The Intoxicating Exotic

An Ecocritical Analysis of Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide an ecocritical analysis of Jean Rhys’ postcolonial novel Wide Sargasso Sea, focusing on three central issues. Firstly, the natural parallels that Rhys uses to illustrate the relationship between island topography and the inner human landscape will be looked at in conjunction with the implications of colour, both in nature and in the ethnic makeup of Caribbean islanders and of the English. Also, the natural imagery of fire and its significance to important points in the novel’s plot will be discussed in relation to the experiences of Annette and Antoinette as physical and psychological captives. Secondly, the nature of love, lust and fear will be analysed through a juxtaposition of differing cultural values. Psychological trauma and the resulting conflict it creates will be compared within a colonial context, exposing the projection of human experience onto a neutral environmental canvas. Lastly, this paper will discuss the impact of colonization and cultivation on natural places and people within the context of Rhys’ novel. Multiple perceptions of identity will be considered, and an effort will be made to provide a modicum of historical background to the issues facing both colonized and colonizing peoples of the English empire in the late nineteenth century.
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