complexity it represents, especially in terms of postcolonialism. For example, the relationship between coloniser and colonised is clearly represented in the imagery of the husband viewing Antoinette as a puppet and a possession of his. In addition, he sees Amélie as a creature. The imbalanced relationship is also conveyed in the symbolism of the wreaths. This essay has also proven that the use of symbolism in the novel emphasises the various themes presented in this essay. The symbolism of the cock as betrayal is an example of this. As in much other postcolonial literature, the Christian symbolism is present in Wide Sargasso Sea. The snake in the Garden of Eden often symbolises danger, however, an interesting note is that snakes in voodoo tradition are often viewed as something divine.
In conclusion, all of the above confirm that the ambiguity of postcolonialism that Rhys tries to convey, mainly through the concept of pastoral is generated successfully in this essay. A topic that could be interesting to analyse further is how the pastoral characteristics of the imbalanced relationship between coloniser and colonised is portrayed in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. 
Works Cited


