

# The Sense of Safety and the Ambiguity of Madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Jingyin Xu

Faculty of English Language and Culture, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou 510420, Guangdong, China  
Email: jingyinxu@163.com

**Abstract:** As an example of rewriting English literary canons, *Wide Sargasso Sea* presents the life experience of Bertha Mason, "The Madwoman in the Attic" in *Jane Eyre*, from the Jamaican side and exposes the distortion and construction of the colony history. Renaming Bertha as Antoinette, Jean Rhys gives the Creole woman back her deprived voice and writes her a "life", resisting Charlotte Brontë's distorted representation of the West Indian woman and the imperial and patriarchal discourse embedded in her text. Rhys's intention to challenge Bertha's image as a lunatic and the relevant themes such as race, madness, colonial history have been discussed in a great many of academic works, but the connection between Antoinette's repetitive articulation of her losing sense of safety and her "madness" regrettably attract little attention. This essay argues that Rhys's description of the heroine's losing sense of safety fundamentally produces an ambivalent form of madness, which deconstructs the western invention of Jamaica, offering possibilities to rewrite the Creole cultural identity.

**Keywords:** *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *The Sense of Safety*, *The Emancipation Act*

## 1. Introduction

With the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966, Jean Rhys won the W.H. Smith Annual Literary Award of the year and now she is still hailed as one of the most prestigious female novelists of the 20th century. In 1974, the writer was acclaimed as "the best living English novelist" (Alvarez 6-7). *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not only known as the prequel of *Jane Eyre*, but a semi-autobiographical novel based on Rhys's own experience. Jean Rhys was born in Roseau, Dominica, West Indies to a Welsh doctor and a Creole woman, and at the age of sixteen she moved to Britain, but shortly after that, she went to Paris and wrote five books there between 1927 and 1939. Being a Creole, the hybrid offspring of the African and the European, she is enveloped by a strong sense of being marginalized in both the Caribbean and Europe, thus she "was personally aware of the conflicting culture she depicts in the figure of Antoinette who, being Creole, is accepted neither within the black community nor by the white representatives of the colonial power" (Cappello 48). Because of her own experience, Rhys believes that what Brontë writes about Bertha is untrue and attempts to present Bertha from the Jamaican side. On August 8, 1968, in an interview with Hannach Carter, a reporter from the Guardian, Rhys criticized Charlotte Brontë's representation of the West Indian woman Bertha as a lunatic (qtd. in Nebeker 126), and she confesses, "When I read *Jane Eyre* [...] why should she think Creole women are lunatics [...] I thought I'd try to write her a life" (O'Connor 144). By renaming Bertha as Antoinette, Rhys gives her back her deprived voice. Meanwhile, as Spivak points out, "in the figure of Antoinette, whom in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester violently renames Bertha, Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism" (312), Rhys reveals the imperial discourse behind Rochester's narration by naming.

Rhys's intention to challenge Bertha's insanity and the relevant themes have been discussed in plenty of academic works, but the connection between Antoinette's repetitive articulation of her losing sense of safety and her "madness" is seldom explored. As we can count, the word "safe" appears for fourteen times in the part one, the part that Antoinette serves as the narrator, which indicates the sense of safety is an essential topic to deal with. In addition, the relevant words such as "afraid" and "dangerous" appear frequently in Antoinette's voice. Nevertheless, previous studies on *Wide Sargasso Sea* seldom discuss Antoinette's safety, except that Judith Raiskin has noted "Antoinette's ultimate disempowerment and impoverishment in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is facilitated by a fetishized representation

of the British Empire grounded in myths of family loyalty and safety" (252), but she does not fully elaborate. This essay argues that Rhys's description of the heroine's losing sense of safety fundamentally produces an ambivalent form of madness, which deconstructs the western invention of Jamaica, offering possibilities to rewrite the Creole cultural identity.

## 2. The construction of madness

Bertha, "*The Madwoman in the Attic*" is constructed as a lunatic by Charlotte Brontë but the image of the "madwoman" also grows in the imperial soil before it finds its way into Brontë's text. In another way, the mad figure is the product of both the writer and the culture behind her. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "in projecting their anger and dis-ease into dreadful figures, creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines, woman writers are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them" (79), they envisage Bertha as "Jane's dark double", the rebellious character unconsciously suppressed inside *Jane Eyre*, and they believe that the writer creates the image of mad woman to release the pressure from the patriarchal society on her. The attic, the symbol of imprisonment, is also found to reflect "the woman writer's own discomfort, her sense of powerlessness, her fear that she inhabits alien and incomprehensible places" (Gilbert 84). Following their analysis, Bertha is represented as a "madwoman" by the female writer to resist and amend the patriarchal oppression on women. However, such way of resistance sacrifices and demonizes Bertha and the culture she immerses in. Furthermore, Bertha is "a figure produced by the axiomatics of imperialism" (Spivak 310), so by subverting Brontë's depiction of Bertha and presenting the Jamaica culture, Rhys challenges the imperial construction of the east which is generated through power and discourse. As Foucault puts forward in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, knowledge of madness is the construction of power and discourse. According to Foucault, power is not

A group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state", neither "a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule", nor "a system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body. (Foucault 92)

By rejecting the common belief that power is a system political machine that helps "a group of institutions and mechanisms" to "subservience of citizens", he redefines power and reveal the generating process of power. As he writes,

Power is in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontation, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault 92-93)

Power is not the instrument for the rulers to administrate the common people or to impose oppression on them, but the generation of vehicles to produce and circulate knowledge, ways of observation and the machine of control. Significantly, discourse is the indispensable element that bridges power and knowledge. By generating and authorizing the certain types of knowledge, discourse consolidates the power. Borrowing the key terms from Foucault, we can reach the conclusion that the knowledge of madness in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are constructed by power and discourse. Thus when questioning Brontë's invention of Bertha's madness, Jean Rhys simultaneously subvert the discourse roots in the British culture. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys prevents Bertha/Antoinette's life experience shortly after the implementation of the Emancipation Act, the act that marks the abolition of the slavery system, and the process of her being declared as a "madwoman" by her husband Rochester. Rhys creates an ambivalent form of madness by representing how Antoinette loses the sense of safety and how her thought and behavior change correspondingly, questioning if Antoinette is really mad and whether Rochester's discourse is reliable or not.

## 3. Antoinette's sense of safety and the generation of her "madness"

Safety implies a certain understanding of social relations, in terms of how one defines a "threatening" Other. This essay deals with three types of social relationships: empire, race, and gender.

When Antoinette, the daughter of a slaveholder, is enjoying the high social statue and great economic condition brought by her father's plantation, a potential threat is fermenting as the conflict between slave owners and slaves is escalating (Ciolkowski 342). The enforcement of Emancipation Act becomes a turning point of Antoinette Mason's life, as Sebaslian Foltz wrote, "[t]he lives of the plantation owners were changed by emancipation" (par.1). The Emancipation Act changes the phenomenon that slaves work loyally for the owners' family members, and "many plantation owners would see their empire shrink in a single lifetime" (par. 1). Furthermore, the hostility from the former slaves throws Antoinette in constantly dangerous living environment. Antoinette does feel safe before the Emancipation Act is implemented, as she states, "[m]y father, visitors, horses, feeling safe in bed—all belonged to the past" (Rhys 15). She feels safe because she has the protection from her father and the slaves have not have the right to resist their owners. However, as the slavery system collapses, as an ex-slave owner's daughter, "danger" comes from the emancipated African slaves, and as a Creole woman, she has to bear harm from those who discriminate and hate white people. The ethnic diversity of Antoinette's homeland is closely related to the European colonists and the "African slave trade" they did. Jamaica became a Spanish colony in 1509, and Negro slaves were imported from Africa in 1513 to replenish manpower. In 1670, Britain and Spain signed the Madrid Treaty, which stipulated Jamaica as a British colony, and at the end of the 17th century and throughout the 18th century, Jamaica became one of the main markets for black slaves in Britain. In the 18th century, a large sugar cane plantation dominated by black slave labor appeared. The production of sugar cane soared, making Jamaica one of the world's largest supply bases of sugar raw materials at that time. It was not only an important market for British industrial products at that time, but also a major link in the British-Africa-Jamaica triangle trade. The cruel exploitation and oppression on black slaves caused fierce resistance, and the African slaves uprisings in 1730 and 1831 forced Britain to announce the abolition of slavery system in 1834, but the emancipation of slaves did not fundamentally change the political and economic status of the blacks. The "African slave trade" did bring prosperity to Jamaica and provide the British Empire plentiful wealth and material, but, at the same time, gave rise to the rage of the African slaves to their white owners. As the African slaves were declared to be "free", they constantly vent their anger to the white people and their Creole progeny. When Antoinette is chased by a malicious girl who calls her "cockroaches" (Rhys 20), she runs back home, then she states, "[w]hen I was safely home I sat close to the old wall at the end of the garden" (Rhys 20), and she even feels "[e]verything would be worse if I moved" (Rhys 20). She has realized she is unsafe. Antoinette does feel the transformation and the hostility from the black people, as she narrates, "[o]ld time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (Rhys 21), which marks what is special about the racial hierarchy in postcolonial Jamaica—racism among the victims of racism. Both the African slaves and the Creole are the victims of racism, but because the Creole people are the offspring of the Europeans, they suffer violence from the slaves. Antoinette's growing anxiety in the emancipation time is partially related to "her identity-or lack of identity-and it has many more implications on her spiritual/ mental being than with the reality of her life" (Cappello 51). In addition, after waking up from nightmare that someone chases her and tries to hurt her, she thinks, "I am safe. I am safe from strangers" (Rhys 23), which conveys that her thought changes from looking forward to visitors to avoiding strangers.

Decolonization also means Antoinette's losing her mother's love and protection, which causes her further isolation when she faces danger. Before the transformation, Antoinette's mother is getting along well with her and her mother gives the sense of safety to her, just as she describes, "[o]nce I would have gone back quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa — once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe" (Rhys 19), which proves that she gains security when she has love and protection from her mother. Nevertheless, and the scene above exists "not any longer" (Rhys 19) and "not any more" (Rhys 19) after the abolition the slavery system. When Antoinette sees her mother's frown deep as it is "cut with a knife" (Rhys 17), she "hated this frown" (Rhys 17) and once she "touched her forehead trying to smooth it" (Rhys 17), but her mother "pushed me way, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her" (Rhys 17). As mentioned above, Antoinette's mother is also a Creole, a mustee of the European and the African. When the white people go back to their motherlands, the Creole have no choice but to stay, facing the outrage of the Africans, which turns Antoinette's mother into an apprehensive, sentimental and frail woman. The intimate relationship between Antoinette and her mother then shifts to be indifferent. In this case, Antoinette lacks of love from her parents and she does not have someone to communicate with her and guide her in the process of growth. The lack of touch from parents, for a child like Antoinette, also causes less desire and courage to communicate. This is why Antoinette "spent most of my time in the kitchen which was in an outbuilding some way off" (Rhys 17). Therefore, she "wished I had a big Cuban dog to lie by my bed and protect me" (Rhys

31) instead of protection from her mother. Furthermore, her mother is insane after Mr. Mason's house is burned, so she does not have the ability to protect Antoinette.

As a response to such an emotional crisis, Antoinette seeks a new sense of safety through marriage, and she marries Rochester because he promises her safety. She likes Rochester to say "you are safe" to her, which means she relies on Rochester to create the sense of security for her. However, Antoinette's illusion of gaining safety from marriage is broken and Rochester fails to offer Antoinette safety. The morning before the wedding, Richard Mason, Antoinette's brother, rushes to tell Rochester that Antoinette refuses to get married. When Rochester asks her the reason, she replies, "I'm afraid of what may happen" (Rhys 66), which means that she is uncertain, and she needs to gain the sense of safety from others. Deep in her heart, she knows that she is uncertain and she relies on others to tell she is safe. Hearing what Antoinette says, Rochester inquires, "But don't you remember last night I told you that when you are my wife there would not be any more reason to be afraid?" (Rhys 66) This time, Antoinette answers, "Then Richard came in and you laughed. I didn't like the way you laughed" (Rhys 66). Antoinette is sensitive and afraid of loss; when Rochester "kissed her fervently, promising her peace, happiness, safety" (Rhys 66) Antoinette agrees to get married. Therefore, Antoinette does except to gain safety from their marriage, which is her response to her lack of safety and her state of uncertain. Rochester cheats Antoinette to marry him even though he hates her, as he claims, "The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition" (Rhys 59), their marriage is based on money. He confesses, "I did not love her" (Rhys 78). For him, "the woman is a stranger" (Rhys 59), and "[h]er pleading expression annoys me" (Rhys 59), which demonstrates that their marriage is not based on mutual love. Rochester believes that "I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks" (Rhys 59), so Rochester's promise to Antoinette is merely aimed to get married successfully at that moment. Rochester hates his wife because of his cultural arrogance, which roots in his mind, but he never tells his wife. In the novel, Rochester expresses his hatred to his wife and the place they spend their honeymoon, as he states,

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 me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it. (Rhys 141)

Rochester was born and educated in Britain, so he values English culture and his English identity. In his cognition, English culture is superior to Jamaica culture, thus he cannot accept Jamaica culture. Living in Jamaica, he feels everything is uncomfortable, though Jamaica's "indifference and the cruelty" is "part of its loveliness". Rochester's paradoxical saying about the natural landscape and Antoinette has something to do with his colonial desire. He hates the beauty of the Jamaica landscape and woman because of the "magic" and the "secret" he "would never know". As the representative of the British colonists and explorers, Rochester longs for representing the land from his perspective, but it is difficult for him to do so due to the mystery of the east landscape. He does recognize the beauty of the Jamaica landscape and Antoinette, but their intangible features make him uneasy. For him, the mysterious place also pose threat to him, so he also says "you are safe" (Rhys 79) to himself. As Rochester complains, "[t]here was nothing I knew, nothing to comfort me" (Rhys 123), he cannot even give himself the sense of safety, so it is more difficult for him to give it to Antoinette. As she tells Rochester, "I never wished to live before I knew you," (Rhys 76) she wishes to die before she knows Rochester and he gives her hope to live. Since her last illusion has broken, her wish to die becomes stronger and she becomes more depressed. Her wish to die conveys that she has become desperate after her turbulent life, and this wish has formed for "such a long time" (Rhys 76). Her conversation with Rochester proves how desperate she is after she realizes Rochester does not love her, "If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don't believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die" (Rhys 77). Antoinette's melancholy is so strong that it affects Rochester, as he tells,

I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight. Nothing left but hopelessness. *Say die and I will die. Say die and watch me die.* (Rhys 140)

Because of Antoinette's influence, Rochester also realizes that the feeling of security has left him. From Rochester's perspective, Antoinette becomes "ghost", a hopeless creature, a dead person's spirit. Antoinette's melancholy is so strong because it has existed since she was a child and it did not decrease but accumulate in the process of growth; she gradually loses the desire and courage to live. For Antoinette, death means the end of agony. The melancholy has rooted in Antoinette's mind, and she is

uncertain throughout her childhood, which cannot be easily changed, so Rochester could not give his wife the sense of safety easily. What is more, he never tries to give Antoinette the sense of safety. As mentioned above, Rochester also lacks the sense of safety since he has lived in the new environment that is full of danger for him. Rochester feels unsafe in the new place, and he "feel that this place is my enemy and on your side" (Rhys 107), so he tries to ensure his sense of safety first instead of caring Antoinette's feeling. However, Rochester offers her safety by confining her. Rochester thinks Antoinette is insane, so he locks her up in a small and dark room. As Antoinette describes, "[t]here is one window high up-you cannot see out of it. My bed had doors but they have been taken away. There is not much else in the room. (Rhys 147)" Rochester tries to protect her by confining her. For him, she cannot hurt others when she is locked up, which keeps her from making crime. By doing so, Rochester actually intends to protect himself from her. Ironically, Antoinette hurts not only the guest with a knife but also sets fire to harm Rochester, which proves his attempt to ensure Antoinette's safety fails. He tries to repress Antoinette while she resists his repression. Rochester once calls Antoinette Bertha, this is Rochester's oppression. Antoinette resists the name he gives her. Then, when Rochester thinks she is a lunatic, Antoinette tries hard to justify for herself, which is useless. Their relationship is in a circle of repression and resistance. Rochester tells readers that Antoinette is insane and he takes her to England to lock her up. Importantly, Antoinette is taken from the colony to the colonizer's home country, which suggests a shift in power relation. After Rochester reads the letter from Daniel Cosway, Antoinette's half brother, he believes that Antoinette is "a mad girl" (Rhys 106), and Antoinette is angry about that. She tries to ask Rochester to "talk about it now" in a "high and shrill" voice (Rhys 106). She wants to defend for herself. This is her resistance to others' slander. For Rochester, she is physically safe in the small dark room, but, for Antoinette, she is more unsafe, and she wants to leave the room. She is regarded as a lunatic, and she loses her freedom. She cannot accept this, so she tries hard to escape. As she dies in the fire she sets, her resistance against Rochester's repression culminates in self-destruction. Her safety is not ensured by being locked up. Locking her up, to some extent, even pushes her to die. Therefore, what Rochester offers her is not the safety she needs. By locking her up, Rochester ensures her safety physically, but she further loses her sense of safety.

Antoinette fails to gain safety from marriage, in that she trusts an untrustworthy man, her melancholy roots in her mind, and what Rochester offers is not what she needs. In their marriage, the circle of repression and resistance constantly exists. Antoinette not only does not gain the safety from their marriage but is regarded as a lunatic. Locking her up is Rochester's repression toward Antoinette, and he tells readers that he does so because she is insane. Antoinette then keeps defending for herself. Their narration and the things they do affect readers' understanding of Antoinette's lunacy, and her madness becomes ambiguous because of their different explanation.

#### 4. Different accounts of the same scenes and the ambiguity of madness

Jean Rhys applies multiple points of view in *Wide Sargasso Sea* with Antoinette, Rochester and the servant Grace Poole as narrators so that the story is told by different voices. In part one, Antoinette narrates her experience of growth and how she understands the world around her. In part two, there are seven scenes, among which six with Rochester and one with Antoinette as narrator. In part three, Grace Poole states why she is employed and her experience with Antoinette, and then the narrator shifts back to Antoinette. The contradiction between what has been said by the narrators makes it difficult to tell whether and when Antoinette becomes insane. In the end of part two, Rochester tells readers that his wife has become a lunatic, as he exclaims, "My lunatic. My mad girl." (Rhys 136) However, A's alleged insanity is challenged in part two. Antoinette's living in darkness is an indication that she is insane. However, Grace tries to persuade readers that Antoinette is not insane, as Grace Poole states,

All of us except that girl who lives in her own darkness. I'll say one thing for her, she hasn't lost her spirit. She's still fierce. I don't turn my back on her when her eyes have that look. I know it. (Rhys 146)

Grace Poole is the maid who is paid to look after Antoinette. As an eye-witness, she wants to tell readers that Antoinette is not insane upon her arrival in England. What is more, with Antoinette herself back as the narrator, readers can notice that she still has clear conscious, accusing Rochester of tormenting her, just as she describes: "There is one window high up-you cannot see out of it. My bed had doors but they have been taken away. There is not much else in the room." (Rhys 147) The room is like a prison, and there is "not looking-glass" for her to know "what I am like now" (Rhys 147), so her transformation on appearance can be understood. She may not be insane when she arrives in England, but the harsh living condition makes her look like an insane woman, a woman without a neat

appearance but wear something like cerecloth. Thus when she appears in front of *Jane Eyre*, she looks like a lunatic.

Antoinette's behaviors, however, make readers suspect that she is insane. For example, she rushes to hurt a visitor with knife without realizing what she has done, as Grace Poole illustrates to her,

You rushed at him with a knife and when he got the knife away you bit his arm. You won't see him again. And where did you get that knife? I told them you stole it from me but I'm much too careful. I'm used to your sort. You got no knife from me. You must have bought it that day when I took you out. (Rhys 150)

Hearing the different voices and reading Antoinette's behavior, readers cannot easily tell when and whether Antoinette becomes insane. The different voices cause ambiguity. This is also Jean Rhys's subversion toward Charlotte Brontë's description that Bertha, the West Indian woman, is insane. Therefore, though the lack of sense of safety pushes Antoinette to be more depressed, readers may hesitate about her insanity.

Compared with the scenes in which Bertha appears in *Jane Eyre*, candle is closely related to the representation of Antoinette's sense of safety and her madness, thus candle's different symbolized meanings worth investigating. The symbolized meanings and the scenes in which candle appears makes readers see the ambiguity of madness. On the one hand, candle provides Antoinette a sense of safety, so she holds candles to ensure her safety, which is quite normal for her. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the symbolized candle is closely related to the sense of safety. Jean Rhys gives the candle the symbolized meaning of safety. Antoinette says, "as the candle burned down, the safe peaceful feeling left me" (Rhys 31). However, Antoinette is confined by Rochester to a dark small room, in which she further loses the sense of safety, and she needs to escape from such a room. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha always holds a candle in her hand when she appears, which is surely needed in the darkness to ensure her safety and lightness. Charlotte Brontë applies Gothicism, which makes the atmosphere in the castle more terrible. In the darkness of the created gothic atmosphere, candle can be interpreted as symbol of safety and lightness. On the other hand, candle light makes *Jane Eyre* see clearly Bertha's horrible appearance, and holding candle causes fire, which makes readers suspect that Bertha is insane. *Jane Eyre* wakes up during the mid-night because of "candle-light", and along with the candle-light, she sees, "[i]t took the light, held it aloft and surveyed the garments pendant from the portmanteau" (Brontë 296). When Bertha approaches *Jane Eyre*, she still holds the candle, as *Jane Eyre* recalls,

It drew aside the window curtain and looked out: perhaps it saw dawn approaching, for, taking the candle, it retreated to the door. Just at my bedside, the figure stopped: the fiery eye glared upon me-she thrust up her candle close to my face, and extinguished it under my eyes. I was aware her lurid visage flamed over mine, and I lost consciousness: for the second time in my life-only the second time-I became insensible from terror. (Brontë 297-8)

The shift from "it" to "her" reveals Bertha's dreadful appearance and the significance of the candle light. Candle light does not mean safety but horror, because seeing Bertha clearly, for *Jane Eyre*, is horrible. The horrible scene make Bertha look like a lunatic. Besides, candle can throw her in the condition of danger and the behavior of setting fire makes her look like a lunatic. In part three, Antoinette illustrates numerous scenes in which candle appears. It is natural for her to lit candles to see thing clearly, but she also puts herself in fire, as she describes,

I wanted to get out of the room but my own candle had burned down and I took one of the others. Suddenly I was in Aunt Cora's room. I saw the sunlight coming through the window, the tree outside and the shadows of the leaves on the floor, but I saw the wax candles too and I hated them. So I knocked them all down. Most of them went out but one caught the thin curtains that were behind the red ones. (Rhys 154)

This scene shows that candle's meaning can be ambiguous—safety and danger. The dialectic of enlightenment shapes the subject but also creates a dark Other. Thus our understanding is challenged again. Jean Rhys applies multiple point of view and symbol to create the ambiguity of madness. By doing so, she subverts Bertha's image as a lunatic.

## 5. Conclusion

All in all, this essay proves that Rhys's description of the heroine's losing sense of safety gradually fundamentally produces an ambivalent form of madness, which deconstructs the western invention of

Jamaica, offering possibilities to rewrite the Creole cultural identity. Jean Rhys's "writing back" Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* results from her own identity and experiences, and she subverts Antoinette's image as a lunatic. Antoinette loses the sense of safety after the enforcement of Emancipation Act. During her growth process, Antoinette has realized that she loses the condition of safety and the sense of safety, so she tries to gain the sense of safety from marriage. However, she fails to do so. In the marriage, Rochester's repression and Antoinette's resistance constantly exist. Antoinette not only fails to gain the sense of safety from the marriage but is regarded as a lunatic by Rochester. Antoinette's madness, however, is ambiguous. It is Rochester who tells us Antoinette is insane and locks her up. Antoinette tries to resist that, and their repression and resistance make Antoinette's madness ambiguous. To create the ambiguity of madness, Jean Rhys applies multiple points of view and symbol. After Rochester states his wife becomes insane, Grace Poole, the servant for looking after Antoinette, and Antoinette go back as narrators. The conflicting statements about Antoinette's madness affect readers' understanding. The inter-textual study between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* also shows that the frequent appearance of the candle has symbolized ambiguous meanings, which also makes the madness ambiguous. In this way, Antoinette's loss of the sense of safety becomes ambiguous because readers cannot tell exactly whether and when she is insane.

## References

- [1] Alvarez, Alfred. "The Best Living Novelist." *New York Times Book Review*. Vol. 17, No.3, 1974, pp.6-7.
- [2] Brontë Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- [3] Cappello, Silvia. "Postcolonial Discourse in 'Wide Sargasso Sea': Creole Discourse vs. European Discourse, Periphery vs. Center, and Marginalized people vs. White Supremacy." *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*. Vol.6, No.1, 2009, pp. 47-54.
- [4] Ciolkowski, Laura E. "Navigating the Wide Sargasso Sea: Colonial History, English fiction and British Empire." *Twentieth Century Literature*, 1997, pp. 339-359.
- [5] Foltz, Sebaslian. "Plantation Owners and Apprenticeship: The Dawn of Emancipation". *Whites and Freedom*. Available from: [www.scholar.library.miami.edu/emancipation/whites1.htm](http://www.scholar.library.miami.edu/emancipation/whites1.htm)
- [6] Foucault, Michel. *Knowledge and Power*. Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- [7] *Madness and Civilization*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.
- [8] Gilbert, Sandra and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979.
- [9] Nebeker, Helen. *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage. A Critical Study of the Novels of Jean Rhys*. Montreal: Eden Press, 1981.
- [10] O'Connor, Teresa F. *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels*. New York: New York University Press, 1986.
- [11] Raiskin, Juith. *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's writings and Creole Subjectivity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- [12] Rhys, Jean. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. London: Penguin Books, 2000.
- [13] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, eds., *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*. Edinburgh University Press, 2003.