

Michael Opoku-Arthur

Dr. Zarook

ENGL 1121

03 November 2025

Reparative Retelling

Character A is Christophine from *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Character B is Ajay. I have chosen Christophine because she has displayed the ability to recognize emotional harm.

Original Scene

Throughout the story, there are multiple scenes where Ajay faces subtle harm; however, I will focus on the scene where he is sitting with his supposed friends, Jeff and Michael. The scene is as follows:

- One lunch period, I sat down across from Jeff and Michael in the cafeteria and said, “We’re starting to move the furniture that we’ve bought. We’ll move to our house right after school ends, and then Birju will be brought a few days later.” Jeff and Michael continued their conversation. “I’m going to take French next year,” Michael said, keeping his eyes directly on Jeff. “I’m going to take French, too,” I said. “My brother studied French.” I remembered Birju calling me monsieur and how funny it had sounded. “Spanish is more useful,” Jeff said, looking at Michael. “France is a more important country than Spain,” I answered. “Do you hear something? I don’t hear anything,” Michael said. “The Spanish teacher seems nicer,” said Jeff.

The scene continues with Ajay still attempting to speak until he receives a response from his classmates. It is clear in this scene that Ajay is trying to talk to Jeff and Michael and fit in at school. Instead of acknowledging his presence, they act like they didn't hear him, let alone accept his presence. Although there was no physical harm, the emotional damage done has an enormous impact. This is one of the many scenes where Ajay realizes that his presence is unwanted and that his attempts at friendship may be futile. Scenes like the one here led Ajay to internalize the idea that speaking up leads to humiliation, which is why he eventually learns to silence himself. This is one of the scenes that I believe contributed to Ajay's insecurities, need for validation, and his fear of social interactions.

Reparative Retelling

In my head, this is how I imagine if Christophine were present in the story, how the scene would go:

- As Ajay attempts to speak to Jeff and Michael, Ms. Christophine (imagine she is a teacher in this scene) is on lunch duty and notices Ajay being blatantly ignored. Ms. Christophine slowly approaches the boys. With a calm but stern manner, she says, "You boys." The boys turn to her and are surprised that this has caught Ms. Christophine's attention. Ms. Christophine places her hand on her shoulder and says to Jeff and Michael, "Can't you two see that he is trying to speak? Don't be rude, let him speak." Jeff and Michael, embarrassed, begin to turn towards Ajay. Ms. Christophine replies with, "Thank you, everyone deserves to be heard, even if you're busy eating lunch," and continues with her responsibilities for lunch duty.

This scene is essential because, for probably the first time in the entire book, Ajay was acknowledged for his efforts.

Tracking Changes

I believe if Christophine's intervention were real, it would have a ripple effect on Ajay's life. The first change is that following this scene, Ajay would begin to develop a sense of voice. After multiple instances of social rejection, Ajay starts to silence himself and begins to believe that what he has to say is strange, embarrassing, or uninteresting. Christophine's repair introduces a moment early in Arjay's life where he attempts to speak and is not ignored/undermined/rejected, but instead encouraged and supported. The impact of the repair is that it allows Ajay to realize that people are indeed listening to him, even if it isn't his anticipated audience. As the novel progresses, Ajay begins writing as a way of expression. If the repaired scene had occurred, it's possible that Ajay would start writing not just as an escape but as an effective way to communicate himself, because he knows someone out there will be interested in hearing what he has to say, just like Ms. Christophine did.

The second change may be evident in how Ajay begins to navigate his friendships and relationships with peers. Jeff and Michael's constant ignoring of Ajay contributed to his fear of social spaces, which in turn led him to withdraw, observe, and lean towards people who treated him poorly. Although Ms. Christophine's repair doesn't make Michael, Jeff, and Ajay the best of buddies, it may, in fact, lead to further resentment for Ajay. The repair is done internally for Ajay. Following this scene, Ajay could begin to internalize that if he wants to be heard, he needs to have the confidence and assertiveness to do so. The next time something like this happens, he may be able to stick up for himself and say, "Excuse me, I am trying to speak." Instead of automatically taking the rejection, Ajay will begin to approach conversations with more self-

confidence and less dread. Although there won't be a significant change in his social life, it will give him more self-respect.

The third change would affect Ajay's relationship with his family. His home life also contributed to the emotional distance that he has developed. Ajay wasn't seen at school and also wasn't seen at home due to Birju's condition and his dad's addiction. Due to these factors, Ajay rarely spoke to his parents about his struggles. Ms. Christophine's repair could lead Ajay to think that if his peers won't listen, then at least an adult will. This may give him the courage to speak up to his parents on difficult days; "I know you guys are busy, but I would love to talk to you guys about my day. This repair could potentially lead to a shift in how Ajay handles emotional events. It's possible that even if they had listened just once, the resentment for Birju would never have happened. For once, Ajay would like to be heard.

These three changes do not alter the plot of Family Life, but they meaningfully affect Ajay's internal landscape. Christophine's repair gives him a moment of dignity at a crucial stage of development. This subtle shift allows him to navigate the rest of his experiences with slightly more confidence and courage. This repair may impact how Ajay understands himself in relation to others, proving that even a moment of being heard can have a lasting effect.

Artist Statement

I chose this scene because, despite the overall theme being reflected in instances throughout the story, it represents an emotional harm that shapes the way Ajay learns to see himself in relation to others. This moment stood out to me immediately because it is small, but the impact is grand. A scene perfect for meeting the assignment requirements. There is no argument, no dramatic confrontation, no physical injury. Instead, the injury occurs internally to

Ajay. Ajay attempts to enter a social space, but is met with silence. Reading this scene reminded me of my own early school days when I tried to be heard by my peers. I remember what it feels like to speak and watch others turn away as though you are not there. That emotional connection helped me understand how deeply this moment must have hurt Ajay, even though the novel only devotes a few lines to it. The quietness of the scene makes the harm more realistic and therefore more lasting.

I chose Christophine because I believe she is equipped to recognize and respond to the kind of harm occurring in the scene. Throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Christophine demonstrates an extraordinary ability to observe, listen, and intervene precisely when the victim, in some cases, Antoinette, is unable to speak up for herself. She advocates for those who are mistreated or overlooked. Her strength may not be grand or flashy like heroic gestures, but her ability to notice emotional suffering before others do makes her the perfect insert for Ajay's life. In the cafeteria retelling, she enters the space as a teacher performing her regular patrol duties; however, she is fully aware and alert to locate anything out of the ordinary, such as Ajay's situation.

In *Family Life*, Ajay's harm is not physical, but emotional. Stemming from the everyday moments of dismissal, neglect, rejection, and silence. Birju's accident has reshaped his entire world, and he is forced to navigate a home where attention is consumed by crisis and an alcoholic father and a school environment where he struggles to belong and is constantly rejected. The harm he faces is a buildup of multiple instances: subtle rejections from classmates, lack of acknowledgment at home, and a growing sense that his voice does not matter. Because of this, Christophine fits perfectly in Ajay's situation. She is someone who consistently identifies emotional neglect and refuses to let it continue unchallenged. Her intervention does not need to be dramatic; her presence itself repairs the harm by making Ajay feel seen.

What makes Christophine unique for this repair in this crossover is her ability not to let children disappear into the background of their own lives; that everyone is their own main character.

Stepping into the cafeteria, she does not attack Jeff and Michael, nor does she force a friendship that evidently did not exist. Instead, she sends a message: Ajay deserves to speak, and his voice, just like everyone else's, deserves attention. I believe this moment was all Ajay needed in his life, as he was navigating through difficult times.