Double Exile: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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Abstract

The problems of cultural displacement and a shaky sense of one's own identity have been the main concern of the twentieth century Caribbean writer, Jean Rhys. As a white Creole writer living in England, Rhys attempts to capture the ambivalence of what it means to be caught between two cultures and never able to identify fully with any one .Born to a Welsh father and a Creole(white West Indian) mother on the island of Dominica in the West Indies, Jean Rhys was white but not English, West Indian but not black. Her sense of belonging to the West Indies was necessarily charged with awareness of being part of another culture. Thus, the ambiguity of being an insider/outsider in both the metropolis, England, and the colony, West Indies, shaped Rhys' world, resulting in her sense of exile and marginality

The purpose of the research is to examine how Rhys gives the same sense of exile and marginality to Antoinette Cosway, the heroine of her 1966 novel Wide Sargasso Sea, through whom she reflects the unique experience of dislocation of the white Creole woman.

There is a common tradition in literature emerging from the shadow of colonialism to "write back" against the English canonical text. The re-telling of a story from a different point of view is an extension of the deconstructive project of exploring the silences and gaps within a text[1]. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is an example of this tradition, a novel that is written as a "corrective" text to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). The novel is used to speak for the silenced, otherwise known as the "Other", in the canonical text. The "Other" is seen to be Bertha, Mr. Rochester's mad wife in *Jane Eyre.*Since writing has long been recognized as one of the strongest forms of cultural control, it becomes evident that the re-writing of colonial narratives is an act of liberation for "what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented in such works"[2]. In these narratives, characters from other ethnicities are silenced, viewed as "Others" and set up in opposition to the English ones, such as Bertha in *Jane Eyre* or Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). These "Others" are different and, therefore, unable to claim the English identity as their own, nor can they break from the complications of their ethnic background to create an independent self.

As Britain began colonizing the West Indies and other Caribbean islands, identity within the British empire became nebulous and reinforced the need for a distinction to be made between the colonized subalterns and the homogenous Britons who possessed the pure "Englishness". The English began to refine the qualifications of Englishness, making them more exclusive and promulgating the idea that the colonists were never truly "English". Creating this demarcation within the empire allowed the British to disavow the darker parts of their national history. Suddenly acts like slavery became divorced from the English history that promoted liberation and, instead, associated with the population of the Caribbean islands, who had forfeited their marks of Englishness through their colonial contamination.

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This idea of the superiority and desirability of "Englishness" finds a voice in the English narrative. Edward Said points out that the nineteenth-century British novel and British imperialism "…fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible… to read one without in some way dealing with the other"[3]. It is as a result of this mutual relationship that the construction and protection of English identity becomes a major theme of many nineteenth- century English novels. In these novels, the colonial world is never "…seen except as subordinate and dominated, the English presence viewed as regulative and normative"[4]. This strategy of comparison between the English normative and the colonial "Other" can also be seen in the English authors' choices of characters. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte employs this strategy in her choice of Bertha, a West Indian Creole woman, as a foil for Jane. While Jane is depicted as healthy, chaste, modest and English, Bertha is shown to be mad, blatantly sexual, violent Creole who needs restraint. Thus, Bronte chooses a West Indian woman to highlight Jane's Englishness and to reinforce the English superiority. In *Wide* Sargasso *Sea*, Jean Rhys attempts to resist the legitimacy of "Englishness" found in *Jane Eyre* by condemning its distortion of the Creole character, which helps complete the project of colonialism.

Wide Sargasso Sea is the story of the mad first wife of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. Rhys is haunted by the figure of the first Mrs. Rochester whom one knows only by Rochester's biased, racist and repulsively gendered descriptions of her. She is defined as a monster by her English husband and the only voice she gets in *Jane Eyre* is to roar, grunt and laugh manically. Her rage and madness are unexplained and seemingly unwarranted. Rhys wants to change this by giving Bertha a voice that is used to be silenced. By rewriting Bertha's story, Rhys uncovers the life of the West Indian Creole, the mysterious Other hidden under the hegemony of the English imperial narrative. In an interview, Rhys explained her impulse to rewrite *Jane Eyre*: "When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she [Bronte] think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful mad woman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life"[5]. Indignant and inspired, Rhys feels compelled to write her own vision of the story.

Rhys was born in 1890 on the island of Dominica in the West Indies to a Welsh father and a Creole (white West Indian) mother. She felt antagonism directed towards the English side of her heritage as it was associated with a history of colonization and slavery. Though she identified more with Dominican than with English culture, her ancestry complicated her relationship with the island people. She belonged to a generation of English slave-owners. She once described her longing to truly fit in among the Caribbean people, but her connection to a salve-owning family made this impossible: "I thought a lot about them. But the end of my thought was always revolt, a sick revolt and I longed to be identified once and for all with the others' side which of course was impossible. I couldn't change the color of my skin"[6]. Therefore, Rhys felt as if she were an outsider in Dominica, but these feelings were intensified when she went to England, the mother country, where the West Indians were not well-received for they were a reminder of a shameful history and looked upon as inferiors. Thus, the ambiguity of being an insider/outsider in both the metropolis, England, and the colony, the West Indies, shaped Rhys's world. In most of her novels, Rhys reflects her sense of dislocation as a white Creole, welcome in neither Dominica nor England. She always expresses her yearning for a country or a residence she can consider home. One of her women characters, Sasha Jansen, laments in her novel *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939): "I have no pride-no pride, no

name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere"[7]. Francis Wyndham provides a reading of Rhys's dilemma: "She [Rhys] had been cursed by… a feeling of belonging nowhere, of being ill at ease and out of place in her surroundings… a stranger in an indifferent, even hostile world"[8].

Just as she feels displaced in a world where she never feels fully "belonged", Rhys also appears to inhabit a literary world that is unsure of her place in literature. Her literary identity has been a matter of controversy for years. Critics heatedly debate over whether her work should be considered Caribbean and whether or not she is an English or a West Indian writer. She is doubly marginalized in that she is neither considered alongside Caribbean writers, nor is she considered among European women writers. In her autobiography, *Smile Please*, Rhys speaks with a tone of self-defeat as she describes her isolation: "I would never be part of anything. I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing… I am a stranger and I always will be"[9]. Her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, challenges cultural definitions as well as pinpoints double culture as a source of deep anxiety. The novel dissects the problem of individuals who feel trapped between two cultures and are unable to identify fully with anyone. But what makes this work so fascinating is that Rhys does so through the rewriting of *Jane Eyre*, giving a story, life and voice to the marginalized Bertha, the mad woman in the attic, who is silenced, dehumanized and mistreated because of her Creole origin. In so doing, Rhys defies the canonical validity of the classic English text and, by extension, the English colonizing culture, encouraging the reader to view Bertha as the tortured victim and Rochester as a cruel manipulator. Bertha is no longer the raving mad woman whose illness runs in the family, but instead she becomes a sympathetic character with whom the reader establishes a connection. Rhys does not allow the mad woman to stay in the attic of the Victorian novel. She wants to relate the other side of the story as she believes *Jane Eyre* to be "only one side- the English side"[10] of the story.

Rhys has always been keen to give voice to the untold experience of the Creoles- people who, like the heroine of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and like Rhys herself, are of European descent, yet born and brought up in the Caribbean. The Creoles are, in Rhys's opinion, misunderstood and maligned both by the blacks of the Caribbean islands and by the wealthier white Europeans who come to settle in the West Indies after slavery is abolished, taking advantage of the new economic climate and usurping the Creoles' superior perch. Before the abolition of slavery, the Creoles were educated to conceive of England as home, but they were also culturally marked and excluded as inferior colonials. At the same time, they were racially privileged in relation to the Africans who existed as bound labors and subalterns. This created a severe conflict between the white and the black populations of the West Indies. Antoinette Cosway, the heroine of the novel, is born in the middle of this conflict. She is the daughter of a white Creole woman and a former slave-owner of English descent in Jamaica, who sinks into destitution after the liberation of the black slaves by the Emancipation Act in 1833. The fact that Antoinette's family is descendant from a generation of English slave-owners only fuels the animosity of the islanders. The family continues to carry the stigma of slavery and is, therefore, viewed as a family of colonizers. This connection with a slave-owning family makes Antoinette alienated from the black people of the island. She is also excluded, on the basis of her mother's Creole nationality, from the fortune-seeking English community. In fact, she does not belong anywhere. She is rejected and despised by both the black and the white populations in the West Indies. The black community doesn't accept her because she is white. At the

same time, she doesn't fit into the world of the whites who consider those of mixed races as inferior to themselves. As a white Creole, Antoinette becomes a double outsider: “white nigger” for the Europeans and “white cockroach” for the blacks as she explains to her husband in the novel:

> … a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they [the blacks] call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all[11].

These two phrases are important in the novel because they encapsulate the paradox of the Creole who feels his/her double exile. While Antoinette is at once able to move between the black and white cultures, she is also scorned by both of them and is thus forced to see herself as “Other”. She is not English enough for England nor Caribbean enough for the Caribbean and is, therefore, doubly exiled on her island home and her mother country, having no place to truly belong. M. Adjarian points out that Antoinette lives a life of “inbetweenness”[12]. It is this sense of “inbetweenness”, of belonging to neither culture which is the primary factor in driving Antoinette into madness.

The problematic nature of the white Creole is emphasized at the beginning of the novel in Antoinette's explanation of her lonely, isolated existence: “They say when trouble comes, close ranks. And so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks” (*WSS*, 15). This introduction gives the reader a strong sense of a lack of belonging, mirrored in Rhys's own life and, correspondingly, in Antoinette's. Mona Fayad notes that readers can witness the extreme influence social labels have on Antoinette from the very first words of her narrative, “They say”. Fayad argues that Antoinette's emphasis on the opinions of the “judgmental “they”” of society indicates her lack of an autonomous self that can grow independent of others' prescribed notions regarding her Creole background[13].

Antoinette's attempts to break out of her displaced role of the “Other” and establish herself within one cultural group are continually thwarted. Since childhood, Antoinette has increasingly been desperate in search for social acceptance and she, therefore, attempts to fit herself into first the role of the Caribbean native. She tries to embrace black characteristics in her attempt at friendship with a dark-skinned child named Tia. In an earlier episode, Antoinette puts on Tia's dirty, torn dress after the two girls have gone swimming and Tia has stolen Antoinette's dress and left her own behind. In exchanging dresses, Antoinette metaphorically becomes Tia or, using Mary Lou Emery's words, “Tia's double”[14]. This dress is symbolic of Antoinette's “unconscious desire”[15] to be like Tia, that is, to be black. Sue Thomas discusses the concept of “cultural cross- dressing” in literature as a “strategic sign of the ability to cross barriers of difference”[16]. So taking on the garment of another allows the individual to release from his/her own existence. Antoinette's longing to be like Tia, to take on her cultural identity through the “re-dressing” represents a form of release from her own misery caused by her lack of identity. But Antoinette's desire is not fulfilled as she is forced to put on a new dress when she returns home and meets the gaze of English visitors. However, this new dress is ripped, a way of expressing that her old identity no longer fits. Nothing fits Antoinette: her original dress[17] has been stolen and her new dress is ripped. Antoinette can not find an identity to suit her and this lack of belonging applies to her inability to assimilate to the Caribbean culture.

According to A. Smith, Tia can be seen as an image of possible healing for Antoinette's sense of fragmentation in the scene of exchanging dresses[18]. But the doubling signals disruption rather than completion as Tia acts as part of the black mob that sets fire to Coulibri, Antoinette's family estate:

> Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I didn't see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass. (*WSS*, 38)

Antoinette desires to be accepted by the island people and is reluctant to say goodbye to her life in Coulibri even though the people's hostility towards her is evident. The island is all that she knows and she is desperate to identify with it through Tia for she feels that they have shared the same experience of oppression because of their ethnicity. She wants to be part of something, so she clings to the hope of Tia and being “like her”. This desire manifests itself most strikingly when Antoinette looks directly at Tia as if she is looking into a mirror. Tia becomes like a mirror that serves to reflect Antoinette's self-identity. Erika Pugh explains that the image of the looking-glass or mirror is important because “it symbolizes Antoinette's need to find her “other” self- her identity. Her inability to reach to the other side of the mirror symbolizes her inability to find and grasp that other self”[19]. Of course, Antoinette's illusions are shattered when Tia throws the stone at her face, or rather, at what she represents: the hated-slave owning class, breaking the mirror image and driving Antoinette into the realization that she does not belong and that she is not like Tia. The reality is that the racial boundaries are set: Antoinette is white while Tia is black. Antoinette represents the colonizer, Tia the colonized. Within this in mind, it is really through her interaction with Tia that Antoinette comes to realize how radically out of place she is among the black people of Jamaica and how futile her wish to become one of them truly is.

It is worth to mention that though Antoinette is attached more to the vitality of the black community than with what she sees as the sterility of the white world, she is not without racist feelings towards the blacks. In fact, she has ambivalent feelings about the blacks, specifically a mix of envy and dislike. This is again problematic for her sense of identity. This ambivalence is, once again, clearly enacted in the love/hate relationship that exists between Antoinette and Tia. For Antoinette, Tia has skills to be envied: "fires always lit for her, sharp stone did not hurt her feet, I never saw her cry” (*WSS*, 20). Besides, Tia, though subjected to racial prejudice, seems to find some sort of security in her blackness that Antoinette lacks. This idealization of Tia makes her an object of desire and envy to Antoinette. But she is also an object of fear and dislike. When forced to wear Tia's dress, Antoinette feels “sick-hating her [Tia]” and calls her “cheating nigger” (*WSS*, 21), a situation which confirms that the racial boundaries are insurmountable.

Another interesting relationship, that between Antoinette and Christophine, a black house servant, demonstrates that the former has an ambivalent relationship with the blacks. Christophine is the only warm, secure and lovely person Antoinette ever

knows. She acts as a sort of surrogate for Antoinette when the latter experiences maternal rejection. Though a servant, Christophine is independent, resistant and unhesitatingly blunt. Sandra Drake comments that Christophine represents "a model of female independence and self-defiance for Antoinette"[20]. Later, Antoinette comes to see Christophine as a "black devil from hell" (*WSS*, 111) and an "ignorant, obstinate old Negro woman" (*WSS*, 93) rather than the epitome of kindness and love she once portrayed. Since she is a practitioner of *obeah*, a black Caribbean magic, Christophine is always seen as an outsider, a mystery woman who is an object of fear and awe to black and white people alike. It seems that the ties connecting Antoinette with Christophine are threatened by "[Antoinette's] compulsion to escape from a world [blacks] believed to be hostile"[21]. Bedsides, Christophine, like Tia, can not provide Antoinette with a firmer sense of identity because race and cultural differences keep them separated. Caught between fear of and affinity with the black community, Antoinette fails in achieving any sense of identity.

Antoinette's struggle with blackness is autobiographical. In her autobiography, Rhys herself noted that she "felt akin to black people", but she was "a bit wary…"[22] of them. Further, she wrote: "I prayed so ardently to be black, and would run to the looking-glass in the morning to see if the miracle had happened. And though it never had, I tried again. Dear God let me be black"[23]. To be white is to feel rejected and so Rhys's Caribbean heroines long to be black. In Rhys's early novel, Voyage in the Dark (1934), Anna Morgan longs to be black: "I always wanted to be black…Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad"[24]. While yearning for this apparent warmth of the black life, Rhys also fears the blacks' hostility towards the whites. This ambivalence which can be read as a dual desire for and fear of blackness is characteristic of Rhys's work.

Another immediate contribution to Antoinette's lack of identity is her childhood rejection by her mother, Annette. The relationship that Antoinette has with her mother is one without much dialogue or understanding, yet Antoinette ironically follows in her steps, marrying an Englishman, leaving the island and succumbing to madness. Annette does not have an endearing relationship with her daughter, favoring instead Pierre, her mentally-retarded son. Antoinette reflects upon her mother's demeanor: "I hated this frown and once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she decides once and for all that I was useless to her"(*WSS*, 17). When her mother does become ill, Antoinette goes to see her and is, once again, pushed away: "Why you bring the child [Antoinette] to make trouble, trouble, trouble? Trouble enough with that" (*WSS*, 40). Antoinette feels that her mother is ashamed of her for her assimilation to the black Caribbean. The fact that the island people show hatred toward the family and that the family is in financial ruins following the emancipation drive Annette to see the result of that hatred and financial despair in Antoinette:

> Then there was that day when she saw I was growing up like a white nigger and she was ashamed of me, it was after that day that everything changed. Yes, it was my fault, it was my fault that she started to plan and work in a frenzy, in a fever to change our lives. Then people came to see us again and though I hated them and was afraid of their cool, teasing eyes, I learned to hide it. (*WSS*, 109)

Antoinette embodies the idea of dislocation for her mother. She is evidence of their poverty, alienation and desolation. Therefore, Annette turns to England to

remedy the situation in the form of a new, English husband. M. Adjarian explains that Annette's choice to marry a man outside of her own culture suggests a way of protecting herself against "the tainted space of inbetween" and moving "into the more powerful and clarifying space of true whiteness"[25]. Indeed, Mr. Mason, Annette's new husband, rescues the family from poverty, but cannot save them from the blacks' hatred. His "Englishness" and racism are clear in his underestimation of the potential violence of the island people. He refuses Annette's pleas to leave Coulibri, believing that the natives are childlike people who pose no threat to their lives: "Live here most of your life and know nothing about the people. It's astonishing. They are children- they wouldn't hurt a fly" (*WSS*, 30). Mr. Mason's tone is representative of England as the imperialistic authority that views other islands, races and people as insignificant. Antoinette and her mother know that the people could pose a threat and their viewpoint demonstrates that they are not fully connected to England. As white Creoles, they are different as illustrated when Antoinette ponders Mr. Mason's naïve view of the Caribbean: "None of you understand about us…I wish I could tell him that out there is not at all like English people think it is" (*WSS*, 29). But despite the fact that she is different, Antoinette still longs to equate England with comfort and though she feels the disparity between herself and Mr. Mason, she sees his presence as positive:

> Then I looked across the white tablecloth and the vase of yellow roses at Mr. Mason, so sure of himself, so without a doubt English. And at my mother, so without a doubt not English, but no white nigger either…Yes, she would have died, I thought, if she had not met him. And for the first time I was grateful and liked him. There are more ways than one of being happy, better perhaps to be peaceful and contented and protected…(*WSS*, 30-31)

England is seen as protection for English descendants and Mr. Mason is seen as the protector and rescuer. Though she is not English, Antoinette feels that England, through Mr. Mason, will protect her family, convincing herself that her mother would have died without his help. But in fact, Mr. Mason's actions, or inactions, leave the family unprotected and this inaction ultimately leads to Annette's madness and death. This offers a glimpse of England that provides little safety for those who do not fully belong and this idea is completed when Antoinette is treated cruelly by her English husband, Rochester, and when she goes to her mother country, England.

It is important to note that the idea that Antoinette and her mother are mad is questionable from Rhys's point of view. What the "English" determine as mad is, in Rhys's novel, a response to being ill-treated and rejected. Annette is despised by the island people for being a Creole and a former slave-owner's wife. She witnesses the burning of her estate by the blacks and she loses hope when her only son dies in the fire. This drives Annette beyond sense and Mr. Mason leaves her in the hands of caretakers who abuse her. Christophine gives an explanation of Annette's madness: "They drive her to it…They tell her she is mad, they act like she is mad" (*WSS*, 129). Christophine asserts that Annette's madness is externally imposed. She becomes mad out of grief and social pressure. Likewise, Antoinette does become mad only when Rochester mistreats her and shuts her up in the attic after realizing how different, non-English she is. This opposes what Rochester claims in *Jane Eyre* that "Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations"[26]. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester is, as an Englishman, given the authority to say that Bertha is mad and make it so. By paralleling Antoinette's forced madness to

Annette's imposed insanity, Rhys illustrates the anonymity of the act. In other words, White Englishmen do not only drive their Caribbean wives mad, but they "name" them mad too[27]. Both Antoinette and her mother experience the same fate when they try to save themselves in the form of a relationship with their mother country through marriages to Englishmen. Inevitably, the English side betrays them.

Because England is the mother country for the colonial settler, it is natural for Antoinette to look to England as an alternative home when she is shunned by the people of the island. For Antoinette, marriage with an Englishman is a sort of merging with a greater force (England) that will overwhelm and define her. This idealized view of England surfaces even at the beginning of the novel. Antoinette's favorite picture is of an English girl, "the Miller's Daughter" (*WSS*, 30). But the novel soon depicts the country much like Rhys describes it in her letters-dark, cold and hostile place. Rhys mentions that the reason her heroine sets fire in Thornfield Hall at the end of the novel is a simple one: "she is cold-and fire is the only warmth she knows in England"[28].

Though Antoinette has a need to identify with England, she can't suppress a feeling of danger associated with the place, yet she refuses to admit that England is an unwelcome territory that, in the form of her English husband, has contributed to emphasizing her sense of non-belonging. Hence forcing her into the role of the mad Creole found in *Jane Eyre*. In contrast to Antoinette's persistent desire for an allegiance to England, Christophine, who has a strong identity, rejects that a place such as England exists as she asks Antoinette, "Why you want to go to this cold thief place? If there is this place at all, I never see it, that is one thing sure" (*WSS*, 92-93). Caroline Rody attributes Christophine's rejection of England to the fact that she has "a more culturally authentic relationship to [her] island and its history"[29]. She, therefore, does not need a different place in which to ground her identity. Christophine knows that Antoinette is using England as a fantasy, that Antoinette's concept of England is a false one which will not provide her with the comfort she is looking for. However, since Antoinette is unable to belong to the people and culture of Jamaica, she clings to her ancestry in hope of finding a place that will accept her. She attempts to go home, only to find that home is, just as Christophine describes, a "cold thief place" that threatens to destroy any shred of self for Antoinette. In a conversation with her husband, Antoinette asks, "Is it true that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up" (*WSS*, 67). This question confirms the nightmares Antoinette has of England as an unwelcome, hostile place. One of these dreams occurs when Antoinette is living in the convent, the place she is sent to after her mother goes mad:

> Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest. I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen. Now we have reached the forest. We are under the tall dark trees and there is no wind…We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees… (*WSS*, 50)

In this dream, Antoinette appears to be in a wedding dress, which foreshadows her marriage, and is following her betrothed Rochester. The different trees indicate

that she is in a different place (England), away from her comfortable surroundings. The fact that she makes no effort to save herself foreshadows her voyage to England with Rochester for when they leave the island, she does not protest or refuse. When Antoinette wakes up, she thinks that she has dreamed of "hell", not realizing that the place she has been dreaming of is England. The reader can see the prophecy that hell is synonymous with England and rather than being a place of refuge, it is a place of oppression and confinement. This dream is further evidence that Antoinette is displaced in her mother country.

Antoinette's relationship with Rochester reveals that she does not really belong to her mother country. This non-belonging to England is partially defined by her husband for he realizes how different and non-English she is. It is Antoinette's "Otherness" that ultimately leads to the demise of her relationship with Rochester and her connection to the natural surroundings of the island contributes to this "Otherness".

Though Antoinette is of English descent, she is very much entangled with the island landscape. One of her first childhood memories is that of the garden at Coulibri which she loves despite its wildness:

> 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…All Coulibri had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery-why should *anybody* work? This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous. (*WSS*, 16-17)

Antoinette's carelessness about the overgrown garden is an example of her non-Englishness because she, unlike those who remember the days of slavery, does not lament the lack of order in the garden. Though she is "béké", that is, white, her association and love of her natural surroundings are her main source of comfort. The islands are much more suited to her than England as Christophine says: "She is Creole girl, and she have the sun in her" (*WSS*, 130). This association of light and warmth with the character of Antoinette signifies her strong connection to the Caribbean environment and links her vibrant personality with flamboyant colors of the island itself: "We are cross-stitching silk roses on a pale background. We can color the roses as we choose and mine are green, blue and purple. Underneath I will write my name in fire red…" (*WSS*, 44). Though Antoinette's identity is not fully realized, the fiery colors of her stitching foreshadows where her devotion lies. Rochester also questions Antoinette's racial belonging as he looks into her eyes: "Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (*WSS*, 56). Even Antoinette herself establishes her connection to the island: "This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay" (*WSS*, 90). Unfortunately, Antoinette abandons her wish because she is so desperate to identify herself with England through her marriage to Rochester. Later, she realizes that she is alien to Rochester's English culture and it is Rochester himself who strengthens her sense of alienation.

Unlike Antoinette, Rochester[30] lacks this affinity to the island culture and this is why he can not adapt to his new life in Jamaica. Rochester's perception and judgment of Antoinette's world is a distinctly English perspective and seems harsh and unwarranted. He has a feeling of something hostile and unknown on the island as he admits to Antoinette: "I feel very much a stranger here. I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side" (*WSS*, 107). From the very beginning, Rochester is uneasy

with the lush surroundings, describing the island as a place that is "not only wild but menacing" (*WSS*, 58) and overwhelmed with color: "Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near" (*WSS*, 59). In a landscape that is so different from his own, Rochester can not assert his authority as a white European and this causes him to despise both the island and his wife for her association to its beauity:

> I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever color, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it. (*WSS*, 141)

The above passage illustrates Rochester's role of being a colonizer as depicted in some critical studies. Rochester's position of authority and ownership clearly raises him to the status of colonizer who wields control over the subaltern, that is, Antoinette. As an Englishman, Rochester wants to colonize both his wife and the island. His lack of control and knowledge about Antoinette's world makes him fear that he is losing his colonial power. He feels hatred towards Antoinette since he, as a colonizer, is not part of her world and does not understand it. His unease with the island culture and lifestyle, that are so distinctly not English, makes him, later, force Antoinette to return with him to England.

Rochester's intense hatred of the island's beauty is also mentioned in *Jane_Eyre*. While Rochester is telling Jane about his marriage to Bertha, he mentions how the atmosphere of the island is stifling and oppressive: "The air was like sulphur-streams-I could find no refreshment anywhere"[31]. However, a European wind rouses his desire to go home, and it is this juxtaposition between the island atmosphere and the English one that renders the island as harmful and England as inspirational:

> The sweet wind of Europe was still whispering in the refreshed leaves, and the Atlantic was thundering in glorious liberty…my being longed for renewal-my soul thirsted for a pure draught. I saw hope revive-and felt regeneration possible. From a flowery arch at the bottom of my garden I gazed over the sea-bluer than the sky…32

Whereas the European wind and sea are refreshing, pure, liberating and reviving, the West Indies atmosphere is stifling and oppressive. This could be read quite ironically in terms of Rhys's text for in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, England is not a place of liberation as Rochester describes it in *Jane Eyre*, but is instead a place of enslavement and horror.

The difference between Rochester and Antoinette does not lie only in their attitude to the landscape of the island, but also in their behaviors towards the native blacks of the island. Rochester feels disgust at the sight of Antoinette demonstrating physical affection for Christophine. This shows the persistent European mentality of viewing members of a race formerly enslaved as objects rather than human beings. Growing up among a majority of black people, Antoinette, however, sees Christophine as part of her family and finds it natural to "hug and kiss" (*WSS*, 76) her regardless of her race. Misunderstanding and societal differences, such as this one, prevent Antoinette from feeling accepted by members of her white background and prohibit her from identifying herself as thus.

In addition to Antoinette's understanding and familiarity of the island, Rhys links the exotic quality of the landscape to Antoinette's sexual awakening. Antoinette's sexuality proves too much for Rochester in contrast to his European "civilized" world. This is another element of her character that Rochester sees as non-English. He shows this in a conversation with Christophine:

> Do you think that I don't know? She thirsts for anyone-not for me. She'll loosen her black hair, and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl-she'll not care who she's loving). She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would-or could. Or could. (WSS, 135-36)

Rochester reduces Antoinette's character to that of a woman whose sexual desire and laughter are uncontrollable. These are, according to Rochester, signs of madness. Rochester always doubts Antoinette's fidelity since she is passionate and expresses her sexuality openly. For him, Antoinette acts outside the normative framework of the Victorian time that considers sexuality "one of the chief symptoms of moral insanity in women"[33]. Laura Ciolkowski writes that " Antoinette is deemed mad, unsuited for English domestic bliss not because of the psychological disorder from which she might be suffering but because of the appetites and excesses she so liberally exhibits"[34]. Antoinette seems merely a victim of the English imperial system that renders colonial women as "intemperate and unchaste"[35], terms Rochester uses to describe Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Thus Antoinette's lack of restraint confirms her "Otherness" in the eyes of Rochester. This makes him feel that she looks like Amelie, a black servant, whose lack of moral constraint allows her to have sexual encounter with Rochester: "For a moment [Antoinette] looked very much like Amelie. Perhaps they are related, I thought. It's possible, it's even probable in this damned place" (*WSS*, 105). Yet, Rhys emphasizes the fallacy of the English hierarchy by undermining Rochester's claims to moral and cultural superiority through sleeping with a black servant.

Antoinette meddles in *obeah* in order to bring Rochester back as he becomes more distant from her. Sandra Drake mentions that "Antoinette wants to use the spell to complete her assimilation to England and to whiteness"[36], thereby achieving a definite identity for herself. Therefore, she asks Christophine for an obeah potion to win back the love of her husband. But the potion does not work because, as Christophine says, "… [obeah] is not for *béké*. Bad, bad trouble come when *béké* meddle with that" (*WSS*, 93). Since Antoinette is "béké" and not of the island people, the potion fails to produce the desired effects. This is another way in which Antoinette's lack of identity works to destroy her. Mary Lou Emery connects this failure to the fact that Antoinette lacks identity: "The reasons [that the obeah fails] belong to the larger one of Antoinette's lack of place in this society. Neither beke nor black, her reliance on obeah for individual, personal matters cannot succeed, for as an individual she hardly exists"[37]. Antoinette is, once again, forced to recognize her non-whiteness as well as her non-blackness as Christophine states to Rochester: "she is not *béké* like you, but she is *béké*, and not like us either" (*WSS*, 128).

An attempt at stripping Antoinette of her identity even further is made when Rochester renames her Bertha, the mad woman's name in *Jane Eyre*. He does this in an attempt to make her submit to all "the cultural and personal association of a white English woman that he has constructed for her"[38]. Antoinette, in return, tries to escape this trap by confronting him: "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name" (*WSS*, 121). By calling her Bertha, Rochester takes away part of who Antoinette is and turns her into someone she cannot

identify with. A person's name is important since it is part of his/her identity and through the name he/she can be identified in a community. By renaming Antoinette, Rochester attempts to mold her into a "proper" Englishwoman. He explains why he calls her Bertha: "it is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha" (*WSS*, 111). Carolina Tennholt explains that the reason for Rochester's fondness of the name is that it is an English name[39]. True to his role as a colonizer, Rochester attempts to "dissociate [Antoinette] from her West Indian past [that he detests] and establish her rebirth"[40] by forcing an English identity upon her. He wants to create a woman whom he can control, dominate and possess for the sake of perpetuating his "Englishness".

Rochester's other nickname for Antoinette, "Marionette", also signifies the loss of identity as Antoinette becomes Rochester's possession to be locked away in the attic and devoid of free will. Patrick Hogan comments on Marionette as a nickname for Antoinette, saying that it reflects Rochester's desire to change Antoinette into"…a puppet, a piece of wood, without reflection or autonomous action, without social connectedness, without identity"[41].

Rochester's second attempt to assert his authority occurs when he decides to take Antoinette away from the Caribbean, uprooting her from the only place she ever loves: "She said she loved this place. This is the last she'll see of it…No sun…No sun. The weather's changed" (*WSS*, 136). This changing weather signifies England where there is very little sun. This is the frightful England of Antoinette's dreams, of Rochester's cold Atlantic Sea, far from her warm tropical Sargasso Sea. By taking Antoinette away from her homeland, Rochester has taken any chance she might have in trying to establish an identity. According Nicola Nixon, it is this "removal from her natural home, her dispossession, that makes her mad"[42].

Once Antoinette is in England, she is seen as mad and is, therefore, imprisoned in the attic of Thornfield Hall where no one will talk to her and where her voice will never be heard. She first refuses to believe that she is in England: "They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them" (*WSS*, 148). She no longer envisions England as a fantasy. Now she describes England as a "cardboard world where everything is colored brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it" (*WSS*, 148). As Thomas Staley points out:

> Antoinette's image of England is gradually dominated by cold and snow,all of its features set in careful contrast to the warmth of her native land. England holds no hope for her; it is cold, menacing, isolated, dead…There is no unifying element where the two of them can meet…There is no context to join them43.

England is already "dead" to Antoinette. She belongs more to her island even though she has a complicated relationship with its native inhabitants. England and Rochester are both cold and do not understand her. She lives in England, but her mind is on the island. Speaking to her husband on their honeymoon, Antoinette mentions that "[she] loved [the island] because [she] had nothing else to love" (*WSS*, 107). This condition of having "nothing else to love", but the island demonstrates her allegiance to the Caribbean. Hence her persistent desire to belong somewhere.

In England, Antoinette has another dream in which she sets fire to her husband's house. As in *Jane Eyre*, Antoinette steals Grace Poole's keys, her guardian in Thornfield Hall, as she falls asleep in order roam the house, but she is frightened to encounter "the ghost of a woman whom they say haunts this place" (*WSS*, 153). Antoinette does not realize that the ghost is herself. A ghost is what she is reduced to

in *Jane Eyre*, one that Antoinette does not recognize. The fire begins to spread as Antoinette knocks down several candles in the room:

> I laughed when I saw the lovely colour spreading so fast, but I didn't stay to watch it. I went into the hall again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her- the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. (*WSS*, 154)

This time Antoinette is not only a ghost for she does recognize herself. Since Antoinette has been locked in a room in Thornfield Hall which has no mirrors or windows, she has forgotten what she looks like when she comes to England:

> There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us-hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I? (*WSS*, 147)

The above passage is important as it, once again, raises the issue of identity. Antoinette's self-hood is largely connected to her ability to see her own reflection. The looking-glass becomes a symbol of self-identification that Antoinette is missing, a place where she looks for confirmation of her identity. M. P. Joseph explains that Antoinette's constant turning to mirrors indicates her need for the assurance of being herself and having an identity[44]. Antoinette's desire to "kiss" the girl in the mirror shows that she does very much wants to embrace, or fully become, herself. By moving Antoinette to England and by taking her looking-glass, Rochester has symbolically taken away any chance she has of establishing her identity as he says, "She'll not laugh in the sun again. She'll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass" (*WSS*, 136). But in the fire scene, Antoinette contradicts Rochester's words for she will see herself in the glass. She not only sees herself , but she "knows" herself too.

In her dream, Antoinette begins to distinguish her real self beyond the "Other" that is determined by the English novel. She starts to recreate nostalgia for the Caribbean:

> …When I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated she laughed…And I heard a man's voice, [calling] Bertha! Bertha…And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, why did I scream? I called 'Tia' and jumped and woke. (WSS, 155)

In the dream, Antoinette sees Tia, her childhood friend who betrayed her, which demonstrates her desperate wish for a connection to her island home. She neglects the "man's voice", that is, Rochester, calling her Bertha, and chooses instead to join Tia. One critic suggests that Antoinette's leap can be read as a "celebration of or a fantasized union with…blackness"[45]. With her experience as a slave to her English husband, Antoinette can more easily achieve a bond with the black community she feels close to because this history of slavery is now shared. In her dream, Antoinette jumps into the pool and, in so doing, she is finally able to get to the other side of the reflection and merge with the "colonial blackness" that Tia represents, thereby achieving or embracing the "ultimate completion of herself"[46].

Though Antoinette's fiery death is in the form of a dream, she intends to carry out the actions in her dream. When she wakes up, she is convinced of what she has to do, which is to put Thornfield Hall to flame:

> Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it up with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage. (WSS, 155-56)

The novel ends with Antoinette's resolution to act rather than a description of her death. Rhys did this purposefully to avoid giving Antoinette the same literal end that Bertha had. This changes the "role" that Gayatri Spivak describes of Antoinette killing herself so that Jane can remain the heroine:

> … [Antoinette] must play out her role, act out the transformation of her "self" into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction…At least Rhys sees to it that the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister's consolidation.47

But Antoinette does not merely "play out her role" by setting fire to the estate and killing herself. Though she is within the confines of the "cardboard house", which Spivak interprets as the "cardboard covers" of a book, that is, Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, this book is symbolically burned to create a space for the Creole character and defeat the plan to keep her story a "secret". This plan is expressed by Rochester's words:

> Very soon she'll join the others who know the secret and will not tell it. Or can not. Or try and fail because they do not know enough…I too can wait- for the day when she is only a memory to be avoided, locked away, and like all memories a legend. Or a lie…(WSS, 141-42)

But Antoinette's story is no longer a secret. The experience of being oppressed by her English husband and the memory of her island home compels her to act and this action gives her an identity that is formerly withheld.

Antoinette's last dream, a foreshadowing of an act of revenge, reflects Rhys's project in the novel as a whole: to confront rather than, as in *Jane Eyre*, conceal the workings and effects of British colonialism. Rhys's depiction of the effects of British colonialism in the West Indies is a dark one since it brings violence, destruction as well as a forced merging of cultures that entrap rather than liberate those who, like Antoinette and like Rhys herself, inhabit the uneasy space of inbetween that resists identification. However, Rhys is able to portray a character that discovers her sense of self amidst the very social constraints that cultural colonialism imposes upon her. In so doing, she changes one's perception of Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and reacts to its Victorian and racist views that reinforce English culture as superior to non-European ones.

Notes

[1.] Cited in Catherine Geenty, "'…Her skin was darker, her lips thicker than I had thought'-An Examination of Blackness in Jean Rhys's *Wide SargassoSea*"(URL:http://www.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@arts/documents/doc/uow019482.pdf) January 26, 2010.

[2.] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knop, Inc, 1993), p. 66.

[3.] Ibid., p. 71.
[4.] Ibid., p. 75.
[5.] Cited in Joya Uraizee, "'She Walked Away Without Looking Back': Christophine and the Enigma of History in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *CLIO*, vol.28 (1999).
[6.] Teresa O' Connor, *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 36.
[7.] Cited in Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. xv.
[8.] Cited in Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 7.
[9.] Jean Rhys, Smile Please: *An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 16.
[10.] Nancy Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 127.
[11.] Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 85. All subsequent references to this novel are to this edition and will be incorporated within the text by the abbreviation *WSS* with page number as follows: (*WSS*, page no.).
[12.] M. M. Adjarian, "Between and Beyond Boundaries in *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *College Literature*, vol. 22 (1995), p. 203.
[13.] Cited in Stephanie Coartney, "Identity Crisis for the Creole Woman: A Search for Self in *Wide Sargasso Sea"* (URL:http://faculty.mckendree.edu/scholars/winter2008/coartney.htm.) January 26, 2010.
[14.] Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 39.
[15.] Adjarian, p. 205.
[16.] Cited in Geenty.
[17.] The image of the dress, like the one Tia steals from Antoinette, frequently appears as a symbolic image in the novel and usually signifies Antoinette's relationship with England and the Caribbean. These further references to dresses emphasize the colors white and red which represent England and the Caribbean respectively. The color, that Antoinette wears, shows where her devotion lies.
[18.] Cited in Geenty.
[19.]Erika Pugh, "Caribbean Women Writers" (URL:http://textsandtech.org/english/publications/lit3930/pugh.html.) January 26, 2010.
[20.] Cited in Coartney.
[21.] Cited in Geenty.
[22.] Jean Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 32.
[23.] Ibid., p. 33.
[24.] Cited in Margret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction* (New York: Greenwood Press, 19992), p. 27.
[25.] Adjarian, p. 205.
[26.] Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin Books, 1847), p. 290.
[27.] Barbara L. Langston, "'I Will Write My Name in Fire Red': Subjectivity and Allegory in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Annie John*", *Chrestomathy*, vol.2 (2003), p. 165.
[28.] Cited in Bettina L. Knap, *Women in Twentieth-Century Literature: A Jungian View* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), p.103.
[29.] Caroline Rody, *The Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 141-42.
[30.] Although he is named nowhere in the novel, most critics refer to him as Rochester because of the connection to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.
[31.] Bronte, p. 305.

[32.] Ibid., p. 306.
[33.] Cited in "*Wide Sargasso Sea*-The Dark Continent of Jean Rhys" (March 21, 2009. URL:http://marjalisa.wordpress.com/2009/03/21/wide-sargasso-sea-the-dark-continent-of-jean-rhys/) January 28, 2010.
[34.] Laura E. Ciolkowski, "Navigating the '*Wide Sargasso Sea'*: Colonial History, English Fiction and British Empire", *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol.43 (1997).
[35.] Bronte, p. 304.
[36.] Cited in Coartney.
[37.] Emery, p. 44.
[38.] Adjarian, p. 207.
[39.] Karolina Tennholt, "Patriarchal Oppression and Madness in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (URL:http://www.diva-portal.org/diva/ getDocument? um_nbn_se_sh_diva-609-1_fulltext.pdf) March 3, 2010.
[40.] Ciolkowski, "Navigating the *Wide Sargasso Sea*".
[41.] Patrick Colm Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literature of Indian, Africa, and the Caribbean* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 93.
[42.] Cited in Pugh.
[43.] Cited in Roose Brekelmans, "Lost in the Bermuda Triangle: The Significance of Locations in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (URL:http://home.kabelfoon.nl/~boshuis/alwweb.htm.) March 3, 2010.
[44.] Joseph, p. 23.
[45.] Quoted in Uraizee.
[46.] Pugh.
[47.] Quoted in Uraizee.

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المنفى المزدوج: رواية جين ريس "بحر ساراغوس الواسع"

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الخلاصة

لقد انصبّ اهتمام كاتبة القرن العشرين الكاريبية جين ريس على مشكلات الاغتراب الثقافي والشعور المهزوز بهوية المرء. وتحاول ريس، بوصفها كاتبة كريولية تعيش في إنكلترا، أن تصور التأرجح بين ثقافتين وعدم القدرة مطلقاً على التماهي مع إحداهما. ومع أن مسقط رأس هذه الكاتبة هو جزيرة دومينيكا في غرب الإنديز لأب ويلزي وأم كريولية (بيضاء من غرب الهند) لكنها تعدّ بيضاء لكن ليست إنكليزية؛ من غرب الأنديز لكن ليست سوداء. وقد كان شعورها بالانتماء إلى غرب الإنديز مشحوناً، بالضرورة، بإدراكها أنها جزء من ثقافة أخرى. ولهذا السبب فإن الغموض الذي يكتنف كونها *دخيلة/متطفلة* في كلتا الحضارتين (إنكلترا والمستعمرة: غرب الإنديز) قد شكّل عالمها الخاص وتمخض عنه إحساسها بالنفي (أو الإقصاء) والهامشية.

يهدف البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على الكيفية التي تتمكن فيها جين رايس من منح انطوانيت كوزوي (بطلة روايتها لعام ١٩٦٦ وعنوانها بحر سارغوس الواسع) الإحساس نفسه بالنفي والهامشية لتعكس من خلالها التجربة المتفردة المتمثلة باغتراب المرأة الكريولية البيضاء.