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The Problem of Identity in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*



Submitted by

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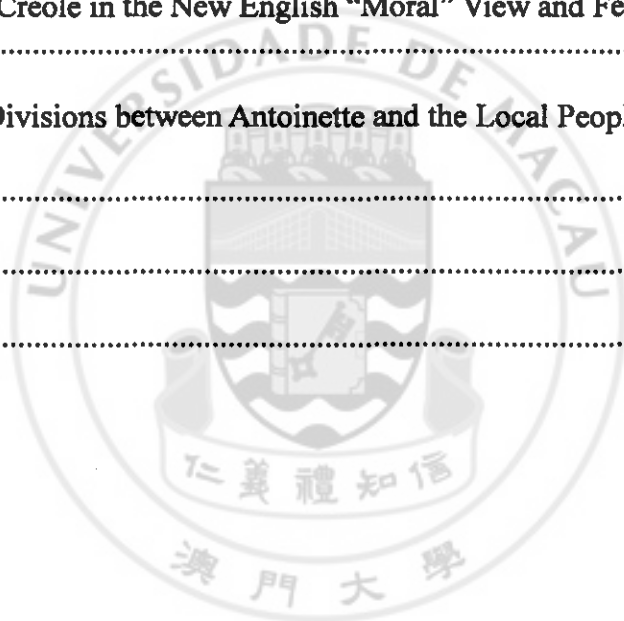
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Abstract of the Thesis

In 1966, Jean Rhys's most famous novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, was published. Regarded as the prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the novel rewrites the madwoman Bertha in the attic of Thornfield, the estate of Rochester, as Antoinette, a Jamaica-born white girl of the West Indian plantocracy after the abolition of slavery. Giving multiple voices to the discrete yet interconnected groups in the novel, Rhys draws clear lines of difference in terms of class, gender, and race discourses. With an ambiguous ancestry and declining economic status, Antoinette is strongly conscious of the contempt of the new English. As a rebellious beautiful girl besieged within the patriarchal society, she is gazed at and judged by the white man from England. Meanwhile, mediated between the white and the black, her position on the periphery according to Eurocentric belief and her rejection by black people because of her family's historical position as slaveholders reflects the white Creole's difficulties. Therefore, attending to the social and historical setting indicated, this paper suggests that the white female Creole's identity is a discursive and historical construction, and that the novel as a result shows Antoinette's capability of holding only a temporary agency to perform her freedom and renascence.