Jean Rhys was born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams. She was born in Dominica. Rhys is the daughter of a Welsh doctor and a white Creole mother. She later moved to England when she was sixteen to become educated at an all-girls school in Cambridge. Jean Rhys drifted into a series of jobs before becoming a writer at age 30: chorus girl and an artist's model. In the 1920s she traveled around as a Bohemian artist. During this period, Rhys lived in near poverty. She soon became interested modern art and literature. Her experience of feeling displacement during this time has influenced her writings.
Adaptations

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is an adaptation of Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*. This Victorian novel was published in 1847. Jean Rhys rewrote to portray the character of Bertha in *Jean Eyre* to be a strong yet vulnerable Antoinette Cosway. Jean Rhys transforms the fear of a foreign woman and makes the insane Bertha into a real woman with hopes and desires giving the mysterious character a real background and explanation of herself and giving her a voice. Bertha /Antoinette becomes a likable character with meaning. Jean Rhys gives Antoinette the power to tell her story with the first person narrative of Antoinette’s character. With *Wide Sargasso Sea* the reader is able to sympathize with the misunderstood character. For more of Antoinette’s perspective click [here](#).

Still of Rochester and Antoinette in the TV film *Wide Sargasso Sea*

For more adaptations on *Wide Sargasso Sea* click [here](#).

Resources and Related Links

- [Jane Eyre Wiki](#)
- “Revisiting the Imperial Archive: Jane Eyre, Wide Sargasso Sea, and the Decomposition of Englishness” By Trevor Hope
- [Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography](#)
- [Wide Sargasso Sea as a Modernist Text](#)
- “Before I Was Set Free”: The Creole Wife in “Jane Eyre” and “Wide Sargasso Sea” by Rose Kamel
- “Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and Jane Eyre” by Dennis Porter
- [Wide Sargasso Sea: SparkNotes](#)

Character Analyses
An analysis of each character's role in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

### Form as Content

A discussion of Rhys' stylistic and structural choices for each narrator.

### Setting & Historical Context

A look at the novel's setting & time period, as well as character perspectives on setting.

### Significant Themes

Information on the novel's significant themes: hatred, madness, safety, gender & sexual relations

### Symbols and Motifs

Information on some of the novel's symbols & motifs: alcohol, fire, laughter, magic/"obeah", mirrors & looking-glasses

### Discussion Questions

I.) *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a re-telling of a part of *Jane Eyre*. How has Rhys changed the story? What themes are the same or different? How does having read the Brontë novel affect reading the Rhys novel? Is Rhys’ depiction of Antoinette a sort of redemption?

II.) Do you think the term “Mad Woman” is a fair label? Does it show any bias in that no men are ever considered “mad”? Who’s to blame for Antoinette and her mothers’ insanity? What role does their marginalization play in this sense of insanity?

III.) What role does setting play in the novel? That is to say, how significantly do you feel the characters are shaped and influenced by the place they come from?

IV.) Do the characters of Jane and Antoinette have any similarities? If so, what? What are their major differences? What attracts Rochester to each of the women?

V.) Are there any elements of Antoinette/Bertha’s character, or the story of *Jane Eyre* that you feel Rhys fails to explore? What would you add to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, if anything?