Memories of Self: Sensory Epistemology, Caribbean landscape and Cultural Identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea.*

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Abstract:
Within the complex context of Caribbean cultural identity, the present article examines how Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1982) employs sensory epistemology to develop Caribbean consciousness. Rhys depicts the body as a locus of knowledge through vivid depictions of the island's lush landscapes, which include the vibrant colors, humid scents, and resonant sounds. Sensory experiences either bridge or disrupt the Creole protagonist Antoinette's hybrid identity. Drawing on postcolonial theories of memory (Glissant), third space (Soja), theory of smell (Classen) and through textual analysis, the present article reveals how embodied experiences structure Antoinette's subjectivity and establish her problematic relationship to place, race and memory. It further explores the unnamed husband's narrative as a site of colonial anxiety and epistemic violence. Ultimately, the paper argues that Rhys's sensory poetics contends landscape and memory as fraught contexts where colonial authority is both replicated and rejected, thereby contributing to deeper debates on identity development in postcolonial Caribbean literature.

Keywords: Postcolonial Literature, Memory, Identity, Landscape, Sensory Epistemology, *Wide Sargasso Se*

I- Introduction

Colonial discourse is strongly related with the history of fragrance. Smell, taste, and touch have been relegated to the "lower" physiological registers, while sight and hearing have been regarded as the higher faculty of reason in Western epistemologies since the Enlightenment. These narratives that associate tactile awareness with the 'primitive' other and logic with European civilization were strengthened by this hierarchy. Since smell is a social and cultural phenomenon, as Classen (1994) contends, olfactory hierarchies are both a product and a weapon of colonial authority (p, 3).

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As a result, olfactory imagery is claimed to be often overlooked in literary analysis. This is a serious gap, and it is particularly damaging in postcolonial studies. Colonial powers frequently described colonized lands and peoples as foul-smelling or unclean to present them as inferior and in need of European control. Disregarding smell, means disregarding one of the strategies colonial rulers use to dehumanize others.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1982) is an outstanding portrayal of how a postcolonial writer utilizes smell to resist this colonial reasoning. Rhys, a Dominican-born white Creole writer of British descent, establishes a Caribbean scentscape that questions the sensory dominance of the Europeans. Yet, her status as a Creole is still complicated. Being born in Dominica to parents of British origin, Rhys is called a white Creole. She is racially white, but she was raised in the West Indies, not in Europe. As a result, she belonged neither fully to British society nor fully to Caribbean society. Rhys's liminal position and fractured identity haunt and shape almost all of her writings.

Wide Sargasso Sea (1982) is claimed to be her most famous novel. She wrote it as a response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In Brontë's novel, there is a character named Bertha Mason. She is Mr. Rochester's first wife. Bertha is the story's main character, not a side figure. But Brontë describes her like a violent, animal-like "madwoman" locked in an attic. Bertha has no voice and no story of her own. This representation deeply troubled Rhys. So, she decided to give the silent woman a past, a real name, and a voice. That is how *Wide Sargasso Sea* was born. The novel follows Antoinette from her childhood in the Caribbean to her final imprisonment in England.

As a White Creole, Antoinette's relationship with the Caribbean environment, especially its smells, is deep and complicated. She loves the land, its plants, and its fragrances. But her English husband finds these same smells strange and threatening. Rhys's counter narrative revolves around sensory conflict.

Literature review:

Since its publication in 1966, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has attracted substantial scholarly attention. The dominant critical tradition reads the novel as a postcolonial response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her influential 1985 essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", argues that Rhys's novel "rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition" (Spivak, p. 253). Her study gives an ambivalent reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She argues that Rhys attempts to rewrite Jane Eyre from a Creole perspective, yet it remains "in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native" (p. 253). Christophine, the Subaltern figure, does not master the English language, even in Rhys's revision.

A second major critical strand focuses on gender and madness. In his article, "Exotic Madness in Caribbean Literature: From Marginalization to Empowerment and Indigenization", Bénédicte Ledent claims that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a novel about a creole woman from Jamaica. She is the same character who is famously imprisoned in the attic of Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*. The creole woman, in Rhys's narrative is given a voice of her own (p. 1). Ledent analyzes how Rhys exposes the patriarchal mechanisms that label women as "mad" when they resist masculine control. He says: "Antoinette in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel which goes some way towards indigenizing exotic madness too in the sense that it shows Rochester as being as susceptible as Antoinette to a form of psychological derangement" (Ledent, 1990, p. 9).

Other Scholars have also situated the novel within the Gothic literary tradition. Anthony E. Luengo (1976) maintains: "*Wide Sargasso Sea* is remarkable in its evocation of landscape" (p. 232), conveying the subjective states of characters. He asserts that "colours and smells predominate" in Rhys's atmospheric descriptions (p. 232). However, Luengo does not develop olfactory imagery as a sustained analytical category.

More recently, some critics, likeYu Te Tom Kuo (2008), seek to delve in the development of olfactory in postcolonial writings. He says: "I spend a considerable chunk of argument in demonstrating how post-colonial writing had set forth squelching the olfactory in favor of visual-acoustic imagery in the 60s. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a case in point on the ground" (Tom Kuo, p. 23). The author uses Rhys's novel as an illustration of how 1960s postcolonial texts suppressed olfactory depth in favor of visual and auditory imagery.

Despite this rich body of criticism, the complex employment of sensory imagery, mainly olfactory descriptions, remains critically under examined. The few references of smell in literature consider it as an afterthought, not as something worth analyzing in its own right. No study has systematically analyzed how Rhys deploys distinct Caribbean smells such as vetiver, frangipani, cinnamon, and lime trees in opposition to European sensory norms.

This paper studies Rhys's olfactory imagery as a counter-colonial tool. By juxtaposing the novel's warm, organic Caribbean smellscape with its sparse references to cold, artificial European fragrances, Rhys's novel, Wide *Sargassso Sea,* challenges the sensory hierarchies that underpinned colonial authority. She reclaims sensory authority for her Creole protagonist. Furthermore, the article argues that olfactory imagery allows Rhys to validate Caribbean cultural memory and consciousness through the direct, personal experience of scent.

The present article brings together several theoretical perspectives to explore how Jean Rhys uses descriptions of smell in her novel Wide Sargasso Sea. It draws on postcolonial theories about subalternity and hybridity, concepts

from Caribbean poetics of relation, and research from psychology on how scent and memory are connected. By combining these approaches, the analysis shows how olfactory imagery in the novel becomes a powerful space for expressing colonial anxiety, evoking cultural memory, and enacting resistance.

Drawing on Classen's theory of smell as a "social phenomenon" with politically coded meanings, this analysis will demonstrate how Rhys uses olfactory description to reclaim sensory authority for her Creole protagonist. Additionally, Edouard Glissant's work on memory helps explain how colonized people hold onto the past through the body and the land. While Edward Soja's concept of "third space" (2014) describes the third space as "a site of contestation" where cultural interactions between colonial and local groups create new forms of identity (p. 208).

The work will analyze recurring sensory imagery in Antoinette's narrative and contrasts it with her husband fearful moments. Additionally, it argues that Rhys uses the body as a site of knowledge and resistance. Through her narrative, Rhys transforms sensory experience into a Caribbean consciousness.

II-"The smell of the garden always makes me feel safe": The Transformation from Paradise to Inferno

In the British imperial imagination, the tropics were frequently envisioned as odorous and dangerous. This sensory bias is important for understanding how Rochester perceives and ultimately rejects Antoinette's Caribbean home in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As William Tullet traces in "Grease and Sweat," English texts from the long eighteenth century linked "racial odour with foul spaces" in order to naturalize racial hierarchies (201-, p. 318). Two related pseudo-scientific theories supported this link. For the imperial sensorium, any strong non-European smell, even a sweet on, could be considered as threatening because it signals uncontrolled nature. While in the forest, Rochester wonders about how beautiful it was: "A calm -so calm that it seemed foolish to think or think to plan" (1982, p. 95).

Monogenism held the belief that all humans share a single origin. Tropical climates caused white bodies to degenerate, producing new, unpleasant smells. Second, polygenism claims that races have separate biological origins. They suggest that non-European bodies have different, and supposedly worse, smells. On this base, Kettler(2020) shows how Western racialization use both scatological and biological arguments. A key concept of this approach was the biological transmission of odors and how the body odor is inherited and marks fixed racial difference. Kettler (2020) claims: "The vast and continuing Western racialization project through odor involved different scatological, monogenetic, and polygenetic justifications. Where racist scatology could not

place non-Western peoples as inferior" (2020, p. 2009). Social Darwinists embrace this logic to claim that tropical environments produced inferior, noxious peoples who were naturally suitable to colonial control and domination.

Furthermore, colonial regimes also deployed olfactory discipline to police bodies and spaces. Imperialist language described non-European societies as Chu and Downes contend: "living amid stench and squalor" (2000, p.340). This description legitimizes cleanliness initiatives that acted as means of cultural erasure. The regulation of "hygienic" odors; soap, disinfectant ; was part of a larger process of sensory assimilation, matching colonial bodies with Eurocentric notions of cleanliness and propriety. "cleanliness and propriety," indicate the Eurocentric standards of hygiene that the colonizers imposed on colonized peoples to make them conform to European norms. One morning, while Christophine is helping Antoinette get ready, Antoinette urges her saying: "Don't put anymore scent on my hair. He doesn't like it" (1982, p. 72), referring to her husband's unease with the oil scents. This is a clear example of a colonial subject being repulsed by a non-European bodily practice or product.

In Postcolonial literature, smells often become sites of resistance to these sensory hierarchies. Many authors use "lower" senses, including smell, as carriers of memory, identity, and cultural knowledge. Édouard Glissant (1989) refers to this reclamation as the "poetics of relation" in Caribbean contexts. Sensory experience, he argues, creates connections between individuals, histories, and locations that are not based on colonial classification schemes. Glissant writes: "my landscape changes in me; it is probable that it changes with me" (1989, p.145). Framing transforms smell into a de-colonial archive. It is an embodied mode of knowing that defies the abstract terms of colonial reason.

Using scent as the main medium for examining memory, identity, cultural displacement, and psychological decay, Jean Rhys uses olfactory imagery with remarkable sophistication throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The novel's smell-scape serves both as symbolic depictions of the characters' inner lives and as a real sensory experience. *Wide Sargasso Sea* provides a paradigmatic example of this sensory inversion. Rhys's landscapes are not merely picturesque. As Alejandro Nadal-Ruiz argues, they actively function as active players in the construction of diasporic consciousness (2015, p.72). The novel's smells, including tropical vegetation, decay, rum, and soap, are epistemic instruments rather. They provide Antoinette access to forms of information that the colonial gaze suppressed.

Caribbean authors have long been preoccupied with representing the region's complex histories of slavery, colonization, displacement and cultural mixing. From Jean Rhys to Derek Walcott, writers have repeatedly returned to

the natural world. They use its sights, sounds, smells, textures and rhythms as a way of writing identity and memory. The Caribbean landscape is not an inert background. It is a living active landscape that shapes how people experience themselves and others. Thomas Loe claims that in *Jane Eyre* as in its prequel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, "exhibit a characteristic interdependence between characters and their perceptions of their landscapes."(2007, p. 49). Their views of the landscape do more than just set the scene in their stories. Both women reveal how they think and feel on a deep level, shaping their sense of identity and self-understanding.

Antoinette relies on the natural landscape of Coulibri to evoke memories from her past and to feel calm and secure. She remembers a time when she was pursued by a girl who sang: "go away white cockroach" (1982, p. 20). After running away, Antoinette says: "When I was safely home I sat close to the old wall at the end of the garden" (p. 20). The garden provides Antoinette with a moment of psychological stability. As Pierre Nora (1989) that memories frequently gather around tangible or symbolic places, "at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn" (1989, p.284). In this instance, the smell of the land and flowers at Granbois restores her shattered sense of self and peace of mind.

III. 'If I Smell then I do exist' and Antoinette Embodied Identity

The role of the senses in Caribbean writing is especially striking in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The novel is haunted by the lush, excessive, and sometimes threatening landscapes of Dominica and Jamaica. In his article, Caribbean Landscape and the Construction of Creole Consciousness in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Alejandro Nadal-Ruiz(2015) claims: "there is a relationship between the Caribbean landscape as recollected by Antoinette-as-narrator and this female character's Creole consciousness" (2015, p.196). Rhys's landscapes are not neutral scenery. They actively participate in the construction 'of self-consciousness'. He further (2015) explains how "The sensory experience of this character-narrator brings her closer to her faraway native island, since the dress smells of an array of elements from the Caribbean landscape" (2015, p.54). The sensory world becomes a site of identity formation, belonging, and estrangement.

Antoinette is bound to the Caribbean through her sensory world. She smells the strong scent of flowers. She listens to the unsettling songs of the forest. These experiences evoke many memories of her time at Coulibri:

> I can remember every second of that morning, if I shut my eyes I can see the deep blue colour of the sky and the mango leaves, the pink and red hibiscus, the yellow handkerchief she wore round her head, tied in the Martinique fashion with the

> sharp points in front but now I see everything still, fixed for ever like the colours in a stained-glass window. Only the clouds move. It was wrapped in a leaf, what she had given me, and I felt it cool and smooth against my skin (1982, p. 118).

Her recall of this moment disrupts the normative flow of the story. The reader is forced to pause and focus on her descriptions, just as one might pause to admire a painting. Everything Antoinette sees is calm and unchanging, "in a stained-glass window" (p. 118). She is captivated by the still landscape. Her depiction of the morning resembles an abstract still-life painting rather than a grand landscape. However, she does not achieve self-revelation. She can only be certain of the cool and smooth feel of the leaf against her skin. Even though her senses are active, she cannot gain a deeper understanding of her troubled relationship with Rochester.

The psychologist Rachel Herz(2016) has shown that smells are uniquely powerful for sparking personal memories. In a 2016 review, she explains that scents linked to positive memories can lift our mood, lower stress, and even interrupt cravings (Herz, 2016, p. 6). What makes smell so special is that, unlike sights or sounds, it goes straight to the parts of the brain that deal with emotion and memory. This science supports what Rhys seems to have known instinctively. Being trapped in the attic, Antoinette remembers "the smell of vetiver and frangipani, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering" (Rhys, 1982, p. 166). She is uses those scent as a strategy for holding onto her identity and resisting being marginalized by Rochester and English society. Herz reveals how smell can act as a form of embodied resistance, helping someone maintain a sense of self even when words and stories fail. She argues that "odors that evoke positive autobiographical memories have the potential to increase positive emotions, decrease negative mood states, disrupt cravings, and reduce physiological indices of stress" (Herz, 2016,p.6). Evidently, smell is powerful. A particular odor can bring back a past experience and emotion in an instant, taking the person to another place and time.

Antoinette has an embodied memory. The smells enable her to escape her current state of mental confusion and imprisonment. In part three, she clings to the red dress, and the "scent that came from the dress that was very faint" (1982, p.166). She uses her sense to reconnect with her broken self. Besides, she uses them to resist Rochester's and other people' attempts to eradicate her identity. Childhood memories are loaded with unique scents. Antoinette recalls Christophine's clothing: "her clothes smelled of clean cotton, starched and ironed. I had seen her so often standing knee deep in the river at Coulibri" (1982, p.98). When Antoinette recalls her visit to Christophine, the narrator blends the past with present. Antoinette tells Christophine that "she smells the same" (98).

The scent of Christophine's clothing reminds Antoinette of the women in Coulibri doing laundry. The memory is very comforting for her.

She has strong ties to her past. Her early years at Coulibri show her love for the landscapes. She says: "The scent was very sweet and strong" (1982, p. 17).The sentence establishes smell as inseparable from Antoinette past memories. 'Strong' and 'Sweet' highlight Antoinette's maternal connection to Coulibri. Whenever she smells plants or flower, she feels connected to old memories. Pierre Nora elucidates this bond: "Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present" (1989, p.8). Antoinette recalls the smell of frangipani, which becomes associated with her mother and Coulibri before its destruction. Smell acts as a strong, involuntary trigger that allows her connect to her cultural heritage and her past. At that moment, she thinks: "This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay" (1982, p.99). Through smell, she strengthens her deep sense of belonging to Coulibri.

With Antoinette's embodied memories, Jean Rhys shows memory as a perpetually existing phenomenon. The story's powerful images of "the tree of life in the garden" and "fresh living smell" (p. 17) appear frequently. They create a never-ending present in which childhood trauma continues to affect adult consciousness. It is particularly noticeable, when Antoinette is trapped in the English attic. She encounters both an absolute disintegration of time and an eerie reminiscence of her earlier memories: "I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork... I saw the sunlight streaming through the window" (1982, p. 170). The use of "I saw" in the past tense demonstrates how memory transcends chronological time. The past and present happen at the same time, not one after the other.

Jean Rhys creates a unique Caribbean smellscape that serves as a sign of an authentic cultural identity in juxtaposition with the European senses that have been forced on people. In describing their garden at Coulibri, Antoinette remembers how it was: "large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible. It was a bell-shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see" (1982, p.17). Rhy's story defines well olfactory landscape that constitutes an authentic Caribbean identity. Each element has its own unique cultural significance: frangipani (Plumeria), which grows in the Caribbean, symbolizes native beauty and cultural authenticity; vetiver, a grass that expands deep in Caribbean soil, stands for grounding to homeland; cinnamon is for the spice trade networks that shaped Caribbean cultural hybridity; and lime trees in flower advocate the seasonal rhythms of tropical life.

So, this olfactory catalogue is very distinct, which is very different from the novel's few references to the European fragrances, which are always linked to coldness, artificiality, and subjugation. The novel's detailed descriptions of

Caribbean aromas stand in stark opposition to its sparse references to European scents, which are consistently portrayed as cold, artificial, and oppressive.

IV. From Map to Mire: Rochester's Reading of the Caribbean Landscape

The unnamed English man, presumably Rochester, has his own perspective of nature, the West Indies, and England which are heavily influenced by his changing sensory experiences. These experiences either give or deny him feelings of power, security, and pleasure. Rochester's words upon arriving at Granbois for his honeymoon: "I breathed the sweetness of the air, cloves I could smell and cinnamon, rose and orange blossom. And an intoxicating freshness as if all this had never been breathed before" (1982, p. 65) establish a colonial sensory epistemology. He allows himself to experience the smell of spices and flowers that Western rational thought often neglects. Yet, almost instantly, he shifts to viewing the landscape through a European lens. Rochester enacts what Spivak calls "epistemic violence" because he reduces a complex, memory- laden environment to a simple European botanical intoxication. The claim that the air 'had never been breathed before' is a worlding gesture, as Spivak asserts:"of what is now called "Third World…waiting to be recovered" (Spivak, 1985, p. 243) Rochester conceives Granbois as being "not only wild but menacing" (1982, p. 63). He attempts to discover and dominate it via Antoinette

Rochester, is portrayed as a rational Christian man from the cold, grey cities of Britain, in Christophine's words "that boy worse than Satan" (1982, p.100). He stands in contrast with Antoinette. She is characterized as a sensual pagan woman from the colorful, hot wilderness of the Caribbean. Rochester clarifies the difference between them: "she was a strange to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did" (1982, p. 85). The novel sets up a clear opposition: the English husband and Antoinette are incompatible. Rochester narrates the second part of the book. He describes in detail his decline into cruelty and alienation. A process that is essentially launched by the overpowering, foreign environment of the West Indies. The landscape is more than a backdrop. It bombards him with sensations that steadily destroys his rigid defenses. It forces him to face his own vulnerability and the limits of his imperial worldview.

The Caribbean landscape stimulates all the senses. There is sight, with its wide range of bright colours. There is hearing, especially the sound of water during rainfall. There is touch, as in the description of "green moss soft as velvet". And there is smell, especially the often-mentioned fragrance of flowers like frangipani. Rochester shows his dislike for the new land immediately. He says: "Everything is too much... too much green, too much purple, too much blue. The hills are too close, the mountains are too high, and the flowers are too red" (1982, p. 63). This passage captures Rochester's sensory and epistomogical break down in the Caribbean lands. His litany of excess illustrates Tullet's claim: "By

attending to smell we can get a better idea of the way race was perceived and represented as an embodied phenomenon" (2016, p. 307). For the Westerners, like Rochester, an environment that cannot be known or bounded becomes a moral threat.

At first, Rochester often seems to succumb in to Antoinette's allure as he sees that she is an essential part of Granbois, its people, its landscape, and its history. He describes her as being "wild, untouched…with an alien, disturbing secret loveliness" (p.79). However, his initial fascination soon gives way to a sense of alienation. He begins to see both the land and Antoinette as strange and ultimately meaningless. He states: "it was all very brightly coloured, very strange, but it means nothing to me. Nor did she, the girl I was to marry; She never had anything to do with me at all" (1982, p.69). Like the river flowers that bloom at night, attractive yet overwhelming, Antoinette and the Caribbean landscape unsettle him. He is left conflicted and uneasy about his own desires.

Early at his marriage, Rochester finds the sensory world of the Caribbean exotic and seductive. He enjoys nature, "unwilling to leave the river, the trees shading it, the flowers that opened at night" (p.79). Yet, as the narrative progresses, these same sensations become a source of discomfort. He comes to associate the tropical smells with danger, witchcraft, and excess. What once captivated him now repels him, and his growing disdain extends to the mountains, the river, the sunsets, and even Antoinette herself. As a result, his feelings culminate in the declaration, "Above all, I hated her" (p. 156), referring to Antoinette.

Rochester embodies colonial authority and power. When Antoinette initially refused to marry him, he told Richard Mason that it will be shameful to go "back to England in the role of rejected suitor jilted by this creole girl" (1982, p.70). This quote reveals how Rochester's sense of colonial entitlement hides behind what appears to be wounded pride. His real fear is the public humiliation within his own community. A white English man is not supposed to be rejected by "this creole girl". Her rejection overturns the colonial order, to refer to Spivak's "epistemic violence", yet her refusal is not recognized as a colonial script, but as her role to submit or be possessed. Her conversation with Rochester illustrates how obedient she is. She states, "Say die and I will die; You don't believe me? Then try, try, try, say die and watch me die" (1982, p.84). The quote emphasizes her willingness to submit to his authority and highlights the depths of her devotion to him. However, Rochester's power is shown to be fragile, dependent on the very marriage he pretends not to want.

Once married, He feels hated for the land and its people. He blames his situation on them: his marriage to a "madwoman" and his forced residence in unfamiliar, "uncivilized" territory. His feelings stem from his inability to

understand the land and Antoinette, as being part of the West Indies. Certainly, he appreciates the land's beauty, scents, and "life-evoking colors like yellow, green or red" (1990, p. 503). However, he shows no respect for the land, its culture or its customs. For instance, he steps carelessly on the frangipani wreath (1982, p. 67).

For Rochester, the land and its scent scape do not create a sense of belonging. Instead, they appear as a colonial threat. He wants to take apart and label as sick something he cannot understand or control. As a European and colonizer, he conceives the Caribbean world through a prism of fear and alienation. Mardorossian (1999) argues that Rochester relates the wilderness of the Caribbean lands with excess and peril (p, 82). One day, Rochester became disoriented in the forest, experiencing trepidation due to his unfamiliarity with the forest. He sees the trees as enemies, which exacerbate his terror. Rochester gets lost he recounts: "I found that the undergrowth and creepers caught at my legs and the trees closed over my head…I was lost and afraid among these enemy trees, so certain of danger" (1982, p.95). He conceives the trees as 'enemies' which reveal his colonial paranoia, projecting hostility onto a neutral landscape. Rochester finds both the land and his wife mysterious, "untouched and full of secrets" (1982, p. 79). His failure to assimilate into the genuine scent-scape signifies his rejection of Antoinette's identity and the island's culture as well.

Rochester's use of 'too much' repeatedly denotes a loss of control. An acute issue for the English sensibilities, which place a high importance on moderation, order, and proportion. He believes that English identity is based on the enslavement of nature and 'other' peoples, on scientific knowledge, and on rational control. His European frame of thinking cannot encompass or classify the Caribbean landscape because it is different from his own. The vivid colors imply an excess that his mind, as a white colonizer, cannot comprehend. His inability to assert his authority on both the land and his wife causes him to despise them: "I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain" (1982, p. 156). The island's distinct culture and lifestyle drove him to insist that Antoinette go back to England with him. The psychological effects of his failure compel him to project his anxiety and perplexity onto Antoinette, as Spivak has put it: "Rochester violently renames Bertha [referring to Antoinette], Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism"(1985, p. 250). By having Rochester rename Antoinette as 'Bertha', Rhys exposes how he can strip her of her name and her sense of self.

VI. "Who I am, where my country is, where I belong": The erosion of Antoinette' Sense of Self

The term "white nigger" captures the complicated racial hierarchy of colonial societies. People with European heritage could still face discrimination. *Wide*

Sargasso Sea stands as an examination of racial and cultural identity. Antoinette's identity crisis comes from her liminal position within the strict racial and class hierarchies of post-emancipation Jamaica. This sensory attachment reinforces her liminality. Both native Jamaicans and European colonists perceive her as neither entirely white nor entirely black. Homi Bhabha (1994) refers to it as the "third space" of colonial discourse (p. 36). In the scene where she was putting her muslin dress, she says: "the old muslin dress was found and it tore as I forced it on (1982, p.23). The muslin dress which is a symbol of English femininity does not fit in. It reveals Antoinette "as almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 1994,p. 131). She fails to inhabit the English identity.

At the beginning of the novel, Antoinette considers her family's unstable social status. She reflects: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (1982, p. 15). Her words show their exclusion from white solidarity networks that normally offer protection and social legitimacy. The plural pronoun "they" creates an instantaneous distance between Antoinette's family and the established white colonial community. The trouble of who she really is justifies her continuous dreams about her childhood which was free from all sorts of rejection.

As Antoinette attempts to understand the nuances of her identity and her place in the world, her quest for acceptance and belonging become elusive. She grows up in a setting that leaves her feeling alone and alienated. Vimala and Priya (2025) claims: "The epithets white cockroach and white nigger hurled at Antoinette crystallise the double alienation of the white Creole girl-child. They mark her as racially contaminated within the colonial taxonomy: not pure enough to claim metropolitan whiteness, yet too privileged to be folded into the Afro-Caribbean majority" (2025, p. 2). The chant, "white cockroach" serves as a ritual for establishing boundaries, effectively excluding her from the community while also marking her body as surplus to colonial interests.

However, Rochester's cruelty and betrayal serve as stark reminders of the insurmountable barriers between them, barriers rooted in their different cultural backgrounds. In his essay "The Place of Jean Rhys and *Wide Sargasso Sea*," Ramchand (1999) explains how the landscape affects the characters' relationship:

> Miss Rhys is concerned as much to evoke the landscape as to explore its impact upon the human consciousness. The different stages in the changing relationship between English husband and White West Indian wife are marked by the husband's changing and confused attitudes to the landscape, and the difference in temperament between Antoinette and her husband is measured out for us in his reading of the natural world which he identifies with his wife (p.183).

Antoinette realizes that she can never fully belong to Rochester's world. Her Creole heritage sets her apart and deepens her sense of alienation and loneliness. As the story progresses, Rochester, who at first finds the wilderness and beauty of the Caribbean land and his wife fascinating, can no longer admire her. Even the white dress he once liked on Antoinette now looks awful. He says: "She was wearing the white dress I had admired, but it had slipped untidily over one shoulder and seemed too large for her" (1982, p. 80). Like English clothes, English identity, does not fit Antoinette. Her attempt to assimilate into her new homeland becomes a dilemma.

When Antoinette goes to England, she feels lost. She struggles to acclimate to the cold English weather. Her memories of Coulibri force her to continuously compare the two places. Her memories of the West Indies remind her of the warmth there. Rhys erases the boundary between Antoinette's story-telling and her emotional monologue. She depicts how her heroine is striving to find her way in the 'void' between two worlds. One world is England, where she now lives despises. The other is Coulibri, which she has left behind but still loves.

Antoinette's ideal image of England vanishes as soon as she arrives. Her confused narration of the event shows her surprise and disappointment. This situation is not unique among Rhys's white West Indian creoles. Rhys discusses a similar fantasy in in her incomplete autobiography, *Smile Please (1979)*: "I thought a lot about England, not factually but what I had read about it. When I imagined it in the winter, I saw a nation blanketed in snow and ice, but there were also millions and millions of fires" (p. 51). The pain of displacement not only prevents Antoinette from acclaiming to life in a new place but also obliges her to constantly choose inappropriate to play in her daily life.

As a teenager, Antoinette has already developed the most acute awareness of what exile is. She lives alone on a desolate and dilapidated estate with a mentally ill brother and a miserable mother. She feels that she belongs to two different worlds, but without being completely of either one or the other. Born of Welsh father and a creole mother, Rhys created the character of Antoinette Cosway who is quite similar to her own, a woman of both English and Caribbean descent. Antoinette struggles to find a place of belonging to find herself. She feels a deep connection to Granbois. She loves it "[a]s if it were a person. More than a person" (1982, p. 53). However, she is forced to leave it after the fire set by the creoles. She considers it her homeland, where she can find security and peace. Antoinette declares that "[t]his is my place and everything is on our side" (42), she belongs to Coulibri and Coulibri is part of her life.

Rochester is a stranger. He always feels threatened because he does not belong to the Caribbean. He conceives his creole wife and her motherland as

being different and he believes that what is different could be dangerous. He thinks of Coulibri as an "enemy". He tells Antoinette that the place is "on your side" (1982, p.82). The novel uses place to show the dissonance between Antoinette and her husband, especially in their feelings toward the Caribbean.

For Antoinette, England is a romantic place. She knows it only from novels. Rochester confirms this: "Her mind was already made up. Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten … a picture … some note of music, and her ideas were fixed" (56). The picture she had about her husband's homeland is that it is a beautiful place with good things that is disconnected from colonialism. Hall (1990) explains that people caught in Diaspora often imagine the true homeland as unchanging, and also as something timeless and primitive (p. 231).

The imaginary and idealistic image that Antoinette has of England has nothing to do with the real nation, which is deeply shaped by colonialism. Her utopian image comes from her disconnection from the Caribbean after the emancipation Act and the change in her family's status. She wants to be connected to England because she wants to belong to her husband. She loves England and admires the English people, just as she admires her stepfather, whom she believes could save her mother from death.

Nibras Jawad Kadhim(2011) analyzes the themes of alienation and identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in an article entitled "Double exile: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" . Khadim(2011) explains that during slavery, Creoles were taught to see Europe and England as their home. However, they were also marked as different (p.591). Consequently, Antoinette's attempt to fit into English society only makes her aware of being perceived as different from Europeans. She is left caught in a dilemma about where she belongs. Antoinette felt unaccepted in Coulbri because she is called a cockroach. This rejection increases her desperation and makes it difficult for her to preserve the beautiful memories about her homeland. Yet, when she comes to know the real England, she prefers return in memory to the Caribbean land.

The new land becomes a source of danger and threat for Antoinette as it is revealed in her dreams: "I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and though I struggled and screamed I could not move" (1982, p. 10). Rochester is definitely the person who hates her and from whom she cannot escape. Kadhim (2011) claims: "[t] hough Antoinette has a need to identify with England, she can't suppress a feeling of danger associated with the place" (2011, p.696). England is dangerous because it is unknown for Antoinette and it is a place where she is perceived as the 'other'. She wonders: "what am I doing in this place and who I am?"(1982; p.162)

In both her waking reality and her unconscious dreams, Antoinette suffers from homelessness. The spatial and psychic dislocation reflects her liminal Creole identity. She is rejected by both the white colonizers and the Black Jamaican community. The ontological instability can be explained as follows: Thornfield is the ultimate negation of place. It is a prison that completely erases her name, her history, and her Caribbean identity. Granbois, which is momentarily envisioned as her honeymoon paradise, becomes the site of her psychological disintegration. Coulibri's garden, first remembered as Edenic, becomes the scene of violence and loss. Her recurring dreams make her dislocation feel real. She constantly moves through hostile forests and burning homes. She never arrives and never belongs. She is always already banished from places which at first give the appearance of safety before turning out to be places of trauma and eviction. Antoinette says: "Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest … I walk with difficulty … 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" (1982, p. 34).

The above passage explores Antoinette's imminent realization that she cannot leave England and that resistance is useless. She must experience the homeland she has long yearned for. She recognizes the differences in the trees, so when she really makes it to the forest, she finds herself in a garden, most likely in England. Since Antoinette claims not to know these trees, nature is personified once more. When she describes the details of her dream, the ominous vision becomes even more vivid: "I dreamed I was in Hell" (p. 35). When she talks about England, her descriptions are classic and exquisite. Her unconscious, however, paints a different image, indicating that England will never be a genuine home. Her unconscious, however, displays a different image, indicating that England will never be a genuine home. Nevertheless, Antoinette has not yet reached this decision since she feels ambivalent about who she is.

When she is in England, she says: "Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer" (p. 11). The old Antoinette disappears when she leaves Coulibri because English people conceive her as the other. Kadhim (2011) explains how the Caribbean people, seen as the other, will never be able to "claim the English identity as their own nor can they break from the complications of their ethnic background to create an independent self" (p. 589). Antoinette attempts to be truly English by marrying an English man, learning English traditions at the convent, and eventually relocating to England. But this "mimicry" is as Bhabha says, "almost the same but not quite" (1994, p. 131). Her memories of the Caribbean, her Creole accent, her relationship with Christophine, and her physical traits, such as her "dark" eyes, which Rochester

finds strange, all mark her as always different. The more she tries to assimilate, the more her difference stands out.

VII-Conclusion

Rhys uses sensory epistemology to connect Antoinette's sense of self to the Caribbean's sights, sounds, and smells. Antoinette's claim that the garden's smell makes her feel safe reveals a connection that Rochester cannot understand. This epistemological gap signals a rupture in the novel's colonial framework It also shows that Rhys privileges Antoinette's embodied, sensory knowledge over Rochester's abstract colonial reason. Thus, lived experience has greater value in Rhys's novel.

The vibrant and sometimes dangerous landscape serves as a place or a "milieu" for Antoinette where her memories come alive. The scents of land, the colors of flowers, and flashes of her childhood in Coulibri bring her comfort, but they also highlight her loneliness and the ache of losing her Caribbean culture. Jean Rhys believes that memory, which is shaped by sensations, can be both a source of strength and a cause of loss and trauma. Throughout the whole narrative, she is trying to get back an identity that colonial discourse has tried to silence.

The Caribbean landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea (1982)* is more than just a physical backdrop; it plays an important role in the story by affecting Antoinette's sense of belongingness. The island's wild beauty is shown to be both nurturing and threatening, which is similar reflecting Antoinette's own inner turmoil and the broader tensions of colonial history. Jean Rhys depicts landscape as deeply connected to identity, especially for those navigating multiple worlds. Antoinette's changing relationship with the West Indies, from being forced to leave it to finally identifying with it in a tragic way reveals how memory, place, and history all intertwine to shape our sense of self.

Antoinette's dual identity, neither fully Caribbean nor fully European, does echo the experiences of colonial subjects who are trying to assimilate with and resist different cultures. Rhys's story challenges the idea of a single, stable identity and instead shows it as a process of negotiation and change. The novel critiques the colonial legacy that seeks to erase or marginalize Caribbean voices through Antoinette's memories woven into her bodily experiences. Ultimately, *Wide Sargasso Sea (1982)* emphasizes the significance of reclaiming and redefining cultural identity through memory and the relationship with the landscape, providing a compelling counter-narrative to the suppressive impacts of colonial discourse.

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