

# Wide sargasso sea english mla analytical paper

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

As the arranged marriage between Antoinette and Rochester causes their relationship and sanity to slowly unravel over the course of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, they also suffer as a couple and as individuals. This novel follows the life of the protagonist, Antoinette, in Granbois, Jamaica where she deals with self-identity issues and undergoes an arranged marriage with an Englishman named Rochester. The story ends with Antoinette turning completely mad due to Rochester's controlling acts.

In Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she uses the arranged marriage between Antoinette and Rochester to show the effect it has on their sense of identity throughout the book. It seems Rhys already establishes the problem of displacement and a shaky sense of one's own identity in the very first part of the novel, long before the marriage takes place. Beginning with Antoinette, she brings up this issue with the novel's very first lines. She writes, " They say when trouble comes, close ranks. And so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (Rhys 15).

The problems of the Creole existence are at the surface and Rhys makes sure to lay emphasis on Antoinette's feelings of alienation which are that the white Creoles are neither part of the black slave community or accepted as European either. They are alone, as Antoinette mentions, and extremely hated. The people around them also played an important role in creating this identity crisis in Antoinette. Rhys writes, " White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you" (Rhys 20). Though this is a childish taunt in the novel, the truth of it is that nobody wants Antoinette.

Rhys exemplifies this metaphor by using the ugliest thing there is. Nobody likes cockroaches and consequently nobody likes Antoinette or her family. Antoinette's identity is suffering from a very early age and becomes more prominent in the future marriage with Rochester. The second part of the novel marks the beginning of the marriage between Antoinette and Rochester. During the wedding, however, they encounter the first of many problems. Though this is not as serious as the ones to come it is essential in order to see the small signs that signaled the fact that this marriage was never meant to be. 'Your sad heart,' she said, and touched my face. I kissed her fervently, promising her peace, happiness, safety, but when I said, 'Can I tell poor Richard that it was a mistake? He is sad too.' she did not answer me. Only nodded" (Rhys 72). Interestingly enough, the marriage contract itself is negotiated and put into action by a series of men: Rochester's father and brother, Antoinette's stepfather and her step-brother, Richard Mason. When Antoinette herself puts up a half-hearted resistance to the marriage, both Rochester and Richard Mason step in to push the contract along.

Already, Rhys, within the marriage, establishes action as a male characteristic and inertia as female. As the narrative moves into part II, Rhys has Rochester take over the narration from Antoinette and, along with that, shifts the feelings of displacement and problems of identity onto him. At Granbois, Rochester comments, "Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green" (Rhys 63). Once he lands in Jamaica, Rochester experiences a complete lack of power, at once having to deal with the strange otherness of the West Indies.

Rhys uses the repetition of the phrase “ too much” to emphasize Rochester’s uncomfortable feelings. The marriage has placed him in the position of the female: without power, without knowledge, and, most importantly, without a sense of English identity. In the same way, he also feels out of place. He says, “ It was a beautiful place—wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I’d find myself thinking—‘ what I see is nothing—I want what it hides—that is not nothing’” (Rhys 79).

Rochester is unable to reconcile with the strangeness of the place and he becomes frustrated with his inability to know and control it. On the other hand, Antoinette appears to have gained a sense of belonging at Granbois from the very beginning of the marriage. She says of the place, “ This is my place...” (Rhys 67) and “ Here, I can do as I like” (Rhys 84). Rhys here links knowledge and power as Antoinette has knowledge of the island she therefore is in the position of power, a situation that embitters Rochester as time goes on.

In these quotes, the short, choppy syntax Rhys uses portrays the casualness and familiarity that Antoinette is experiencing. Rhys takes care to portray Rochester’s crisis of identity in the West Indies as she does the Creoles’. The development of the marriage begins to turn into a colonial allegory as Rochester tries to deal with the problems of displacement upon him. In a conversation between him and Antoinette he says, “‘ Certainly I will, my dear Bertha. ’ ‘ Not Bertha tonight,’ she said. ‘

Of course, on this of all nights, you must be Bertha. ‘As you wish,’ she said” (Rhys 123). Rhys writes Rochester directly into the role of a colonizer at the point where he changes Antoinette’s name to Bertha, attempting to change the Creole other he imagines in her into something knowable. He also denies Antoinette a physical relationship and instead sleeps with the black slave Amelie within hearing which is a harsh blow to any hope that Antoinette had in keeping the relationship alive and her sanity.

Finally, Rochester physically displaces her, splitting her from the West Indies and any connection with a self image. There is no looking-glass here and I don’t know what I am like now...what am I doing in this place and who am I?” (Rhys 162). At this point in the novel, Rochester’s role as colonizer and Antoinette’s as colonized within the marriage are fully realized. Rochester, in the position of power, has successfully taken possession of Antoinette's wealth, property and identity. Antoinette, stripped of all three, goes mad and makes the transition from who she was in this book to the mad woman in the attic of Jane Eyre.

To conclude, this arranged marriage causes Antoinette and Rochester’s relationship and sanity to slowly unravel over the course of Wide Sargasso Sea. Consequently, they suffer as a couple and as individuals. Antoinette goes from being completely in control of herself and her surroundings to being insecure as a colonized nation. On the other hand, Rochester begins with feeling powerless and displaced in the marriage yet as it continues he becomes the traditional stance of male imperialist authority, consequently gaining control of Antoinette and stripping her of her identity.