Landscape and Character in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*

The popularity and influence of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is difficult to overestimate. Not only has this novel had a clear and major impact on a range of major issues for novels that followed, but it has also affected the way narratives can be perceived and defined. Charlotte Brontë’s handling of Jane Eyre’s character, especially, has helped demonstrate both thematic and technical ways in which a character can be given significance. The character of Jane Eyre has, in fact, established a standard by which other fictional characters can be judged and as a consequence has received much critical attention. One particular aspect of *Jane Eyre* which has received little attention, however, is the relationship between its title character and the handling of its landscapes. The specific topic I wish to address in this context is to compare the ways in which landscapes in this novel and its later prequel, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, encode responses to notions of character. My contention is that both novels define the spatial coordinates of character in terms of landscape in similar ways, but result in strikingly different characters. My general argument is that readers’ inferences about characters are strongly determined by the way those characters are revealed to inhabit and respond to their spatial worlds. I focus on landscape – the apprehension of natural physical surroundings, whether actually presented or imagined – because it seems to me to be a particular, specific, and definable narrative component, significant in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Landscape is a peripheral or supplementary element of narrative, as commentators from Aristotle to the present have observed. Characters, on the other hand, are regarded as a core property of narrative. My thesis is simply that the two qualities are often inextricably bound up with each other and that these two novels exhibit a characteristic interdependence between characters and their perceptions of their landscapes. Perceiving how characters respond to landscape is a crucial means by which readers apprehend character. In both novels landscape highlights the vital connections between place, memory and human identity. I do not intend to delve into thematic implications of imagery or details – which have been explored extensively. Instead, I hope to demonstrate that relationships between landscape and characters are more central – more at the core – in locating and defining inferences we may have
about the characters themselves. Landscape plays a significant role in any narrative for which a map can be constructed, I would argue – even, and perhaps especially, if that map remains imagined.

Many critical studies have shown how closely Wide Sargasso Sea, published in 1966, is bound to and circumscribed by Jane Eyre. It relates, in an open-ended and impressionistically evocative manner, the story of Antoinette Cosway in the Caribbean before she marries and ends her life as Bertha Mason, locked in the attic of an English manor house we presume to be Edward Rochester’s Thornfield Hall. Because Wide Sargasso Sea largely avoids causal links in its action and instead depends on building a sense of character to provide a sense of continuity, it makes an ideal text for helping locate and examine the landscape/character relationships in Jane Eyre. Jane’s tie to landscape is defined by the more traditional linear progressions of the causal plot. Both novels have first-person narrators. Jane Eyre also gives us its famous intense first-person rendering of perceptions, locations, and events, about which much has been written. Wide Sargasso Sea, on the other hand, has an equally intense rendering of perspective, but splits its narrative perspective between Antoinette and Rochester (or at least an unnamed narrator we assume to be Rochester). The contrasts between these types of narratives give us binaries (female and male, Caribbean and English, colonized and colonizer, passive and assertive, natural and man-made) for emphasizing similarities and differences in the characters’ psychic makeups through their relationships with landscape. Their perceptions of landscape go far beyond the dimension of simply framing the spatial parameters of their narratives – they give us insight into their innermost cognitive processes that are crucial to their identity and their own understanding of their senses of self. The landscapes of all narratives tend to function in this character-defining fashion to some degree, but landscape-oriented, landscape-conscious narratives like Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea are distinguished by this dimension.

Even the obvious geographical specifics of landscape, for instance, could be argued to help generate deictic clues for generating notions of characters. On the first page of her narrative Jane Eyre locates herself almost immediately – but not in terms of her actual physical landscape, “the drear November day” with its “pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast” (1). Instead, she loses herself in her book, Bewick’s History of British Birds, where “[e]ach picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting…” (2). This helps establish a continuum of references that alternate throughout the entire novel between the actual
landscape and more figural interior ones. Later oblique hints at actual geographical places – the location of Thornfield, for instance, outside “Millcote, -shire […] seventy miles nearer London than the remote county where I now resided” and “on the banks of the A—” (56) – scarcely matter because readers are soon conditioned to accept the novel’s subjective perceptions and definitions instead of external ones. There are many similar instances when Jane presents more of her own sensibility in her depiction of highly-selective and suggestive details than external specifics: her “low broad tower” and the “galaxy of lights” (60) of her trip to Thornfield; “the lonely hills […] seeming to embrace Thornfield with a seclusion” (63) after her arrival; the grounds “laid out like a map” (68); and the single “preternatural” and “tragic” laugh she hears in the courtyard at high noon that prefigures Bertha Mason Rochester’s eventual appearance (69). In this manner, the gaps and ellipses in descriptive detail as Jane works to establish her bearings may in fact be more significant than the accumulation of details in themselves. “Inference drawing, based on character-related information beyond explicit property ascription, is crucial in mental model building,” argues Uri Margolin, “especially when the mental properties of characters are concerned, since these are often implied by non-mental data, e.g., about a character’s actions” (55). It seems reasonable to assume data like landscape details play the same role as actions.

Wide Sargasso Sea employs similar tactics. The fact that its action takes place largely on two Caribbean Islands, for instance, prompts first Antoinette’s, and then Rochester’s definitions of themselves within a larger world – perhaps reminding us of Stephen Daedalus’ schoolboy paradigmatic mapping of himself: “Stephen Daedalus/ Class of Elements/ Clongowes Wood School/ Sallins/County Kildare/ Ireland/Europe/ The World/ The Universe” (Joyce 15). In such instances, the specifics immediately assist in locating the defining thrust of the narrative and the characters’ particular notion of themselves and their conscious definition of themselves within it. “We are cross-stitching silk roses on a pale background” relates Antoinette about one of her impressionable classroom experiences: “We can colour the roses as we choose and mine are green, blue and purple. Underneath, I will write my name in fire red, Antoinette Mason, née Cosway, Mount Calvary Convent, Spanish Town, Jamaica, 1839” (WSS 31). This ontological naming process – an archetypal attempt to define one’s self in terms or signs offered through a combination of words and geography and time – is performed by both Jane and Antoinette.

Another signal achievement of both Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea, noted by many critics, is their evocation of place. Wide Sargasso Sea offers the same kind of immediacy – a primacy of immediacy – as Jane Eyre in its
vibrant colors, odors, and semi-tropical, sensory details of place. But in terms of landscape, its evocation of place is also more than this locating of sensory details. The title *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the novel’s first suggestion that a geographical locus – emphasized all the more because the Sargasso Sea is never mentioned within the novel itself – should be taken seriously both as a trope for the empire/colonial situation of the novel and for grounding the narrative in a specific geographical and historical locale. We can infer from the names of towns – Spanish Town, for example – that the action takes place in Jamaica, even though Jean Rhys was born and spent her early years in Dominica, and its evocation of place one could reasonably assume is based on Dominican memories. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* there is a clear and evident sense of being on islands – and of moving among islands – but in a disjointed and disrupted fashion that reflects the unsure and disjointed nature of its narrators. Sometimes the sensory details are close to overwhelming the reader. *Jane Eyre*’s landscapes, on the other hand, allow for a clear and distinct “tracking” of the action – for instance, when she flees Thornfield and makes her way to Moor House and then back again. Peter Hulme points out that

[perhaps on one level what is ‘West Indian’ about *Wide Sargasso Sea* is its struggle to find a narrative form that is not – cannot be – the self-confident bildungsroman of *Jane Eyre*, a struggle which is analogous to that [of] the novel’s protagonist to put together the fragments of a disintegrating world (10).]

Some instances are more structurally significant than others, of course, but we can follow Christophine’s peregrinations among islands, for example, in the same terms that Jane Eyre’s movements seem to allow for a kind of spatial logic – a structure – enabling readers to see how she figures in the series of events. Christophine is revealed almost immediately as “a Martinique girl” in Jamaica – a foreshadowing of her later journeying between landscapes. Other journeys in the novel bear more on the larger geographical shifts and subsequent political and imperial/paternalistic impress of the novel as a whole, such as Antoinette’s and Rochester’s disjointed trips from Jamaica to the “honeymoon” island of Granbois and back again – and then their final trip on to England – in the latter part of the novel. This movement through landscape parallels in very different terms Jane’s flight from Thornfield and back again. Movements among landscapes like these in both novels provide a reinforcement of continuity – a kind of structural pattern or cohesiveness. The characters’ awareness or lack of awareness of these politically-infused notions of locations and how they relate to the specifics of landscape could be usefully explored in terms of Edward Said’s theory of “contested spaces” and nationalized cultural conditioning and how that affects perceptions of landscape. “The landscapes
of *Wide Sargasso Sea* are heavily charged with meaning” (167) argue Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, and “the West Indies and England become irreconcilable opposites” (167) as the novel progresses. Gayatri Spivak’s well-known analysis of the interconnections between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* has demonstrated clearly the violent impact of imperialism and some of its effects on character in this regard.

The landscapes of *Jane Eyre* are charged with the same post-colonial import in their relation to Jane’s inheritance from her Uncle John, though this feature of landscape – the money is fixed as coming from Madeira, after all – largely escapes her, but certainly not the contemporary reader. St. John Rivers’ Christian “labors for his race” (301) in India, undoubtedly helped by Jane’s sharing of her inheritance, create a complexity of landscapes suggested but never made real.

Jean Rhys’s particular depiction of Antoinette’s involvement with her landscape is consistently double-edged and yet, in spite of Antoinette’s strength of feeling, it remains shadowy and obscure. Because causal connections other than chronological sequencing are largely absent in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we draw our conclusions about character motivation from what we can infer, and in *Wide Sargasso Sea* this is the intensity of the characters’ relationships to the land. In fact, the sense of both characters is complicated by their extreme reactions to landscape, both in its hostility and alien forcefulness, and its accommodations and comforts – the two primary, but opposing reactions to landscape most often expressed in literature identified by Leonard Lutwack. The details of landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea* often have an intense sense of immediacy in terms of relationship to character, because of the way it compounds complexities between the narrating-I and the experiencing-I. Details of landscape are represented in different, even idiosyncratic, ways by different characters, and most strikingly so when a narrative is focalized around the two different first-person accounts.

Antoinette’s grasp of landscape is almost always immediate and highly personal. Her description of the garden of her family’s estate very early in the novel is freighted with implication.

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. Underneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered – then not an inch of tentacle showed. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it. All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. (10-11)
The Edenic allusion to the ruined garden, the hint at snakes, the contrast between the living and dead, the strength and blend of odors, the green light, and the colors all establish motifs which will work to dramatize and structure the story. This may recall Marlow’s archetypal journey into the African jungle in *Heart of Darkness*: “‘Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted and the big trees were kings’” (35). Antoinette’s garden is also a ruined one, and she is at once enveloped in it, frightened by it, and tries to avoid it. But Marlow is a passer-by, a traveler. He returns to his starting point. Jane’s sense of self is progressive, identified and defined in terms of landscapes that may circle and loop, but eventually offer closure in terms of her stable location. Antoinette’s sense of self comes through her identification with the landscape into which she has been born and raised, a familiar landscape that offers comfort, but also a landscape where forces – both masculine and colonial – seem to be gathering to work against her. Unlike Marlow, she has little inkling of the historical, political, or imperial forces helping define the early nineteenth-century Jamaican political landscape when Britain’s Emancipation Act finally went into effect, freeing slaves and throwing them and landowners alike into instability and ambivalence. As Paul Starrs reminds us, “Global forces both dismember and contribute to regional identity” (5).

Left to her own devices and without familial defenses, Antoinette’s later references to landscape clearly alternate between the security she feels and her continued sense of threat. Positive values – comfort and brightness – alternate with a continued sense of vulnerability. Antoinette writes “When I was safely home I sat close to the old wall at the end of the garden. It was covered with green moss soft as velvet and I never wanted to move again” (13). The pool she visits with Tia is similar, “I lay in the shade looking at the pool – deep and dark green under the trees, brown-green if it had rained, but a bright sparkling green in the sun. The water was so clear that you could see the pebbles at the bottom of the shallow part. Blue and white and striped red. Very pretty” (13). The comforts created by such a soothing, intimate identification with the warmth and color – the sensuality – of the landscape are quickly destroyed. The resultant insecurity establishes a pattern of trust and mistrust that governs Antoinette’s sensibility as a character throughout the novel. Her garden, for instance, is destroyed when the estate is set afire. Her friend Tia steals her clothes at the pool and later – at the estate fire – ends up throwing a stone at Antoinette which results in a concussion which does indeed spoil her on her wedding day. Even within the secure confines of the convent, she dreams of a vague but sexually threatening situation in another garden where she “did not know the trees” and is frightened awake by their discomforting “swaying and jerking” (36). The pool, too, later figures in an
almost off-hand manner in the relationship with Rochester because it has a lurking crab. In this encounter Antoinette also reveals a detail suggesting the subtextual backstory of her involvement with her cousin, Sandi – “a boy,” she tells Rochester, “you never met” (52). Whatever her relationship with Sandi consists of, it is also fated to failure. Any early sense of security for her is shown to be false. The result is only greater anxiety, whereas the self-confident Jane actually “progresses.” In such instances in both novels landscape-bound actions help fix future events – the pieces and bits of potential stories – into patterns of specific images linked with character and what actually does or does not happen to these characters in terms of action. The spatial orientation of both novels allows for this non-causal but still linear way of providing structure to the narrative.

Another early example of an innocent sense of false security identified specifically with Antoinette’s sense of landscape is after a threatening nightmare. She thinks: “‘There is the corner of the bedroom door and the friendly furniture. There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. The barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers’” (16). These “barricades” are, of course, later circumvented and their imagined protective boundaries prove ineffectual. Jane’s perception, equally influenced by an emotional response to landscape, is strikingly dissimilar. Instead of generating a false sense of security, her impressions of landscape are subordinated to her own feelings and frame of mind. Organic and natural excesses are domesticated by her own feelings. The passage preceding the famous passage about the split chestnut tree with its overcast “blood-red moon” shows this:

I sought the orchard: driven to its shelter by the wind, which all day had blown strong and full from the south; without, however, bringing a speck of rain. Instead of subsiding as night drew on, it seemed to augment its rush and deepen its roar: the trees blew steadfastly one way, never writhing round, and scarcely tossing back their boughs once in an hour; so continuous was the strain bending their branchy heads northward – the clouds drifted from pole to pole, fast following, mass on mass: no glimpse of blue sky had been visible that July day.

It was not without a certain wild pleasure I ran before the wind delivering my trouble of mind to the measureless air-torrent thundering through space. (183)

The character of Rochester is of course a major link between the texts, once the reader assumes he is the same individual. His reaction to the landscapes he encounters in the Caribbean vacillates, just as he appears to vacillate in his affection and distaste for Thornfield in Jane Eyre. On the one hand, he is moved by the beauty, distinctiveness, and clarity of the islands (42); on the other, he finds the landscape menacing (41) and oppressive:
[E]verything around me was hostile. The telescope drew away and said don’t touch me. The trees were threatening and the shadows of the trees moving slowly over the floor menaced me. That green menace. I had felt it ever since I saw this place. There was nothing I knew, nothing to comfort me. (90)

Rochester is the only character to mention roads and paths, and in one of the most curious episodes in the novel, he follows a paved road into the plantation of coffee trees and “straggly guava bushes” and becomes lost – the only character to literally become lost – only to have Baptiste, who rescues him from the “enemy trees” (62), deny the existence of the road. Even animals in Wide Sargasso Sea react strongly to the landscapes: Antoinette’s horse Preston shies and stumbles at the Mounes Mors, the rocks called “the dead ones,” and Antoinette remarks that “they say horses always do” (64). In Jane Eyre Rochester’s horse falls on the path Jane is following under “the rising moon” in an evocative, surreal landscape

over Hay, which, half lost in trees, sent up a blue smoke from its few chimneys; it was yet a half mile distant, but in the absolute hush I could hear plainly its thin murmurs of life. My ear too felt the flow of currents; in what dales and depths I could not tell: but there were many hills beyond Hay, and doubtless many becks threading their passes. That evening calm betrayed alike the tinkle of the nearest streams, the sough of the remote.

A rude noise broke on these fine ripplings and whisperings, at once so far away and so clear: a positive tramp, tramp; a metallic clatter, which effaced the soft wave-wanderings; as in a picture, the solid mass of a crag, or the rough boles of a great oak, drawn in dark and strong on the foreground, efface the aërial distance of azure hill, sunny horizon, and blended clouds, where tint melts into tint. (72)

The dichotomy between the two main characters is also dramatically demonstrated by the language they use to perceive landscape in what Bakhtin would call a “language zone” of character’s discourse inside the mind. Because of its two different narrators, Antoinette in the first half and Rochester largely in the second, Wide Sargasso Sea generates a binary effect – a juxtaposing of the two main characters’ language zones in the way they react to landscapes. The contrast in language and terminology with which the characters of Wide Sargasso Sea express their reaction to landscape offers a further heteroglossic opportunity, especially if we take Anne Spirm’s suggestion that landscape itself possesses a grammar and syntax of its own that can be translated into aesthetic and human terms. And the dichotomy is made all the more significant if we examine it within Gillian Rose’s concept of “time-geography” and her distinctions between public and private spaces in terms of gender. A patriarchal notion, Rose argues, shows everything to be knowable and mappable and hence containable and controllable; a feminist concept of geography enters more physically into the geography or landscape and engages with it as an end in itself, not as a means to some different end.
From such a perspective, the landscapes in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are one of the novels’ most forceful elements. One could argue that in both the landscape almost takes on the quality of a character itself, like the setting does in novels like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* or Mann’s *Death in Venice* or Joyce’s *The Dead*. *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s emphasis on landscape would seem to fit the models of narrative suggested by theorists like Monika Fludernik, who contends that the setting plays an essential cognitive role for readers in providing the basic perceptions of narrative processing. It might also be argued that by defining the important landmarks and paths and the manner in which these elements of the landscape are presented in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* develops – or fails to develop – a sense of structure for the narrative action through their characters’ thought processes. Urszula Tempska, for example, argues that some of the major tensions in Jane’s personality occur on a border territory between Jane’s familiar world and an unfamiliar external one (204). Jane, by the end of her narrative, has resolved many of these tensions – by perceiving them through the Edenic metaphors associated with the landscapes of Ferndean. By the end of her narrative, on the other hand, Antoinette has abandoned earlier Edenic references for a collage of tension-wrought memories unified by color and by fire.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* there are many crucial gaps of information, either through deferred or through suppressed information, and we must infer conditions and connections for the narrative from the strength of the characters’ relationship to their surroundings. Emma Kafalenos suggests that “[m]issing information matters because we interpret and reinterpret events, from moment to moment, on the basis of information that is available to us at that moment” (35) and that we look “for possible causal relationships” (35). This is particularly true of what I would term the “missing landscapes” in *Wide Sargasso Sea* – the absence of any transitions between landscapes. One could argue there is a missing component in character, analogous to or corresponding with the gaps in causality in the action of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as the action shifts from location to location without transitions. And just as there are few gaps in the action of *Jane Eyre*, so are there few missing landscapes. Almost without exception, crucial action is tied to details of landscape in Brontë’s novel: one need only consider the fall of Rochester’s horse, the foreshadowing of the doomed marriage in the lightning-struck chestnut, the escape to the heath, and many other location-oriented occurrences.

A sense of character is also built in both novels by landscapes represented in associative and more indirect ways than actions. A particularly striking instance in *Jane Eyre* is Jane’s “escape” from Thornfield, when, fleeing
Rochester, the fleeting details of her landscape form an anthropomorphic objective correlative to her own disoriented state:

I touched the heath: it was dry, and yet warm with the heat of the summer-day. I looked at the sky; it was pure: a kindly star twinkled just above the chasm ridge. The dew fell, but with propitious softness; no breeze whispered. Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness. To-night, at least, I would be her guest— as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price. (214)

A comparable instance in *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals that Rochester’s England exists in the novel primarily as a cold room in its last half-dozen pages. The landscape is never depicted externally, in a dramatic fashion, but in an interior way, through the impressions of Antoinette’s meandering mind. Her only commentary on England is parenthetical, but still in terms of its landscape: “That afternoon we went to England. There was grass and olive-green water and tall trees looking into the water. This, I thought, is England. If I could be here I’d get well again and the sound in my head would stop” (109). The English landscape – so abundant in *Jane Eyre* – becomes significant in its absence when contrasted to the lush, detailed, sensuously represented, but scattered landscapes of the Caribbean islands.

Yet the landscape of England is also represented indirectly in several curious and unique ways. One is Antoinette’s vague and bemused notion of England and the effect on herself from a geography book (which recalls Jane’s early delving into Bewick’s *History of British Birds*) in her debate with Christophine about the existence of England:

I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me. [...] England, rosy pink in the geography book map, but on the page opposite the words are closely crowded, heavy looking. Exports, coal, iron, wool. Then Imports and Character of Inhabitants. Names, Essex, Chelmsford on the Chelmer. The Yorkshire and Lincolnshire wolds. Wolds? Does that mean hills? How high? Half the height of ours, or not even that? Cool green leaves in the short cool summer. Summer. There are fields of corn like sugarcane fields, but gold colour and not so tall. After summer the trees are bare, then winter and snow. White feathers falling? Torn pieces of paper falling? They say frost makes flower patterns on the window panes. I must know more than I know already. [...] ‘England,’ said Christophine, who was watching me, ‘You think there is such a place?’ ‘How can you ask that? You know there is.’ ‘I never see the damn place, how I know?’ ‘You do not believe that there is a country called England?’ She blinked and answered quickly, ‘I don’t say I don’t believe, I say I don’t know, I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it’. (66-7)

This “abstract” and imagined landscape is dealt with, or attempted to be dealt with, by the two women in terms of observable immediacy – similar to the way they relate to the landscapes of their islands. One could regard this as an
“embedded landscape” – analogous to the embedded narratives which are rife in both Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre. Such embedded landscapes serve to offer contrasting values which contribute to our understanding of characters. It is clear from such a passage why Rochester feels he needs to break the hold such landscapes exercise on Antoinette by removing her from them. Imprisoning Antoinette in an attic room where only an alien landscape can be glimpsed separates her from the sources of formulation of self in the same way that renaming her and referring to her as “Bertha” does. It is a strategy of negation and subjugation through spatial dislocations meant to create a state of self-inexpressibility. It is also worth observing that in her attic room, at the very end of Wide Sargasso Sea, it is only through recalling the landscapes of her early life at Coulibri that Antoinette can regain enough of her sense of identity to rouse herself into purpose and action. Jane’s certainties of self are much more fully established in the conclusiveness of her narrative within the protective isolation of Ferndean.

William Howarth points out that “[l]iterary places are never empty because they have implied observers, trying to read the stories written there” (512). Landscape can be defined in relation to character by its connotations associated with character and through the way language is employed. It may also suggest character by revealing a particular cognitive mind-set, a subtle interaction of psychic condition and external phenomena. These sorts of correspondences can be even more abstruse and suggestive in narratives in free indirect discourse than they are in the first-person narratives of Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea. Embedded or layered landscapes – those presented through dreams or pictures or books – have profound significance for character and a reader’s sense of character. Eliding or removing landscape can easily be equally significant. Clearly landscape provides a topical space for action, but, equally important, I would argue, are its contributions to locating character. A short paper cannot deal fully with the subtlety or intricacy of the many links between landscape and character, especially in novels so rich in their interrelationships as Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea, but it may reveal some similarities in their approaches. Classical Chinese poetry is described as trying to capture for the poet the “unique configuration” of “the momentary alignment of external detail” to “catch a glimpse of his own spiritual location […]. Continuity between self and surroundings was implicit: Description further characterized the feeling while the feeling extended out into the landscape” (Birkerts 141-42). We capture a similar sense of characters and the topographies of their psyches in Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea by more fully understanding them in their landscapes.
Works Cited


