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When deciding which texts from this semester I was going to focus on I had to think back to which ones had the most impact on me. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys both spiked a lot of thoughts and emotions in me. *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847 and then Jean Rhys decided to do a continuation if you will that was published in 1966. Interestingly enough when I first started reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* I did not put the connection together right away, so as I got further and further into the book I kept being surprised. Both of these books are wonderfully written and teach valuable lessons if you allow them too. When I read *Jane Eyre* in high school I did not fully pay attention or care about the text if I am being honest. Reading *Jane Eyre* again as a 20 year old woman I am angry at my 17 year old self who decided to not pay attention. If young teen girls allow themselves to fully embody the lessons both of the books provide it would be such a game changer for their future. Even though the original was released in the 1800's men are still disgusting human beings who take advantage of younger girls and their vulnerability. Which leads me to our character that we love to hate, Mr. Rochester. This man is everything that is wrong with men, and what is sad is there are ones worse than him. Rochester was married to both Antoinette and Jane at the same time and was terrible to both of them. After reading both of these books we see that Rochesters relationships with his wives are mentally and emotionally abusive, he grooms them to be just like him, and he

is very misogynistic. Both of these young women deserved much better than Rochester as their husband.

Both Jane and Antoinette were dealt rough childhoods, so when Rochester came into their life it felt like a saving grace. Because of this he was able to take advantage of them and groom them to be just like him. Their bad childhoods allowed this as well as the age differences, maturity levels, and life experience. Of course an older man going for a younger woman is not unheard of, especially at that time, but he did not love them he wanted power and control over them. I was reading this piece by Hiskes, Andries called, "Prosthetic Performatives: Reading Disability's Discomfort through Emotives and Affect Patterns in Jane Eyre." This piece made some very interesting points about emotives and language and how they can be conducted to manipulate a situation. Emotives is a performative language that designates emotional states which require a response in return. We see this a lot in Jane and Rochester's conversations because he has spent time grooming Jane to become used to this language. What ends up happening is Rochester will lead the conversation asking Jane questions like, "Do you think I am handsome?" or "And will you stay with me?" What he is doing here is acting insecure and seeking Jane's approval which later leads to Jane actually needing the same thing from him. Rochester continues to use tactics to make Jane seek for validation, make her feel insecure, bewildered, confused, and unsettled. The relationship Rochester and Jane have relates to the master and slave relationship. It reminds me of Stockholm syndrome a lot because even though Jane is not literally kidnapped and being held hostage, her mind is completely kidnapped by Rochester. Looking back through my journal annotations there is a specific line I wrote down that I found to be very inappropriate. He calls Jane, "My pet lamb" and I specifically wrote

down underneath it “He seems like he’s grooming her.” There are many other instances that prove he groomed her, like when he kept wanting to hold her hand or when he blackmailed her with money so that she would not go see Mrs. Reed. I think Antoinette got more of the sexual grooming from Rochester than Jane did because he did not hold any ounce of love or like towards her.

Not only was Rochester grooming these young women, but he mentally and emotionally was very abusive to them. I think one scene from the book that still shocks me is when Rochester had not arrived to Thornfield yet, but he had all of his guests there and the Bunches came to the door. Jane was surprised when the Bunches requested to see her, and they had a very long and emotionally manipulative conversation. The Bunches is revealed to be Rochester in disguise and now knows Jane takes a liking to him. He went through all of that to confirm her feelings for him and then embarrass her. Then of course Jane already being manipulated says, “I’d give my life for you sir” and at that point he knew he had all of the control. Rochester was even more emotionally and mentally abusive to Antoinette. He refused to call her by her name and only referred to her as “Bertha” and once said, “Lovely meaningless face” to her. He completely ruined Antoinette and drove her to actually become mad and confused with her life it is pure evil. Antoinette’s family had money and that was the reason Rochester wanted to marry her, once he had the money he locked her in his attic and convinced her she was crazy until she actually was. Even when you look something up about Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre they do not refer to her as Antoinette, they call her Bertha. What is even more sad is Rochester has gotten so much control of Jane’s mind that when she discovers Bertha in the attic she does not

feel sympathy. She describes Berths as, “purple, savage, swollen lips, thick and dark hair” and you would think after realizing the man you were about to marry locked his still wife in the attic Jane would have some sympathy. I believe she felt confused and hurt, but remember this is written from older Janes perspective and she should be nicer now that she was older. It shows that the subject of Bertha for Jane is unsettled and it spikes something in her.

On top of the grooming and mental and emotional abuse Rochester did to these young women, he was also very misogynistic. You have to be a special type of man to be a misogynist, so I guess majority of guys are special. Rochester only tends to his own needs and they come above the women in his life. He was so quick to lock Bertha away, he abandoned his many mistresses like nothing, and the fact that he was willing to commit bigamy with Jane without question shows how much the women in his life actually matter to him. Rochester looked at women like all they were supposed to do is sit there and look pretty, but he also hated them even more if they did not have intelligence that related to him, so women never win with him. Except in some weird twisted way I believe he developed the attraction towards Jane because she did speak her mind and was educated. Maybe it was because Jane was not the most beautiful girl, but she could carry on a conversation with him for quite some time. According to “Mrs. Rochester’s Story: Franco Zeffirelli’s adaptation of Jane Eyre” the book Jane Eyre was one of the first books to have the main character be a feminist heroine figure. It tells a tale of “difficulties every woman in patriarchal society must meet and overcome” (Franco Zeffirelli). It even says that Bertha had to live out her story for Jane to take her role as a proto-feminist. Many people are upset with the ending where Jane goes back to Rochester in the end to be his wife and

caretaker, and yes it is disappointing and I do question her mannerisms as an adult woman because of the way she demonized Bertha. All that being said though at least Jane tried, back in that time period Jane would have been winning if she married Rochester because she would have the nice house, money and status. I appreciate her taking time to find herself and then coming back to him knowing a bit more about herself than she did before.

Both of these books have opened my eyes in more ways than one, and being able to do more research on them was amazing. I think these two books are great staples for a mother to talk about with her daughter. Even though we have made so much progress since the 1800s, men still disrespect women and it is almost done in a more obvious way than Rochester did. I used to dread having to read Jane Eyre in high school, it seemed very intimidating and to be frank, boring. This book is completely the opposite, yes there are long monologues, but the meaning behind Jane Eyre is amazing and I really think Charlotte Bronte was ahead of her time. Both of these books demonstrate a man grooming young women, emotionally and mentally abusing them, and being misogynistic. Men are still doing all three of those things, but they are going against a very strong and well-spoken generation of women. Rochester will always be the character we love to hate and Antoinette and Jane both deserved more than this disgusting man to take over and ruin their lives.

## Works Cited

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