

《夢回藻海》中的熱帶森林、 「自然界局外人」與「肉身」

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摘要

歷來學者研究英國小說家珍·瑞斯 (Jean Rhys, 1890-1979) 的《夢回藻海》(Wide Sargasso Sea, 1966, 另譯:《藻海茫茫》), 大都專注以下的議題: 異族通婚 (métisse)、奴役、父權暴力、性別不平等、種族剝削, 以及文化間衝突和誤解。評論者大多認為《夢回藻海》是一本關於後殖民、女性主義或後現代, 以及帶有自傳風格之傑出文學作品。但是, 如果以生態批評學 (Ecocriticism) 的角度重新咀嚼《夢回藻海》一書, 我們就會發現: 瑞斯翻寫夏綠蒂·勃朗特 (Charlotte Brontë) 的《簡愛》(Jane Eyre, 1847), 替此書中閣樓上的瘋女子所寫的前半生傳記, 也可讀成是一本反思「人類」(思考的自我) 與「自然」(具威脅性的他者) 間複雜關係的鉅著。

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世人慣於忘記我們只是地球大家庭裡的一份子，就如小說中男主角愛德華・羅切斯特的心態一般，把周遭萬物與植物看作是入侵者，對熱帶環境，由無知而恐懼，由恐懼而厭惡。還有人一味痴心妄想，自視為神明指派到世界上的唯一主宰。在此主從關係中，人類為萬物之靈，高高在上，並和其他萬物疏離，萬物名正言順的受人類宰制。在瑞斯的作品裡，羅切斯特和妻子安東妮特（《簡愛》中的瘋女）頻頻接觸熱帶森林與生物，可是兩人的舉止、反應和感想卻南轅北轍。從雙方與自然接觸的經驗來說，羅切斯特出現羅伯特・哈力森 (Robert Pogue Harrison) 所稱的「理性主義的森林恐懼症」(the forest phobia of rationalism) 的症狀，或者根本是罹患了理性主義自然恐懼症。簡而言之，羅切斯特可視為尼爾・艾佛頓 (Neil Evernden) 筆下典型的「自然界局外人」(the Natural Alien)，相對地，安東妮特卻是大衛・艾布藍 (David Abram) 書中之「肉身」(the Flesh)，生態共容共存的典範。

關鍵詞：生態批評學、《夢回藻海》、「自然界局外人」、「肉身」
森林恐懼症

“The Natural Alien,” “the Flesh,” and the Tropical Forest in Wide Sargasso Sea

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Abstract

As a text rich in detail with the issues of *métisse* (miscegenation), slavery, patriarchal violence, gender inequality, racial exploitation, and inter-cultural misunderstanding and conflicts, Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) nonetheless sheds light on human alienation from, as well as fear of, nature. What lies behind the surface of a postcolonial, autobiographical, feminist, postmodern novel is an inspiring rethinking of the complicated relationship between human beings (as the thinking self) and nature (as the daunting other). In the novel, Edward Rochester views other earthly residents and plants as merely intruders in his life. Some human beings, like him, tend to

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forget that we are just one of the members of a great earthly family, rather than the sole, dominant species appointed by God to govern the living world. If we consider the Rochesters' encounters with the forest, insect, and animal as portrayed in Rhys' novel, we will notice Edward's sense of unease, fear, agitation when he sees them as threatening; as opposed to Antoinette's calmness and serenity because it is obvious to her that the world also belongs to them. The European husband simply displays what Robert Pogue Harrison has called "the forest phobia of rationalism," or more broadly symptoms of nature phobia of rationalism. In sum, Rochester could have been viewed as a typical "natural alien" as defined in the eponymous book, *The Natural Alien*, by Neil Evernden. By comparison, Antoinette epitomizes what David Abram calls "the Flesh," an ideal state of ecological harmony.

Keywords : Ecocriticism, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, "the Natural Alien", "the Flesh", forest phobia

“Is it true,” she said, “that England is like a dream?”

“Well,” I answered annoyed, “that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.”

“But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?”

“And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?” (Rhys 80-1)¹

I.

At first glance, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), based on both her rereading and rewriting of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), appears somewhat autobiographical.² Her memoir-like masterpiece has mainly depicted the tragic consequence of the conflicts as well as communication between cultures, and it has also been about the pervasive

¹ All the quoted words, lines, and passages of Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* in my paper are taken from the 1982 Norton paperback edition.

² Born on the island of Dominica to a family with a Welsh doctor father and a Creole mother, Rhys was brought up speaking both English and the Dominican French dialect, and had lived in Europe from the age of sixteen until her death in 1979. By contrast, Antoinette, the heroine in Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, was born to a family with an English slave-trader father called Mr. Cosway and a Creole mother named Annette, who was from Martinique, the southern neighboring island of Dominica, across the Martinique Passage, in the Windward Islands of the West Indies. Part Two of the novel about the honeymoon of Antoinette and her husband is set in Dominica. For further information about Jean Rhys, see Wyndham:5-13. Also see Gilson:632-56; Scafe:187-206. For the relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, please see Maurel:155-61.

effect of colonialism on the patriarchal societies in the European colonies of the Caribbean area during the 1830s and 40s. It explores the issues of métisse (miscegenation), slavery, racial exploitation, and gender inequality.³ Still, it could be read as a journey of the heroine, Antoinette (Bertha) Rochester, née Mason (or Cosway), in search of her own identity—to where she belongs, in which culture she should be rooted. Because of their alike Creole background, Rhys may have also felt troubled and devastated about this identity quandary during her lifetime.⁴

However, a close scrutiny of *Wide Sargasso Sea* will expose us to a new perspective or horizon if we pay heed to the various passages about human's contact with the tropical forests. We will find that what lies behind the surface of a postcolonial, autobiographical, feminist, postmodern novel is an inspiring rethinking of the complicated relationship between human beings (as the thinking self) and nature (as the daunting others). In the novel, Edward Rochester and his wife, Antoinette, have several times or occasions in which they either walk by the forest in Jamaica or Dominica, lose their ways in it, or observe it at a distance. Rochester's experience of his various encounters with the green differs a lot from that of Antoinette: for the Victorian Englishman, the woods represent "vast and somber wilderness," maniacally threatening; by contrast, for his wife, they seem like a friendly sanctuary (Harrison 1). Their difference does not end here—even their attitudes toward animals and insects are not the

³ For the postcolonial perspective on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, please see Hope:51-73. Or, see Seshagiri:487-505.

⁴ For the question of Creole identity, please see Carr:38-62.

same. In a sense, if we take their respective relationship with the forest into consideration, Rochester could have been viewed as a typical “natural alien” as defined in the eponymous book, *The Natural Alien*, by Neil Evernden, and by comparison, Antoinette epitomizes what David Abram calls “the Flesh.” Abram clearly derives this term from French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory of it as illustrated in *The Visible and the Invisible* (*Le Visible et L’Invisible*, 1964).

The term “natural alien” denotes man’s detached, isolated state in nature. It shows traces of influences by the Western thinking since the Scientific Revolution, which, according to Morris Berman, has been the offspring of both “[Cartesian] rationalism and [Baconian] empiricism” (28). And, “[the] marriage,” continues Berman, “of reason and empiricism, of mathematics and experiment” paves the way for the emergence of a thinking which “confronts the world [nature] as a separate object,” and man has become a thinking subject trying to observe, analyze, and see it as the base for materials and resources (28, 34). Or, nature as a daunting other needs to be contained, controlled, or conquered. What ensues from this thought is then the separation of mind and body, subject and object, human and nature. This division also parallels “[the] identification of human existence with pure ratiocination” (Berman:34-5). After the advent of this kind of “scientific” thinking with its consequent effect of the “mechanico-mathematico-experimental” management of the earth and all earthly residents (Berman:59), the thinking subject has usually maintained a detached role of an observer in terms of human-nature relationship, and has had to “[rely] on the gaze of objectivity” (Evernden:101). For the

observing subject, “the loss of intimacy and immediacy” with nature is inevitable (Evernden:101). Not only does the “technological being,” the other name for the natural alien, find himself “floating” further and further away from nature, but it also seems that fear begins to arise out of this unhealthy relationship (Evernden:111、120).

Human knowledge always fails miserably in front of the irreducibility of nature, so any textual understanding about our living world could have been found lacking in some important way. When nature perennially dwarfs human attempt to grasp the significance of it, awe or fear will usually accompany a thinking subject unable to explain what confronts him. Edward Rochester, a Victorian English gentleman and a colonizer thinking subject, is certainly a technological being in its embryonic age, and his feeling of unease while inside woods exhibits signs and behaviors of what Robert Pogue Harrison has called “the forest phobia of rationalism” (148). Meanwhile, since Rochester is petrified of animals and insects as Jean Rhys has shown us, it will not be far-fetched to see him as the typical representative of the colonizer thinking subject exhibiting symptoms of nature phobia of rationalism.

By contrast, Antoinette does not act as if she has been either perching or floating above nature; rather, she seems to act as if she is only a member of the natural habitat on earth—sharing it with other species. Rarely does she think of herself as superior, alien to the other residents when she saunters around the woods of the West Indies and whenever she sees insects and animals there. Owing to her ecologically-friendly lifestyle, Antoinette signifies the David Abram’s notion of Merleau-Pontian Flesh.

The Flesh includes “both our flesh and ‘the flesh of the world’ (Abram:66). The flesh of the world includes all living organisms. And, it, continues Abram,

is the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlines and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity. It is the reciprocal presence of the sentient in the sensible and of the sensible in the sentient, a mystery of which we have always, at least tacitly, been aware, since we have never been able to affirm one of these phenomena, the perceivable world or the perceiving self, without implicitly affirming the existence of the other. (66)

At no point will human beings be the only sentient organism on earth; we are always sensible in the sentient living world. Since the Flesh will be incomplete with neither our flesh nor the flesh of the world, a meaningless carnage and a cruel destruction of nature and the other earthly residents will represent an indirect, yet shattering blow to us and cause an environmental disaster. Here, this notion just erases the division between “subject and object, self and other, man and environment,” so all of them “are ultimately identical” (Berman:77). For example, as merely a part of nature instead of a detached viewer, a person feels beheld while he or she beholds a tree. It is not a unilateral but bilateral relationship between the perceiver and the perceived, nor is it just a visual engagement on the perceiver’s part, but it includes the sensory functioning of seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, tasting—a “synaesthesia”—when a person walks in woods (Abram:59-60). The perceiver simultaneously is the

perceived, while the perceived the perceiver. In short, the Flesh is an ideal state of ecological harmony, a “holistic world view” (Berman:77).

II.

Let us now return to both Antoinette and her husband’s respective experiences with the forest as depicted in the novel. At the beginning of the second part of the novel, when Mr. Rochester, together with his newlywed wife, first passes by a village named Massacre in Dominica on their way for their honeymoon, what strikes him most is the “wall of green,” and “what an extreme green” (Rhys:69). By his first impression, Mr. Rochester might not find the tropical forest appealing to him, nor is it friendly. He clearly finds this patch of wildness—permeated and laden with energy and life—imposing, opposing, hidden, and mysterious, when the word “wall” is uttered. This place, as he confesses, is “not only wild but menacing” (Rhys:69). The sense of wildness connotes colonizers’ belief that non-European areas are in dire need of advanced management and control. More than wild and menacing, the whole atmosphere under Edward’s narration is “hostile” to him (Rhys:149). Hostility apparently dispels his little curiosity about the exotic setting: he has been afraid of going into the forest since the very first encounter. For him, the untamed nature, almost exactly like a wall of trees—thick and dense—is too mysterious to understand and impenetrable for any objective gaze. Viewing the forest as a daunting other refused to be studied, he just feels

challenged. After all, the tropical jungle could not be mistaken for a well-planned and managed piece of woodland in England.

After the Rochesters’ arrival at the summer house for their honeymoon at Granbois, Edward’s own words depicting the house and its surrounding area reveal his forest phobia:

Perched up on wooden stiles the house seemed to shrink from the forest behind it and crane eagerly out to the distant sea. It was more awkward than ugly, a little sad as if it knew it could not last.
(Rhys:71-2)

Herein, the colonizer thinking subject identifies himself as the lonely house trapped in the menacing green. The house would have liked to run away from there had it had legs or wheels, for fear that the surrounding forest will devour it alive (Rhys:89). Deforestation surely will get the colonizers a clearing, a space, yet this victory is only temporary. Weeds will constantly threaten to take over any human construction at any moment. Moreover, only by wishfully imagining that the house has been “an imitation of an English summer house,” and his beautiful wife “might have been any pretty English girl” can the displaced colonizer console himself that the hostile feeling he has is just an illusion (Rhys:71). But, his dream amounts to nothing because he cannot conceal the truth of his being in the West Indies, instead of a honeymoon spent at a countryside farmhouse near woods of the managed forest back home. Perhaps without this kind of deliberate self-deceit and the dowry of thirty thousand pounds, he would immediately run away from the house surrounded by tropical trees.

Later, Rochester again shares his observation about the loneliness of the house with us. When Antoinette offers the narrator a tour of the house, the words used to describe it are “neglected and deserted” (Rhys:73). Despite the fact that his wife is fond of the house, he either dislikes it or finds it “abominable” (Rhys:74、161、172). For him, the house, “bordered by a row of tall trees,” resembles a remote outpost of colonization, civilization or even human exploitation of nature, and he is here not because of love nor of choice, but on account of need and money (Rhys:75). Not being the first born in the family, he would not inherit wealth from his father by the rules of primogeniture. Had it been possible for him, he would have wanted to lead a normal English gentleman life, not the one at the margin of the empire and European civilization. Thus, stationing amid hostility in “the God forsaken island” is the only step for him to get the money so as to show his father, eldest brother and the world that he is worthy of the name of their family (Rhys:160).

Although Rochester would rather stay in the garrison-like summer house than in the wild, he still has a favorite site outside. Before his relationship with his wife deteriorates, he does enjoy life in Granbois for a short period of time. He usually likes to go swimming in a natural “bathing pool” in the river near the summer house, unwilling to leave there once in the water (Rhys:87). Where the pool is located is “a beautiful place—wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness,” just the same as the rest of Dominica (Rhys:87). Like a sort of secret garden, it is “tightly shut” from outside because of the “thick leaves” of trees, so “it [keeps] its secret” (Rhys:87). His anxiety

and feeling of being challenged by woods lessen there, but, as a colonizer thinking subject, he tells himself that "[what] I see is nothing—I want what it hides—that is not nothing" (Rhys:87). The word secret here alludes either to the current locale, his wife, the native culture, or the forest there in general, yet his gaze is still objective and he is still the discerning subject. Nature is still the other, and for him, "manipulating nature is a key to knowing it" (Berman:61). Here, other than just relaxing and having fun in the pool, Rochester still wants to know nature, its secret, thereby to control it since knowledge is power.

Nonetheless, apparently his curiosity does not do him any good when he really tries to walk into a tropical forest. Still afraid of the imposing presence of the wall of trees, he again says at the edge of the scary green: "I had reached the forest and you cannot mistake the forest. It is hostile" (Rhys:104). Yet, instead of retreating at that moment, he goes deep into it contrarily. Once inside the nemesis like greenness, all he sees is "the trees," and even the light becomes "green" (Rhys:104). As a result, he loses his way almost immediately after this penetration, and then the longer he stays in the green, the scared he becomes though he keeps reminding himself that he is trapped in a "beautiful place," quiet and serene (Rhys:104). In addition to calming himself down, he feels "so sure" that someone is [watching]" him in the forest (Rhys:104). He then turns around or "[looks] over [his shoulder]," but could not see anything there (Rhys:104). Of course someone is looking at him; it is the trees that are trying to perceive him. He is simply too alienated, too arrogant to remember that man after all is only a part of nature, but his contempt

for the local people, his wife included, native culture and his detachment from nature simply blind him to this truth. His sense of displacement and feeling of unease in a forest just attest to the fact that he is just a natural alien in that spectacular island.

Later, on the verge of his being found by Baptise, their native servant, Rochester still says to himself, “I was lost and afraid among these enemy trees, so certain of danger that when I heard footsteps and a shout I did not answer” (Rhys:105). As a displaced colonizer thinking subject, the imposing greenland covered by trees seems to “[transcend] human grounding” or his knowledge (Harrison:147). His hylophobia of rationalism emerges out of his inability to “reduce” the tropical jungle “to intelligibility through mathematics or history” or any other disciplines (Harrison:147). Consequently, he may only feel safe and secured inside the summer house, the only “humanly constructed” place available there, and for him, it “is a refuge or asylum from nature” (Harrison:147). Because “the world of nature,” ungraspable, “terrifies him,” Rochester “is thus condemned to the city,” the metropolitan center, and the summer house, an outpost of the humanly constructed world in the wild (Harrison:147).

However, according to Rochester, the summer house has never been safe or permanent. In order to build the summer house, people have to “[clear] the forests, cast them to the margins, [bury] them under the [ground],” but on the outskirts of this residence still lies the vast and menacing greenery (Harrison:147). Before leaving Granbois, Rochester looks back at the house, and then reflects on the fate of it:

But the sadness I felt looking at the shabby white house—I wasn't

prepared for that. More than ever before it strained away from the black snake-like forest. Louder and more desperately it called: Save me from destruction, ruin and desolation. Save me from the long slow death by ants. But what are you doing here folly? So near the forest. Don't you know that this is a dangerous place? And that the dark forest always wins? Always. If you don't, you soon will, and I can do nothing to help you. (Rhys:167)

Undoubtedly, the forest phobia of rationalism still looms large in Rochester's mind. Naively he may think that he will be safe from the threatening of trees as long as he gets back to the metropolitan center, but he forgets that even "the cities are under siege," and eventually "they are giving way to the forests" which slowly "encroach from without" (Harrison:147, 13). As a typical natural alien, he indeed has nowhere to run from the maddening green, unless some day he will realize the cruel fact that: "we are not on the earth; we are within it" (Nicholsen:65). As a colonizer thinking subject, Mr. Rochester fails miserably "to acknowledge our existence as one of the earth's animals" because he forgets what constitutes "the organic basis of our thoughts and our intelligence" which we naively believe to be the reasons that our mind could transcend our body, the physical world, and nature (Abram:47).

Meanwhile, for Antoinette, compared with Rochester's fear of the settings, she always wants to stay in the Caribbean and be a part of the natives, notwithstanding the question of identity. Being a Creole daughter by a slave trader father, she, and Annette, her mom, are hated in Jamaica, as well as in Dominica. The black natives shower them with expressions

like “white cockroach,” “white nigger,” or “beggar” whenever they are alone without escort (Rhys:19, 24). The European colonizers do not like the mother and the daughter, either. Indeed, neither the black nor the white has treated both as one of their own kind. Though Annette and Antoinette could easily pass as white, their skin color cannot hide their black behavior—white mask, yet black heart. Though they just act like black, their mixed-race bodily presence reminds the native about their tragic, unhappy encounter with the white people, culture, and civilization. Antoinette, swinging like a pendulum between two poles, ultimately seems to cling to the soil, the woods, the insects, and the animals.

At the start of the novel, when Antoinette recounts how she spent her childhood at Coulibri Estate, near Spanish Town of Jamaica, we first get a glimpse of a deserted Eden. After the death of her father Mr. Cosway and the Emancipation Act of 1833, no one would like to work for Annette so that the whole “Coulibri Estate,” according to Antoinette and Daniel Cosway, “had gone wild like the garden,” overgrown with flowers, ferns, trees (Rhys:19, 96). Unlike the adults who are troubled by the sight of a ruined mansion, Antoinette, never having a chance to see “the place when it was prosperous,” likes the dilapidated house and its wild garden (Rhys:19). There is an old wall “covered with green moss,” and the area below it is her sanctuary (Rhys:23). Later we will find the old wall with moss in the garden will signify the forest, her true haven. Therefore, from the beginning, we know that Antoinette is used to an estate almost “reclaimed by” nature’s vanguard, “the vegetation belt” (Harrison:13). She remains fond of the old ruined house, now gone when it has been

refurbished and renovated after her mom’s second marriage to Mr. Mason. She points out that neither new food nor house satisfies her like the old ones do (Rhys:34). A derelict house still resided in—by people—and full of vegetation somewhat manifests the ideal state of ecological harmony in the coexistence of plants and humans, and Antoinette has had no problem with that state.

In spite of the hatred to her from the black natives, Antoinette identifies herself with the natives. She especially would have wanted to be like Tia, a black girl, almost her age, and they used to go swimming together, eat together, and sleep side by side (Rhys:23-4, 45). But then again, the specter of racism still hovers over their friendship, and it is obvious that Tia usually treats Antoinette with animosity. On one occasion after Tia stole Antoinette’s clothes during yet another swimming trip, Antoinette, wearing Tia’s even dirtier dress home, is scolded by her mom, and the daughter feels sad because Tia has already told her that her mom does not like her during the quarrel in the morning. That night, Antoinette has a dream, her first one out of the three in the novel, and it is a nightmare relating to the forest (Rhys:26-7).⁵

In it, Antoinette is walking in the forest, but not alone, for she could hear “someone” who “hated” her approaching (Rhys:26-7). Antoinette

⁵ In the second dream scene at the end of the first part of the novel, Antoinette is warned about her engagement and subsequent marriage to Mr. Rochester. In the dream, she leaves the forest for a mansion with “an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall” (Rhys:60). And, “the trees” in the garden “are different trees” (Rhys:60). The third dream, portrayed near the end of the whole novel, foreshadows her setting fire on Thornfield Manor (Rhys:187).

then notices the sound of the advancing footsteps, yet she “could not move” despite her effort (Rhys:27). At this moment, she awakes crying. She weeps for the fact that someone is invading the forest, her refuge, or perhaps this dream could be viewed as her reaction to her mom’s possible second marriage. Nevertheless, the next day, likely out of reaction to this nightmare or out of her anger to the frequent absences of her mom from Coulibri Estate, she determines to leave the house, and not to come back till night (Rhys:27). She then chooses a road that she has no idea of its destination, and keeps on walking on. When the little Antoinette reaches a point in the wilderness located in the farthest part of Coulibri, where there are no roads, trails or paths, she suddenly comprehends that the wild, antagonistic woods, “[razor grasses],” “flowers,” “ants,” “rain,” and “[snakes]” are all “better than people” (Rhys:28).

Feeling deserted and unwanted at the beginning of the trip, she just tries to comfort herself with the thought that, even though the razor grasses cut her arm and leg, what people have hurt her so far has been much worse. Then she continues to compare what human beings and non-human beings have done to her. Suddenly, what her future husband cannot stand—like trees and ants—seems to become her companion during her solitary wandering in the wilderness. After all, human beings are simply the most ruthless and wicked animals in nature, and they, her mother and Tia included, even snub her. Thus, so strong is her yearning for love and care that she has no other alternatives but to turn her attention to non-humans. Later, in the vast greenery where she stands, there even seems to be “a door opened,” through it, she appears to become someone else in a

totally new place (Rhys:28).

From the context, this image of an opening door is definitely more a revelation or an epiphany than a miracle, though Rhys does not bother herself for further description about what she means by the words “somewhere else” or “something else” (28). When Antoinette’s solitary tour in the wilderness ends, she obviously understands that, as long as she is a part of nature, she would have never been lonely or scared. Ostracized by both the black and the white, a Creole girl ironically seems to become a Flesh amid the wildness and forest in the remotest part of Coulibri in Jamaica. Antoinette’s experience from this walk in the woods show that human “body itself is the true subject of experience” (Abram, 45). Without the living body, our mind ceases to function, to exist. Her experience that day also reminds us not to forget that our “breathing, sensing body” subsists on “the soils, plants, and elements that surround” our body, and from the soils, plants, and elements, our body “draws” heavily “its very substance” (Abram:46). Our body “continually contributes itself, in turn, to the air, to the composing earth, to the nourishment of” ants, flowers, grasses, and trees, “ceaselessly spreading out of itself as well as breathing the world into itself, so that it is very difficult to discern, at any moment, precisely where the living body begins and where it ends” (Abram:46-7).

Next, throughout Wide Sargasso Sea, it is not difficult to discover that Antoinette is friendly to other animals, while her husband only holds a lukewarm attitude toward them at best. Rochester reports that rats do not frighten her, and nor do snakes (Rhys:82, 88). She even tells him “our snakes are not poisonous” (Rhys:88). Furthermore, what is amazing is her

account about how she spends a period of time alone with “two enormous rats, as big as cats” inside a little room at night (Rhys:82). Most people will be startled by the sight of such two big rats, but not her, she first stares at them amid their return gaze, and then goes back to sleep (Rhys:82). As a matter of fact, the only animal she cannot stand has been the land crab inhabiting in the natural bathing pool near the summer house at Granbois, yet it is clear that she does not want to kill it; instead, she just throws a “pebble” to drive it away during one occasion (Rhys:87-8).

The following example can further illustrate her innocuousness toward animals. Before Rochester’s first trip to the swimming pool, she only warns him about two things: firstly, don’t put the clothes “on a rock;” secondly, not to forget to shake the clothes prior to redressing it (Rhys:86). Later we know that these two are precautions against the troublesome red ants. From her advice, it is evident that neither does she want her husband hurt, nor she would like them to be killed by any means. Albeit it may be argued that her advice displays not so much her compassion and friendliness toward animals as her acceptance of the co-existence of red ants and human beings, her words to Mr. Rochester still remind us that we tend to forget that human beings are not alone in this living world, no matter where or when, even during a honeymoon like that of Antoinette and her husband. If the Flesh will not be complete without either our flesh or the flesh of the world, senseless violence toward and murder of our earthly companions like the red ants will be yet another stupid act influenced by the anthropocentrism. What Antoinette says to her husband above is definitely more anthropomorphic than anthropocentric.

III.

Let's return to the epigraph quoted at the beginning. It consists of an exchange of words between Antoinette and Mr. Rochester, and one does not need to be a genius to note that the ideas uttered there are at opposite poles. For a girl growing up in circumstances and culture closer to that of the so-called “hunter-gather society,” Antoinette simply cannot consider a metropolitan world to be reality after the new established European plantation of intensive farming had gradually changed or even damaged the landscape, flora and fauna, and people of the Caribbean area (Shepard, 22). According to Paul Shepard, the hunter-gather society, unlike the subsequent agricultural and industrial, technological societies, is more ecologically friendly because their style of subsistence hunting and food-gathering has caused little harm to the environment (19-46). By contrast, Rochester, a technological being and natural alien as already mentioned above, cannot reckon that forests, rivers, mountains, and sea are reality. Rochester, as well as his fellow Europeans, including first the Spanish, and then the French and the British settlers, all sees the tropical setting as a perfect land for the growing of economical plants yielding products such as coffee, cocoa, citrus, banana, nutmeg, and sugar. For them, Antoinette's beautiful island offers raw materials and agricultural products for the metropolitan center. To paraphrase Joseph Rudyard Kipling's famous line here, we may say that, since West Indies are West Indies,

and England is England, never the twain should meet.⁶ With disparity so wide as shown above, their arranged marriage seems to be doomed from the very beginning. However, if we judge by today's ecological mess, clearly the people whom Mr. Mason, Antoinette's stepfather, labels as "lazy," mysterious, and laid-back, but whom his wife views as "alive" and energetic, seem to possess a more ecologically friendly attitude (Rhys:32). Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* concludes that, ironically, ecologically friendly people like Antoinette are losers in the historical development which leads to our current world and civilization.

⁶ The original line is taken from Kipling's "The Ballad of East and West." It is the first line in the poem: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."

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