

Memory in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys

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In the novel "Wide Sargasso Sea" by Jean Rhys, Memory is a theme which is touched upon rather subtly yet contributes mainly to the progression of the idea pursued throughout the novel to a great extent. Memory is volatile; however, in the novel, the documentation of Antoinette Cosway's childhood, of their husband's and other characters, even in the smallest of the conceptualized depictions, points to how and why the particular way shapes their lives and thoughts, thus providing enough evidence for a reader to envision the impact caused by memory and pauses the volatile nature of it through the narrative.

Selective Forgetting and Collective amnesia are attributes found in this novel exhibited by the essentialized coloured people of Jamaica towards the people of the Creole identity. This way of forgetting occurs due to the subject's, in this case, the group's psychological defence mechanism of denial and repression. This is done at a collective level in the novel. Sigmund Freud originally devised the concept of Selective Forgetting in his theory of Psychoanalysis. He exhibits it with the example of purposeful Repression (blocking disturbing/unrequired thoughts, memories or desires), which becomes the fruit of the unconscious mind. In the novel, this quality is affirmed by the words of Annette Cosway to Godfrey,

"'You are blind when you want to be blind', she said ferociously, 'and you are deaf when you want to be deaf' "

Annette Cosway discusses how Godfrey purposefully acts repressively and stays blind and deaf for the sake of himself and the collective belonging he upholds. These lines reverberate and affirm the concept of Collective Amnesia.

Innuendos of past trauma persuade the subconscious mind to forget the past and to accept an essentialized standpoint; this effort towards forgetting in the science of

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psychology is labelled as Procedural memory. However, one can see that they are holding it up.

Furthermore, through the mention of death and oblivion by Annette Cosway,

"I dare say we would have died if she had turned against us, and that would have been a better fate. To die and be forgotten and at peace. Not to know that one is abandoned, lied about, helpless."

One can see the association of oblivion with death- yet this particular connection made about the people of the Creole identity themselves gives a whim of oblivion and death to be a premature concept, something which occurs unripe and seen only in the face of grief. It is mentioned with certainty by Annette Cosway, which points towards the procedural memory, which is an unconsciously inherent attitude of the discriminated Creole identity towards Death, Oblivion and memory; the trauma faced over time by the people of their identity dictates the vulnerability of Annette Cosway which is expressed through her perception of death and forgetfulness.

Through the examples of Annette's stand on Godfrey and the discrimination faced by Annette, one can see that the memory of trauma, and the cultural memory on the whole (Cultural Memory Theory, Halbwachs) is not only ingrained in Annette and Antoinette but also in, Antoinette's husband, Godfrey, Christophine, Tia and in every other person in the novel- that their way of expressing themselves has this intertwined ambivalence in it- they have attained a point where the memory of trauma is part of their culture and identity. One can also see that this memory is transmitted from generation to generation.

Franz Fanon discussed this in his theory of postcolonial memory and Trauma in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, where the psychological impacts of colonialism and the internalized inferiority shaped by oppression and erasure of pre-existing values regulate the colonized subjects to feel the way they feel. The memory of their traumatic experiences paves the way for them to acquire the stand the invaders initially pursued and use it to take on the then-established Creole identity. On the whole, one can see that an oppressor discriminates also due to the fear of being repressed by the Other.

During Antoinette Cosway's time at the convent, Mother St Justine advises her to *"forget and pray for her mother as if she is dead."* This advice adds salt to her unhealed wounds, though the reason for her statement is not disclosed. Here again, one can see how death is often considered synonymous with forgetting in the novel. This also reverberates the statement made by Annette Cosway about longing to be dead and to be forgotten. Intersectionality between the capability of the human brain to remember and a human being able to exist can be perceived. Moreover, her identity's notion from externalities and within herself, as a Creole woman throughout the novel, reiterates how forgetting (or to die) is considered a vice rather than to exist with the identity burdened by people's judgement and torment.

Antoinette's words, *"Only some things happen and are there for always even though you forget why or when."* Antoinette's memory of the night in her bedroom in the past examines the role played by one's mental set in memory. The mental set is also known as Schemes, as per Frederic Bartlett. The human brain is known for registering every piece of information in various forms through the six pre-established senses, yet it cannot be summoned when one wishes to recollect it. Memory plays a role in the process of recollection. These schemas can influence how we recall events, often causing distortions in memory because we fill in gaps based on our expectations or existing knowledge. Her statement, which underlines the fact of how certain things are registered, yet one forgets why or when it happens, speaks of how trauma is ingrained in a person; the pain is present, yet the reason or the cause most often is unknown. In this case, she very vividly remembers the night of the accident. Still, however, she could not accept the fact that it was her friend Tia who threw a stone at her due to the traumatic episode she underwent during the night of the accident. Her mental set is unable to comprehend the trauma, and it fails to bring back her registered memory. her memories are also coloured by a sense of alienation and fear, often causing her to misinterpret the intentions of those around her.

Roger Brown and James Kulik's definition of their special-mechanism hypothesis, also known as the flashbulb theory, is as follows,

"memories for the circumstances in which one first learned of a shocking and consequential (or emotionally arousing) event."

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Antoinette's memory works like a flickering bulb, where episodes from her past come to her focus as interludes. Towards the end, one can see that her decline in mental health is influenced by her memory of traumatic experiences, the burning of Coulibri, and her mother's breakdowns from the past. One can see the same phenomenon occurring in Antoinette's Husband, who cannot accept Jamaica due to his flashing memory of his perception of Antoinette.

At the same time, Antoinette clings to specific memories, especially of her childhood home, Coulibri Estate, to resist her erasure. These memories connect her to her past and culture, even as Rochester tries to strip them away. Her memories of Jamaica's vibrant, sensory-rich landscape contrast with England's cold, oppressive atmosphere, highlighting her deep emotional ties to her Caribbean identity.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, memory is not just a recollection of the past but an active force shaping the present. It influences the characters' identities, relationships, and perceptions of reality, highlighting the novel's colonialism, displacement, and psychological trauma themes.