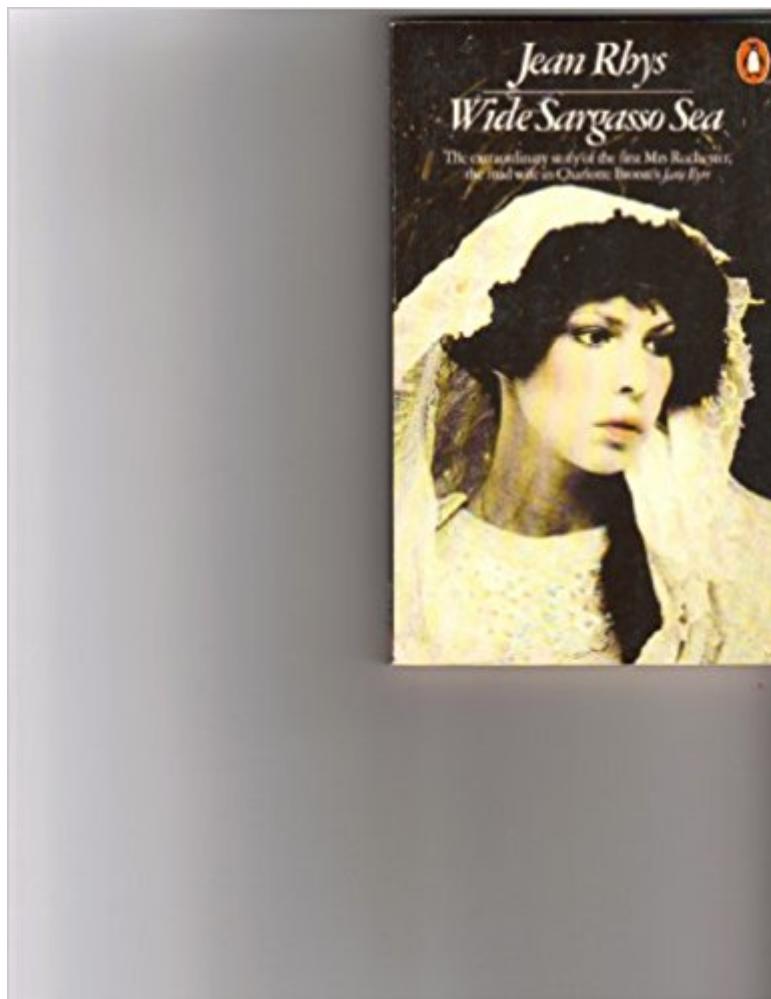


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Wide Sargasso Sea



Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in late May while on vacation in Telluride, Colorado. Once I was aware that this book was a prequel to Jane Eyre about the mad, passionate first wife of Mr Rochester, nothing would keep me from it - outside of a penny-priced copy of it being available on and it spending months & months stowed away in my bookshelf. So, after much ado, I dove in. It's a little disorienting to read between its dual narration and Antoinette's aggressive, spiteful prose, but it also reminds me of Alice Hoffman's A Marriage of Opposites headstrong heroine and her plight to know herself and who to trust in an almost anti-paradise.

This is one of my all-time favorite novellas. It feels like a book ahead of its time, considering how it challenges paternalistic structures and shifts modern perspectives on a classic literary work. Bronte certainly pushed the envelope in Jane Eyre by creating a heroine who bucked traditional feminine ideals, but Rhys takes it one, large step further. Bertha is no longer the beastly villain. Rather, Rhys humanizes her and fleshes out her backstory, and we as readers come to appreciate the complex powers at play in Antoinette's life--colonialism, racism, sexism, spirituality, psychology... Antoinette defies categorization, and so she is stripped of her individuality, dehumanized, and reshaped into a more palatable (read: submissive) woman. This is an important book for women worldwide, and I share it with all my friends. Such an enduring masterpiece!

Jean Rhys' "Wide Sargasso Sea" derives from "Jane Eyre", but is an entirely different work and stands independently as a masterful piece of literature. While the plot-line is somewhat prosaic, the writing is superb; spare, beautiful, poetic and exotic...Rhys' prose is hauntingly evocative of the island setting. It equals the more famous descriptions of Joseph Conrad ("Outcast of the Islands", for example) and Richard Hughes ("High Wind in Jamaica"). It compares favorably with the writings of Victor Serge (read the chapter in, "Unforgiving Years" on the Mexican sojourn of the agent "D") and with the clash between the idealized vision of rural life held by the planter, Morin Dutilleul and Bossuet Metelus, the Obeah magician in Philippe Thoby-Marcelin/Pierre Marcelin's "The Beast of the Haitian Hills". Rhys easily eclipses current-day South American writers of the "magical realism" genre (Gabriel Garcia Marquez, for instance), who can only grasp at what Rhys has achieved in this novel. With the exotic flora, weird sense of isolation, mysterious interpersonal interactions and vaguely portentous overtones attendant upon the well-established and foretold denouement, Rhys' book is simultaneously whistful and depressing. Having visited Jamaica and living in a rural home for about 6 weeks in 1969 (this being shortly after independence from the UK), I can attest to the continuity of perspective existing between the residue British-Jamaican whites and the "native" Jamaicans: these seemed to be grafted intact from the 1830-era of "Wide Sargasso Sea". Unfortunately, the brilliance of the writing has not been a guarantor of commercial success and, as a result, this fine work has languished in relative obscurity. Despite what another nearly forgotten author (L.P. Hartley in, "The Go-Between", 1953) wrote, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there", Rhys demonstrates in "Wide Sargasso Sea" that, at least some continuity between past and present exists, in that nothing much changes with respect to individual's capacity to hurt others; Il en sera toujours ainsi, I suppose.

The copy of this book is beautiful and arrived very swiftly. I also liked how the book presented a side of the story that the text that its main character was based off- "Jane Eyre"- neglected to mention. I would recommend this text to anyone seeking more information on Bronte's Bertha Mason.

This book was recommended to me as a "classic, must read". At first I resisted as I did not want to change my understanding of "Jane Eyre". but now I am pleased that I did read it. Actually, it enhances my understanding of Jane and Mr. Rochester. Am still firmly convinced that "Reader, I married him" is the best line in literature.

This novels got commentary on racial issues, cheating in relationships, power, and culture. Decent read, but some of the translated material is difficult to understand at times.

A dark read, where a tropical paradise takes a dive into becoming a humid prison of consumption, loss and isolation. The story of a young woman who grows into an arranged marriage while succumbing to patriarchal conventions that break her sanity, but not her will.

The end of "Jane Eyre" will never feel happy again.

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