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Enquiries

Jean Rhys, Europe and the West Indies: A Literary Study

by

Veronica Marie Gregg

Submitted for the degree of Ph. D. to
the University of Kent at Canterbury

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Abstract

The study seeks to establish the literary connections between Jean Rhys and the aesthetic and ideological traditions of Europe; and how she interpreted and used these to render a West Indian point of view. She started her career in Paris in the nineteen twenties, the time and place of the flowering of the major artistic and creative enterprises of the early twentieth century Europe. She was tutored by Ford Madox Ford, one of the figures who helped to formulate some of the aesthetic theories of Modernism. Her immersion in the aesthetics, techniques, principles and formulae did not cause her to dilute or to discard her West Indian heritage, but sharpened her perceptions of the limitations for her own point of view, contained in the ideological underpinnings of the art forms. A demonstration of aspects of her writing unravels her connections to the aesthetics of Europe, her compromises with the dominant ideology, her own ideological standpoint, and finally her own voice. In terms of West Indian writing her work reveals affinities with other writers of her colour and class; as well as important differences resulting from her experience of Europe. She represents an important voice in the literary output of the Caribbean, and her place is marked by a sensibility and a vision which is at one and the same time that of the insider and the outsider. In seeking to render her own true voice she ransacks and sifts through the literary styles and traditions of Europe; analyses the tangled connections between the metropolis and the colony - the contradictions and the denials - to clarify for herself the true essence of things. Contemporary West Indian women writers in particular acknowledge a debt to the complex spirit which did not seek to simplify or to exclude hidden and unwritten aspects of her reality.

Acknowledgements

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PART ONE

THE EUROPEAN CONNECTION

JEAN RHYS - A LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

Surviving fragments about West Indian writer Jean Rhys reveal surprisingly little about that life. The bald facts are quickly told. She was born on August 24, 1890 in the British West Indian island of Dominica and christened Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams; daughter of a Welsh doctor and his white Dominican wife, Minna Williams née Lockhart. Rhys was the fourth of five children. Two older brothers left for school in England when Rhys was young. Her older sister lived with an aunt in St. Kitts and her younger sister was her junior by seven years.

Her unfinished autobiography Smile Please recalls that shortly after the birth of her younger sister, she was then expected to look after herself, and her 'loneliness was very sudden'.[1] She observes, 'Now I was alone except for books' (49). Beginning as a slow reader she blossomed into a prolific one and soon could make sense of fairy stories sent to her by her Irish grandmother. Some of the early stories she read included The Heroes, The Adventures of Ulysses, Perseus and Andromeda. She read 'everything [she] could get hold of' including the Bible, writers such as Milton, Byron, Crabbe, Cowper, Mrs. Hemans and novels like Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island, Gulliver's Travels and Pilgrim's Progress.

At school, one her teachers instilled in her a life-long of poetry:

> She had a very beautiful voice and read aloud to us She introduced us to Shelley and soon I stopped thinking of Shakespeare and company as examination subjects. I was able to make my own discoveries, even my own enthusiasms. . . . [She] was certainly a splendid teacher. I date all my love of words, especially beautiful words, to her half-ironical lessons (Smile Please 59 - 60)

Rhys was assaulted, in her words, not only by English, but by French poetry. She learned French well as her father had insisted that she take extra lessons in the subject. At about age ten or twelve she started writing poetry.

Jean Rhys belonged to a white , upper class family. Her life included horse-back riding, musical evenings, glossy magazines from England and America and a convent school education. The society's social structure made her acutely aware of the racial divisions and the prejudices of class and skin colour, the hatreds and the contradictions. One experience which marked her indelibly was her experience of ' the impersonal, implacable hatred' directed toward her and her whiteness by a 'coloured girl' in her school. It was an incident which was to remain with her and made her aware of the deep tensions within her society. She enjoyed the Carnivals of the black people and said she envied what she perceived as their 'freedom' in not having to worry about the conventions of marriage and respectability.

Amid the troubling questions of growing up for the young Rhys were problems related to sexual experience and meanings, social conventions, marriage, who/what is a lady? She found it easier to retreat into the world of books:

> So as soon as I could I lost myself in the immense world of books and tried to blot out the real world which was so puzzling to me. Even then I had a vague persistent feeling that I'd always be lost in it, defeated.
>
> However books too were all about the same thing, I discovered, but in a different way. I could accept it in books and from books (fatally) I gradually got most of my ideas and my beliefs (62 -63)

In her seventeenth year Rhys left home to attend school in England. Her first sight of the country made her heart sink. This negative reaction endured for the rest of her life although she spent approximately sixty of her eighty-nine years in that country:

> I swear that looking out of the porthole that early morning in Southhampton, looking at the dirty grey water, I knew for one instant all that would happen to me. . . . I never once thought this is beautiful, this is grand, this is what I hoped for, longed for. (168 - 69)

Her initial experience of early twentieth century England included strange customs relating to requesting baths, a glaring landlady, tours of historical sites and monuments which made her sleepy. She recalls that she 'simply hated' the zoo in which the animals were imprisoned. Her longing was for warmth and colour which she never found. This was for the young West Indian woman a strange and unsettling time and place, and it was in this settting that she first read Jane Eyre. 'I came to England between sixteen and seventeen, a very impressionable age and Jane Eyre was one of the books I read then' (Letters 296).

Rhys left school to attend the Academy of Dramatic Arts and later suspended her studies to become a chorine as a result of her father's unexpected death. Recalling that period of her life,

she observes that a curious reaction overcame her, ". . . in England, my love and longing for books completely left me. I never felt the least desire to read anything, not even a newspaper, and I think this indifference last for a long time. Years " (Smile Please 60) However she also recalls that after the death of her father, her aunt encouraged her to write for publication:

> There was a little calm slow-moving river near my aunt's house, you could watch it from the garden. Walking up and down there she told me that she could understand my grief. My father's death would make a great difference. It wasn't possible now to go back to the theatrical school, it was quite out of the question. . . . My aunt sighed!"What a lovely day. Straight from the lap of the gods." She talked like that. "Gathering apples," she'd say or "Shall we gather some primroses?" It was all new to me but I liked it and stored it up so I was saying over and over again in my head "What a lovely day. Straight from the lap of the gods." When she went on 'I think, I have always thought that you ought to write.' 'Write? Write what?' 'Poetry.?' 'Oh no something you can try to sell.' 'I am too miserable.' 'The nightingale sings sweetly when its breast is pierced by a thorn,' said my aunt smugly. . . . I presented her with a short story. . . . 'This sort of thing never happened when I was in the West Indies,' she said. 'But you weren't there very long, were you?'. . . 'I'll send it to that magazine, you know the one that tells you your faults, if they don't like it.' The story bounced back quickly together with a long list of short-comings. Number seven - No plot, number eleven, plot very unlikely -(both were marked with a cross). . . 'I'm going to keep this,' said my aunt, 'Out of the ashes of your failure on the stage will arise the phoenix of a good novel (How I became a novelist'1.28,p.9)

Rhys's next attempt at writing which was to form the basis for Voyage in the dark happened suddenly and mysteriously, as if she were possessed. She recalls buying some exercise books and pens for no other apparent reason except that she liked the look of them and thought they would cover a very bare and ugly table:

> It was after supper that night - as usual a glass of milk and some bread and cheese - that it happened. My fingers tingled and the palms of my hand, I pulled up a chair to the table and opened an exercise book and wrote This is my Diary. But it wasn't a diary. I remembered everything that had happened to me in the last year and a half. I remembered what he'd said, what I'd felt. I wrote until late into the night, 'till I was so tired that I couldn't go on, and I fell into bed and slept. Next morning I remembered at once, and my only thought was to go on with the writing. (Smile Please 129)

Her writing recorded the details of her first love affair, the man's treatment of her and how she reacted to it. She clung to the exercise books throughout the rest of her stay in England and when she left the country in 1919 they were among her possessions.

Rhys spent almost twelve years in Europe, living in the Netherlands, Austria, Hungary, Belgium and France with her husband, writer and journalist, Willem Johan Marie (called Jean) Lenglet. He wrote and sometimes travelled under the name of Edouard de Nève. In 1920, Jean Rhys gave birth to a son, who died three weeks later. Her husband left for Vienna shortly after and Rhys took a job to 'talk English' to a little boy. This job was not a success and after a while she joined her husband in Vienna and they spent months in Central Europe. In 1922 their daughter Maryvonne was born in Ukkel near Brussels in Belgium. Because of financial and other difficulties her parents were forced to leave in the care of others. In 1923, the couple returned to Paris where Lenglet was arrested. He was imprisoned and later extradited to Holland.

It was also in 1923 that Rhys translated some of her husband's articles and sought a publisher for them. The translations were not accepted but she showed on request something of her own

creation - the writing in the exercise books. This was recast into a novel called Triple Sec which Rhys jettisoned. She kept her notebooks however. At this point she was introduced to Ford Madox Ford who tutored her and in December 1924, her first short story "Vienne" was published in the Transatlantic Review.[2]

The Jean Rhys canon comprises five novels, three collections of short stories and a collection of essays: The Left Bank and other Stories (1927); Quartet (1928); first published as Postures; After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie (1931); Voyage in the dark (1934); Good Morning Midnight (1939); Wide Sargasso Sea (1966); Tigers are Better-Looking (1968); My Day (1975); Sleep it off lady (1976); two short stories 'I Spy a Stranger' and 'Temps Perdi' published in Art and Literature 1966 and 1967; Smile Please (1979).[3]

The twenty one year gap in the publication of her fiction began with the outbreak of World War II. As the author herself observed of Good Morning Midnight published in 1939, 'the war killed it'. Despite often contradictory judgements about her subject matter, Rhys's work received significant critical acclaim during the interbellum years. Novelist and critic and founder of the school of Vorticism, Wyndham Lewis describes her as ' a writer who is well equipped' (637). Ford Madox Ford says her work is 'very good. . . so vivid, so true (Tigers 139). Rebecca West describes her as 'one of the finest writers under middle age' (qtd, in Mellown, Bibliography 23). It seems fair to assume, then, that had Good Morning Midnight been produced at a time less inhospitable to artistic output, it would have enhanced her career and reputation.

Despite the limited number of hard facts available about the writer's life, or perhaps because of it, critical perspectives on the Jean Rhys oeuvre are based extensively on biographical commentary which uses her fictional creations as self-portraits, designating as 'intuitive', 'original', 'peculiarly her own' the form and style of her art[4]. One consistent feature of much of the criticism is the obliteration of the dividing line between the author and the critics' interpretation of her fictional characters. Her work is seen as minor, narrow and personal, even sordid, with little connection to anything outside of itself and the writer's reality.[5] A characteristic viewpoint is expressed by Elgin Mellown:

> There is no need to make extravagant claims for the novelist: her limited output and the circumstances of her publication kept her from being an influence upon other writers in her lifetime, and her technique, so carefully crafted to express the sensibilities of women of her time, may not be of great value to writers of a later generation. But the unconquerable human spirit which informs all of her work cannot date, and one knows that readers and writers of the future, whether male or female will continue to appreciate her expression of the feelings and longings of the isolated individual. Jean Rhys may be a minor figure in relation to the literary giants of the twentieth century, but within her own area she is an artist without peer (Bibliography xxv)

The view of an artist's work as a product to be measured in terms of itself is one which is challenged by one of the undisputed "literary giants of the twentieth century", T. S. Eliot:

> No poet, no artist of any art has his (sic) complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relations to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him for contrast and comparison among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic not merely

> historical criticism. . . . [W]hat happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all works of art which preceded it (Selected Essays 15)

Jean Rhys is at one with Eliot on this point. She believes that the role of the writer is ecumenical:

> You should know it all. You should know all the big writers the big, big writers. . . . All of writing is a huge lake. There are great rivers that feed the lake, like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. And there are trickles like Jean Rhys. All that matters is feeding the lake. I don't matter. The lake matters. You must keep feeding the lake. It is very important. Nothing else is important. . . But you should be taking from the lake before you can think of feeding it. You must dig your bucket in very deep. . . What matters is the lake and man's unconquerable mind (Plante, 'Jean Rhys' 247)

Rhys's comments were made in 1979, the year of her death, more than fifty years after she started writing. Her observations point to the means and the modus of her craft. She is asserting that no writer exists or can exist in isolation, that the work of the individual writer is part of a whole - part of all that has ever been written. Implicit in her observations is the view that a literary tradition, essential to the craft of writing, cannot be inherited in a passive or instinctive sense. It must be obtained by hard, conscious work, 'dig your bucket in very deep'

The author's persistent preoccupation with this aspect of her work is also revealed in her letters:

> I don't believe in the individual Writer so much as in Writing. It uses and throws you away when you are not useful any longer. But it does not do this until you are useless and quite useless too. Meanwhile there is nothing to do but plod along line by line (Letters 103)

However, when faced with criticism about the datedness of her work, the author considers such an opinion invalid, as she insists that a work of art must be grounded in the material and the particular world:

> Books and plays are written some time, some place, by some person affected by that time, that place. . . other books. . . . It must be so, and how can it be otherwise except his book is a copy? (Letters 101)

The time and the place in which Rhys began her writing career was Paris of the 1920s. 'Paris is surely, for Modernism, the outright dominant centre. . . . [I]n the 1920s [it] tended to become the supra-city of Modernism [Bradbury 102].

Literary historians and critics argue and disagree over causes, dates and definitions of Modernism but none deny the cultural and intellectual ferment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in England, Europe and America. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane offer an eclectic but useful frame of reference within which to begin an enquiry into the intellectual climate which produced some of the most influential works of modern art,and to which Rhys was exposed:

> It is hard to convert [modernism] into a universal style or tradition, despite the fact that its environment is not simply the work of individuals but of broader movements and tendencies. It is indeed a part of our modern art, but not all of it: a certain loose but distinguishable group of assumptions founded on a broadly symbolist aesthetic, an avant garde view of the artist, and a notion of a relation of crisis between art and history. . . . [T]here is an historical 'peak' where impulses for many varied sources begin to coalesce, and come through in a particular core of moments, of which [there were] many varied and diverse versions of the primary impulse (437)

Other critics point to more precise aesthetic formulations to define the name and nature of modernism.[6] Whether according to broad framework or precise definitions literary critics concur that modernist sensibility owes something to Flaubert, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Anatole France, Henry James, Conrad, NIetzsche, among others. The roll call of names with connections to this period is long and impressive: Yeats, Pound, Proust, Valéry, Debussy, Picasso, Eliot, Stein, Woolf, Richardson and Joyce are only some.

Jean Rhys's connection to modernism is an important though not a direct one. Of Paris in the nineteen twenties and thirties, she observes: 'It was a very exciting time in Paris, then, I can't quite describe. . . the atmosphere. . except it was very exciting' (Rhys interview with Burton, TRansatlantic Review 36: 105,). When asked specifically about her work and its influences she points again to Paris: 'The whole of Paris helped and I learned to read French pretty well. All that no doubt had an influence on me.' Rhys insists, however, that 'Ford. . . helped . . . more than anybody else.' (Rhys interview with Vreeland, "The Art of Fiction", 226). I wish to trace the literary connections between the two writers and to suggest that these provide a framework for examining Rhys's fiction in terms of modernism and a literary tradition

(2)

JEAN RHYS, FORD MADOX FORD AND MODERNISM

Jean Rhys recounts her early contacts with Ford in the following manner:

> So began several months of writing short stories and having them torn to pieces or praised for reasons I did not understand. 'Don't be so glib. Don't do this Do that. Or Don't take the slightest notice of what I say or what anybody says if you are certain in yourself . . . . Translate one of my books into French. It's very good practice.' 'I don't know French well enough to translate your books,' I said. 'Then try la Maison de Claudine into English. Bring me all you can do of the first chapter tomorrow' (Leaving School: How I became a novelist 5)

Rhys also recalls that apart from helping her with the crafting of her work and publishing the early efforts, Ford also helped her with money.

I shall first explore the context to which Ford belonged, his own connection to modernism and the effects of these on Rhys's development as a writer and on her writing itself. The intellectual milieu in which Rhys began her writing career and from whose literary styles she selected her own is part of the wider social, historical and cultural background of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain and Europe. The decades preceding the first world war was a period of economic growth and massive industrialization By the 1900s the Empire had reached thirteen million square miles and three hundred and seventy million people. Notions of white

supremacy and imperial hegemony went hand-in-hand. Imperialism was not merely a system of power politics and economic exploitation. It was an ideology, a faith practised by intellectuals, writers, businessmen, soldiers, missionaries and politicians alike. Within the European societies the class divisions were sharp and there was undisguised inequality between rich and poor. However, in England, political movements dedicated to the achievement of social reforms were growing. The Fabian Society sought the advancement of socialist ideas without revolution and within the democratic parliamentary system. The Women's Social and Political Union was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903. The voice of social protest was heard even in the theatre in Bernard Shaw's Major Barbara.

In the sphere of culture, art and literature the innovations and experiments of early twentieth century writers were seen by the practitioners themselves as a repudiation of the old nineteenth century values. Yet it is possible to pinpoint certain essential characteristics, especially of the last two decades of the previous century, which anticipate the forms of the modernist writers. A seminal work which exemplifies the current which passed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century is Arthur Symons The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899). Symons discussed the influences of the French poets like Rimbaud, Verlaine, Laforgue and Mallarmé on English writing. The book. dedicated to Yeats, had a decisive influence on later writers such as Eliot:

> I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt. But for having read his book I should not, in the year 1908, have

> heard of Laforgue and Rimbaud; I should not probably have begun to read Verlaine,and but for reading Verlaine I should not have read Corbière. So the Symons book is one . . . which affected the course of my life (Bergonzi 26)

Yeats and Symons belonged to a group of poets who called themselves the Rhymers Club. Their aim was the pursuit of pure song, purged of Victorian rhetoric of moralizing. For Yeats:

> The revolt against Victorianism meant to the young poets a revolt against irrelevant description of nature. . scientific and moral discursiveness. . . . Poets said to one another. . . . "We must purify poetry of all that is not poetry" and by poetry they meant poetry as it had been written by Catullus, a great name at that time, by the Jacobean writers, by Verlaine, by Baudelaire. Poetry was a tradition like religion and liable to corruption and it seemed that they could best restore it by writing lyrics technically perfect, their emotion pitched high, and. . . . instead of moral earnestness life lived as a 'pure gem-like flame' (qtd. Bergonzi 26)

It was perhaps Baudelaire more than most whose poems about Paris had shown the poetic possibilities of the huge modern metropolis. reflected in such works as Eliot's Wasteland.

In the world of the novel, realist writers like Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad and Henry James were producing major works. The literary precursors, especially of the last two , were not only English writers, but Zola, Turgenev and Tolstoy. The figure of Henry James provides a useful connecting link between the values of the nineteenth century writers and the 'moderns'. He exemplifies important aspects of the literary scene of the previous century while anticipating the concern with form which dominated early twentieth century writing. His fictional themes are connected to the traditional values, while his questioning of form is proto-modernist.

The intellectual and literary life, however, was not a monolithic, unvary .ing system. There was some dissatisfaction about the philosophical spirit of the times. In 1913 Randolph Bourne observes:

> Significant discussion almost did not exist. A running fire of ideational badinage, 'good talk', took its place. Every idea tended to go up in smoke. You found your tone either monstrously prophetic as of a young Jeremiah stting at the board, or else unpleasantly cynical. . . . The national mind seemed to have made a sort of permanent derangement of intellect from emotion (qtd. Hartmann 4)

Herman Keyserlling observes that "it really is a fact that a profound clearly formulated thought does not fit into the normal framework of English life". Basil de Selincourt claims that; "In framing a policy of educaction, above all, we must go warily, for a chief part of the educational process is the replacement of unconscious by conscious action of the mind, and, broadly speaking [the] great English virtue is a virtue of unconsciousness" (Qtd Hartmann 4). Referring to the status of plastic arts in the early part of the century, Wyndham Lewis observes that "England is just as unkind and inimical to Art as the Arctic Zone to life" (qtd Ford,Boris 217).

Ford Madox Ford agreed that there had been cause for despair and disillusion but he noted that a change was taking place. For him there was a new and important and new shift in the English arts:

> It was truly like an opening world. . . . For if you have worried your poor dear brain for at least a quarter of a century over the hopelessness of finding in Anglo - Saxondom, any traces of the operation of conscious art - it is amazing to find these young creatures not only evolving theories of writing and plastic arts but receiving in addition an immense amount of public support (Modernism 83)

The titles and dates of some of the works produced by Ford's "young creatures" prove him to be correct: Sons and Lovers (1913); Women in Love (1922); Portrait of the artist as a young man (1916); Ulysses (1922); Prufrock (1917); The Wasteland (1922); The Wild Swans at Coole (1919); The Good Soldier (1915); Tarr (1918); Mrs. Dalloway (1925); To the Lighthouse (1927); Façade (1922).

The flowering of artistic talent which produced these works took place in a climate which in December 1910 saw the opening in London of the Post Impressionist Exhibition, which introduced Van Gogh, Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso to the British public. Diaghilev's Russian Ballet, which combined modern music with modern painting visited London in 1911. Chekhov 's stories were translated in English in 1909 and Dostoevsky's novels in 1912. Volumes of Fraser's Golden Bough appeared between 1911 and 1915, Freud lectured with Jung on psycho-analysis in America in 1909. The Interpretation of Dreams was first published in England in 1913. It was this environment of ideas which nurtured the artists who produced these major works of fiction.

Ford played a crucial role in disseminating the ideas innovations and experiments of the younger writers through the English Review which he founded in 1908. As editor of this influential review he brought together the works of established writers such

as James, Conrad Wells, Forster,with those of Pound, Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis. During Ford's editorship, the periodical also published the works of Galsworthy, W. H. Hudson, Anatole France, Yeats, Hardy and Norman Douglas. The English Review was one of many magazines and small presses which were started in the early decades of the century. These included Rhythm, The Poetry Review, later called Poetry and Drama, Criterion, Blast and New Freewoman, I shall examine briefly the history of the last journal in the following section of the study.

The group of writers of which Ford was a part was self-consciously erudite, an experimental elite with particular modes of publication at their disposal (Eagleton, Marxism 15). Aesthetic debates flourished and a remarkable system of cross-fertilization among the major artists can be easily traced. In the early years of the century Ford collaborated with Conrad and James, writers who were important forerunners to the 'modern' writers.Ezra Pound observes that 'I went to England in 1908 to "learn" from Yeats - and stayed to learn from Yeats and Ford'. He goes on to pinpoint what he learned from Ford:

> For the ten years before I got to England there would seem to have been no one but Ford who held that French clarity and simplicity in the writing of English verse and prose were of immense importance as in contrast to the use of a stilted traditional dialect, a language of verse unused in the actual talk of the people , even of the best of people for the expression of reality and emotion. . . . (Blamires 96)

Pound and Eliot collaborated and the former helped in the production of the draft manuscripts of The Wasteland, which Eliot dedicated

to Pound describing him as 'il miglior fabbro', the better craftsman. Eliot says of Pound, Joyce and Lewis that they wrote 'living English'. Lewis said of Joyce, Pound and himself that they were the men of 1914. Ford, in reviewing the work of Virginia Woolf observed that "before 4th August 1914 we certainly had not even the rudiments of an agreeed critical language" (Critical Heritage 72). Pound was editor of the Little Review. With the outbreak of war Ford left to take part, but Pound continued to exert tremendous influence over the Little Review and The Egoist. Stella Bowen, later to become Ford's companion recalls that she met Pound, Eliot, May Sinclair, Violet Hunt, Yeats during the war as they participated in weekly poetry workshops. Almost all of the outstanding writers of the period were joined at least by a common commitment to their art and to the creation of aesthetic theories and ideas. They were from different backgrounds and often expressed disagreement over the work of their contemporaries. Pound reported that he scorned the works of Virginia Woolf. Wyndham Lewis and D. H. Lawrence held strongly antagonistic views. Overriding the differences, however, were their common pursuit of artistic innovation and perfection of form.

The importance of these writers in the development of English fiction is best represented in the seminal and oft-quoted essay by Virginia Woolf which seeks to demonstrate a new direction in art and a repudiation of the traditional form of writing. Attacking the realism of literary precursors like Wells, Bennett,

she sees in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and more effectively in the then unfinished Ulysses an exemplar of the new writing:

> Look within and life, it seems is very far from being 'like this' [the realism of Bennett et al]. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday,the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his feeling and upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style. . . . Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi- transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end Is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, unknown and uncircumscribed spirit whatever aberrat or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? . . . . We are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe (Collected Essays 106)

The intellectual provenance of Woolf's observations has been cited as William James's Principles of Psychology (1901):

> [C]onsciousness,then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. . . . It is nothing joined it flows. A 'river' or 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life (Ford 52)

Henri Bergson's theories of memory and association also bear affinities to Woolf's perceptions. She emphasizes the difference between Joyce and the modernists and their literary predecessors:

> They attempt to come closer to life and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist. Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly called small (107)

Woolf's insights into Joyce's work and that of his contemporaries still provide a measuring rod for the achievements of that particular group of writers. As Walter Allen observes, for novelists who came to consciousness of their craft in the twenties and thirties, Joyce added to the international store of literary technique, and formed an inescapable source of influence. Woolf's concern to break with realism and to record the 'atoms as they fall' anticipates what she herself set out to do in her fiction, and is realized most effectively in the stream of consciousness technique. The beginning of Joyce's Portrait is an early indication of the use of the technique by this group of writers, although literary historians point to something resembling this technique in Tristram Shandy (1760 -67) and more obviously in Les lauriers sont coupés (1887) Henry James who was strongly influenced by nineteenth century French novelists and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy also used long passages of introspective writing which suggest the stream of consciousness technique. At the time that Joyce was working on his novels, Dorothy Richardson had begun her thirteen volume Pilgrimage (1915 - 38) and Marcel Proust his À la recherche du temps perdu (1913). Central to the manipulation of the stream of consciousness

is a concern with time - in particular the way time expands or contracts under the pressure of sense impressions, even as these are bound to the passage of time. Another concern of the novelists who employ this technique is the relationship between art and life - the way in which experience - thoughts, actions, feelings - are transmuted and rendered in the work of art to capture the flux of existence. The use of shifting points of view, complex leitmotifs, verbal associations,literary allusions distinguish the fiction and the poetry of the period.

Another major concern is the self-conscious use of vernacular colloquialisms and clichéd expressions. In the use of everyday language words are revivified through an implied equivocation. One of the most celebrated examples is the opening sequence of Eliot's Prufrock:

> Let us go then, you and I
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table;
> Let us go through half-deserted streets,
> The muttering retreats
> Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
> And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells
> Streets that follow like a tedious argument
> Of insidious intent
> To lead you to an overwhelming question. . .
> Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
> Let us go and make our visit.
>
> In the room the women come and go
> Talking of Michelangelo

The technique of the poem manages both the rhythm of conversation and of formalised versification. Eliot himself observes that the flexible technique springs from the Jacobean verse and the free verse form of French Symbolist Jules Laforgue. Using fluid metre, Eliot

adapts an urban setting; a sense of tedium and nostalgia is intermingled with sense impressions and ironic asides. Within the poem the contrast between colloquialisms and stylization is also reflected in a contrast between fixity and flux. Prufrock's surroundings consist in hard, gritty objects; his thoughts are fluctuating and evasive.

Practitioners like Eliot, Pound and Joyce, in different ways, also employ a medley of pastiche, quotations, dramatisations and complex literary allusions in their work. They assemble perceptions and characters from widely different periods of history: Classical, Renaissance, Oriental, and European, with pastiche becoming one of their major technical strategies. Not only were they joined, as I have suggested, by their commitment to art and aesthetics, but at an ideological level their allegiance was to the cultural tradition of the West. Literary works, argues Terry Eagleton, are not mysteriously inspired, or explicable simply in terms of their author's psychology. They are forms of perception which have a relation to the dominant way of seeing the world. They are forms of perception which have a relation to the dominant way of seeing the world, which is the social mentality or ideology of the age (Marxism 16). Eliot's important essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which was first published in The Egoist between September and December 1919, has come to be regarded as a manifesto of the modernist writers and reveals their immersion in the cultural values

of Europe, or what Eliot termed 'the European Mind'. The main influences for Eliot's thinking were Ezra Pound and through him Rémy de Gourmont and Henry James, Irving Babbit who introduced Eliot to the philosophy of Humanism and whose traditional values were reinforced by T. E. Hulme and Charles Marras. At about the same time that Eliot's essays and writings were being published by The Egoist, the title was changed from The New Freewoman, with Pound declaring that the old title led to confusion with "organs devoted solely to the advocacy of an unimportant reform of an obsolete political institution" 'Showalter 235 -36). The political institution which Pound and other male modernists declared obsolete was the suffrage movement. The turning away from contemporary social and political concerns was in itself a radical political act perpetrated by many modernists. The complex indirect relations between their work and the ideological worlds they inhabit emerge not only in themes, but in style, image and form. A close examination of the relation between their formal pre-occupations and their ideological beliefs is outside the scope of this study. However, some contemporary critics have defined the modernist movement as "a phallocentric, imperialist affair" (Guardian Dec 10, 1986: 24) Some of the protagonists of the movement have been labelled as 'modern reactionaries':

> Yeat's [was] the cult of aristocracy and hard, heroic men; Pound's conviction [was that] usury was poisoning society and that it was best combatted by the dynamism of Mussolini; Lewis's belief [suggested] that great art could only flourish in a fixed, hierarchical order with no democratic untidiness about it; Eliot's clerical-agrarian traditionalism; and Lawrence's predilection for dark gods. . . natural leadership and the occasional necessity of homicide [were major aspects of ideology] (Bergonzi 29)

The practitioners themselves, like Ford and Lewis, point to the significance of the First World War giving its precise date as the time when aesthetic and critical language came into being. (See page 17). The war dramatised the ideological crisis in the history of imperialist capitalism. The social and political upheaval acted as a catalyst for the crisis of values within the society and in particular within the class to which these writers belonged, if only by virtue of their profession. In seeking to focus on writing, removing it as far as possible from the corrupting influence of societal values, while seeking technical perfection, they were turning away from the language of middle-class liberal rationalism which had become exhausted. The forms which these practitioners creted, changed or built on reflected a change of ideological interests. Eagleton argues that it was Eliot and his contemporaries who recuperated English literature, assaulting the whole ideology of middle-class liberalism, the offical ruling ideology of industrial capitalist society. 'Nobody,' observes Eagleton, 'was much likely to be convinced by talk of "progress" anymore not least when milliions of corpses lay on the battlefields of Europe (Literary Theory 167). The avant garde techniques employed by the writers represented a turning away from the political system which had proved weak and embracing another based on erudition which was more elitist, conservative and exclusionary. The concentration on technique and critical language and the exclusion of politics and history was not a questioning of the moral underpinning of imperialism and capitalism. It was instead a belief in the superiority

of Western cultural values which had been been betrayed by the weaknesses of liberalism.

Ford who collaborated, edited, reviewed and assisted in the production of much of the critical and artistic works of the period clearly expresses his own political and ideological dictum in his essay A Mirror in France:

> And what stands out in our world of Thought and the Arts is this: It is only England and France that matter to our European civilization of today - England for all the finenesses that she has produced and ignored, France for all the glories that would have been forever her had she not owned Provence. . . . Let us, for heaven's sake, be insular and - as long as we include France - bold, bad, remorselessly exclusive (Critical Heritage 173)

Although his concern with the world of thought and art to the exclusion of politics, economics and history bears affinities with the modernists, Ford is not strictly speaking a modernist. Born in 1873, he had a pre-Raphaelite boyhood. In the home of his grandfather, Ford Madox Brown, he interacted with many artists and intellectuals. His father, German by birth, was an admirer of Schopenhauer, an ardent Wagnerian, and an influential music critic with The Times. Ford himself spans three literary generations: He belongs to the Edwardian world of Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett. He collaborated with Henry James and produced three novels with Joseph Conrad. The second group to which he belongs, as I tried to demonstrate, is the modernist writers like Pound, Woolf, Lewis and Eliot. He had certain affinities with this group as from the beginning of his career as an art critic he sought an emphasis on the technical aspects of the work. He was always interested

in how the literary or artistic artefact was created. The third group to which he belonged was the American writers of the 1930s and this period extends outside of the relevant time span for a study of his connections with Jean Rhys's art.

After the first world war, Ford moved to Paris where he founded The Transatlantic Review (1924). His hope, he said, was to discover 'new and beautiful talents'. During the life of the magazine, Paul Valéry, Nathan Asch, E. E. Cummings, Hemingway, Joyce, Stein, Pound and Rhys were among the contributors. While literary historians and critics reveal differing and opposed viewpoints on Ford as writer and critic, all agree that he was an invaluable craftsman, technician and editor, ruthlessly demanding in the last capacity. He cared deeply about art and artists and the assistance he gave to young writers was always concrete. The assessment by Stella Bowen, his companion, seems to be one which most of his critics would endorse:

> He gave [other artists] much of himself; patient perusal and brillant criticism of their efforts, and even when their work was mediocre, he always managed to put heart into them and make them proud of their calling and determined to screw the last ounce of their talents. He had no professional secrets and would take any young writer behind the scenes and explain exactly how he got his effects (Drawn From Life 80)

When Jean Rhys was introduced to Ford in 1923 -24 she was introduced to an impressive range of literary styles, concerns and experience which had been sifted through the mind of not only Ford himself but of most of the writers who produced some of the most outstanding works of art of the twentieth century.

At the time of their meeting, Ford himself was working on his tetralogy Parade's End. It is useful to mention some of Ford's cardinal rules. (A demonstration of the way Rhys uses these will be undertaken in Parts II and III of the study). The term Literary Impressionism is used to describe the work of novelists like Ford and Conrad and derives from the Impressionism of French painters like Monet, Manet, Cézanne and Van Gogh. The literary concern is with careful selection of telling detail and a concentration on the seemingly casual aspects of human relationship. Literary Impressionism exists, says Ford, to render the queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass - through glass so bright that while you perceive in it a landscape or a backyard, you are aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you. For the whole of life is really like that, we are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite another. The Impressionist writer should strive to give an impression to attain the sort of odd vibration that scenes in real life really have. The element of surprise is important. It is essential to break up action and conversation to achieve something more coloured,animated, life-like and interesting. Through this method the writer conveys a profoundly significant lesson as to the self-engrossment of humanity. The chief masters of the literary form which Ford was striving for are Flaubert and Maupassant. The English writer insists that the artist must work toward the discipline which makes him or her avoid temptation in the selection of Words. One must strive for, Ford insists, the discipline

that lets one be remorselessly economical in the words that are employed.

Ford admired the works of Hemingway and said of his work:

> The aim - the achievement of the great prose writer is to use the words so that they shall seem new and alive because of their juxtpaosition with other words. To get that effect your mind has to choose each word and your ear has to test it until by long disciplining of mind and ear you can no longer go wrong (MACShane 133 -34)

Rhys studied the methods and techniques of craft and deliberately and carefully selected those which she found most valuable.

As an apprentice she retained strict control over Ford's tutelage, and appropriated from him what she wanted for herself and her work. Her single-mindedness and clear-sighted determination were remarked upon by Ford:

> I tried - for I am forever meddling with the young!- very hard to induce the author of <u>The Left Bank</u> to introduce some sort of topography. . . . in the cunning way it would have been done by Flaubert or Maupassant or by Mr. Conrad. . . . But would she do it? No! With cold deliberation, once her attention was called to the matter, she eliminated even such two or three descriptive matters as had crept into her work (<u>Tigers</u> 139)

The deliberate elimination of matters of detail and technique from her own work is based on Rhys's own awareness of her difference from writers like Ford himself and his own literary models and precursors. Rhys's concern is separate, as she is, from the dominant values which underpin the art and ideology of metropolitan society. She was in the metropolitan centres and understood the terms and theories which gave impulse to the artistic movements and concerns but she was not of that world. In the deepest existential

sense she was out of synchrony with the ideology which underpinned the language and the literature of the metropolis. As a woman, and as a West Indian, she existed at the moral, aesthetic and hence ideological juncture of that world and the so-called periphery. In imperial Europe, the periphery, her home existed as an absence, a negation. Rhys was aware of this from the very beginning. When she was told that she would be introduced to Ford who thought that some of the expatriate writers in Paris were very important, Rhys asked herself: "Am I an expatriate? Expatriate from where?" V. S. Naipaul also speaks of the problems which Rhys would have have encountered at the start of her career in Europe of the 1920s:

> By the 1920s when Jean Rhys began to write, the Caribbean and the Spanish Main belonged to antique romance: and the West Indian needed to explain himself.
>
> Jean Rhys didn't explain herself. She might have been a riddle to others, but she never sought to make her experience more accessible by making it what it was not. It would have been easy for someone of her gifts to have become a novelist of manners; but she never pretended she had a society to write about. Even in her early stories of Left Bank life in Paris she avoided geographical explicitness. She never 'set' her scene, English, European or West Indian: she had, as it were, no home audience to play to, she was outside that tradition of imperial expatriate writing in which the metropolitan outsider is thrown into relief against an alien background. She was an expatriate but her journey had been the other way round, from a background of nothing to an organised world (27)

As I hope to show, Rhys recognises that her West Indian background is nothing to the European mind, it is not nothing for her.

The traditions and forms of the literary schools in Europe were not created to express what she had to say. In some important respects, they were meant to conceal, distort or render

invisible her reality as colonial and woman. In her hands the tools of the trade would be reshaped to carve out a work, necessarily bound by the reach of the European forms and traditions, but removed from the ideological perceptions which shaped the fiction. She ransacks and sifts through these resources of words, ideas, literary traditions, theories, seeking to draw substance from them, while re-shaping and re-using them to create her own voice. In so doing she chooses to reject aspects of the received tradition, to impugn the moral centre of the ideology and to appropriate some of the technical and stylistic forms.

The use she makes of Ford's impressive literary inventory and her connections to and differences from the techniques and perspectives revealed by Ford and modernist writers can be best demonstrated through an analysis of Quartet , her first major work and Ford's outstanding modernist novel The Good Soldier. Ford said that he had made exhaustive studies about how words should be handled and novels constructed, and in this his major work he had 'put all that [he knew] about writing' (The Good Soldier v). In Quartet Rhys uses the technical innovations and artistic concerns learned from Ford, and by implication, other modernist writers, to implicate and condemn the imperatives of the world he represents.

Judith Kegan Gardiner argues that Quartet was deliberately shaped by Rhys as a countertext to Ford's novel:

> Jean Rhys's great tribute to her literary mentor. . . is the novel Quartet . . . The book blazons both its esthetic tutelage and its moral independence. . . and subtly exposes him as a novelist, rewriting his masterpiece. . . as though from the inside out, or, more accurately, from the underside up. . . [Quartet] demonstrates Rhys' (sic) seriousness about the craft of writing and about her place in literary history. (Rhys. . . and Ford 67)

I am indebted in the following analysis to the arguments put forward by Gardiner. The four main characters of Quartet recall those of The Good Soldier. In both books a foreigner is cuckolded by his wife who has an affair with an English 'gentleman'. Married to a cold but possessive woman,the gentleman habitually seeks emotional and sexual comfort elsewhere. John Dowell, the narrator of The Good Soldier describes his gentleman friend as a tall attractive blond with blue eyes, although later he observes that Ashburnham is "a raging stallion forever neighing after his neighbour's womankind" In Quartet Marya who is the centre of consciousness of the novel sees Heidler as a "tall, fair man of perhaps forty-five". Even as she senses that he can be a brute sometimes especially to his wife Lois, she feels his hand lying heavily on her knee, while "he looked kind, peaceful and exceedingly healthy" (Quartet 12 -13). Ashburnham's wife in Ford's novel looks "the country family. . . even just the saving touch of insolence". She adores her profligate husband with "a passion that was like an agony and hated him with agony that was bitter as the sea". To keep her hold over him she initiates her husband's infidelity with Dowell's wife, Florence. In Quartet Lois is representative 'of the species wife' (76). She is English, 'plump, dark, country with a careful dash of Chelsea' (12). Like

Leonora she adores her husband and comforts herself with the knowledge that her husband will get tired of Marya as soon as she gives in, and hence she initiates the relations.. between Heidler and the other woman.

Rhys's version of the cuckolded husband shifts the role away from the assumptions of The Good Soldier while retaining its basic plot. Marya's husband Stephan is the outsider, improvident reckless and in trouble with the police, unlike Dowell who is extremely wealthy and who sees himself as 'just a male sick nurse' to his wife. Dowell sees himself as naturally inferior to Ashburnham in terms of virility and vitality. Marya tells us that Stephan is an attentive lover and Heidler is clumsy. Through this reversal in Rhys's story, the reader comes to understand that Marya is not lured away by Heidler's superiority as man or lover but by the specific social and economic situation. Stephan is a more attractive human being than Heidler but he is at the bottom of a male hierarchy of money and power. He is cuckolded not out of some sexual natural selction, but because his wife is forced to seek protection of the man on the top of the social heap.

In Quartet Marya plays the dual role of Florence, Dowell's wife in The Good Soldier and of the innocent Nancy. Marya is like Florence the actively questioning , sensual woman who longs for joy and the naive girl whose older mentor threatens her with an almost incestuous passion. By adopting this viewpoint for her protagonist Rhys's novel forces the reader to feel what it is like to be on the other side of the conventional attitudes

about love, passion and social repression that pass as unquestioned if ironic profundities in The Good Soldier.

Quartet attacks the double standard upon which Ford's novel rests. In his work, Edward, the adulterer is a virile man who deserves sexual consolation for his wife's coldness, and he is also a pathetic creature struggling nobly with overwhelming desires he cannot be expected to control. The narrator loves and admires him, while regarding his own adulterous wife as trash. Rhys makes this adulterous wife the center of narrative consciousness. Unlike Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, and other famous adulteresses created by male writers, Marya does not herself believe in the double standard. She attacks the clanking wheels of society which divide the 'good' woman from the 'bad' woman

The conscious parallelism of character presentation is only one area in which Rhys demonstrates her tutelage to Ford's craft and her independence from his values. The recurrent images of Quartet are also prominent in The Good Soldier, but Rhys uses them to different effect. (In Part Two, Section Two, I shall analyse the patterns of imagery in the novel).

Quartet's plot, character and imagery demonstrate Rhys's fruitful immersion in Ford's techniques. Yet Rhys's vision is entirely her own. In the world of The Good Soldier no one knows the heart of another. Vainly we seek mutual understanding. Society is an ordered minuet beneath which lonely madmen scream. Quartet exposes these 'universal' truths as special pleading, evasions and even lies. Ford's characters are wealthy and Dowell the narrator

fusses about the nuisance of being a millionaire. In Quartet money or its absence shapes each character's life in specific ways. Rhys's novel shows how a male honour code unites men but dishonours women, and that by regarding their passions as being beyond control gentlemen may keep indulging them. The Good Soldier sets themes, Quartet plays variations.

Gardiner argues that Jean Rhys's close though ambivalent relation to modernist writing has been obscured by the critical myth of 'the author's life:

> When we read modernist writers, we normally assume and find a dense web of literary allusion built into the structure of the text and integral to its vision of the modern world. . . . Certain critical myths and sexist attitudes have obscured Jean Rhys's close though ambivalent connection with this literary tradition. When a writer like Joyce or Eliot writes about an alienated man estranged from himself, he is read as a portrait of the diminished possibilities of human existence in modern society. When Rhys writes about an alienated woman estranged from herself, critics applaud her perceptive but narrow depiction of female experience and tend to narrow her vision even further by labelling it both pathological and autobiographical. The myth of Rhys as despised and solitary recluse furthers this misapprehension of her work ('Good Night Modernism' 247).

The underlying assumption, that Rhys's critical reception which distorts reading of her work is due in part to her gender, provides a launching pad for an overview of the women writers who were contemporaries or near contemporaries of Rhys, and their similarities and differences.

(3)

JEAN RHYS AND WOMEN WRITERS OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

The relationship between women writers and the women's movement in England seems to be a long tradition of unease and ambiguity.[1] Victorian women novelists dissociated themselves from the movement of their time. George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti all expressed disagreement or distance from the feminist movement of their age. Other lesser known women writers also seem to share their ambivalent attitudes. Despite this, however, the concerns of the women's movement especially in the closing decades of the last century provide a worthwhile framework to examine the creative works by or about women which emerged and which anticipated writings by twentieth century women novelists.

Male writers like Meredith, Moore and Hardy all produced novels which purported to argue for a more liberated attitude toward women. Hardy in Jude the Obscure and The Woodlanders explore marital unhappiness and sexual incompatibility which law and social custom refused to acknowledge. The women characters in Hardy's works "showed how women's lives were distorted simply because they were women, trapped in a moral order rooted in sexual discrimination, and in a social structure which refused to acknowledge them as complete human beings" (Stubbs 80). George Moore's A Mummer's

Wife focuses on squalor and drunkenness as part of woman's existence and his Esther Waters shows a refusal to idealise the lives of women. He chooses to depict the lives of working class women with honesty and without moralising. These works and Ibsen's A Doll's House were understood by contemporary women writers and feminists as an attempt to depict women's lives, but they argued that the real motive was an effort by the men to use a concern with women's sexuality as a means of expressing their own problems with the sexual mores of the time.[8]

In the early decades of the present century some women writers did participate in the activities of the feminist movement. Writers like May Sinclair and Violet Hunt sold tracts on the streets and tried to persuade Henry James to sign a petition supporting women's writers. The great demonstration of June 10 included several writers. Some of the novels which emerged from that period include Suffragette Sally (1991) Outlawed: A Novel on the Woman (1908); and Suffrage Question: From the Wilderness. The literary journal The New Freewoman provides an interesting study of the uneasy relationship between some women writers and the suffragettes. Initially, the journal attacked the suffragists's obsession with the vote as a means of emancipating women and developed its own philosophy of free love and individualism., though there was some support for the aims of the movement. The magazine folded and with its second incarnation the New Freewoman minimised allegiance to feminism and dissociated itself from the suffrage campaign. The main

opposition was to Christina Pankhurst's campaign against venereal disease and her view that male lust lay at the root of female oppression. One young woman writer, who was also a journalist at the time, Rebecca West, attacked Pankhurst's view as a backward step which could possibly have a negative effect on women's writing:

> There was a long and desperate struggle before it became possible for women to write candidly on subjects such as these. That this power should be used to express views that would be old-fashioned. . . in the pastor of a Little Bethel is a matter for scalding tears (Qtd. Showalter, Literature of Their Own 117)

In her old age, West refers to the views she expressed at the time and observes; 'I admired them enormously, but all that business about venereal disease, which was supposed to be round every corner, seemed to be excessive' (Writers at Work 7)

The perceived fanaticism of the suffragettes is also criticised in tongue-in-cheek fashion by Rhys in her late years when she simulates a typical interview with herself:

> 'I didn't like the suffragettes much,' I say.
>
> 'Didn't you,' she says, shocked.
>
> 'Not much, when you posted a letter you never knew whether it would get there. They used to set fire to the post boxes, things like that. Such a nuisance.'
>
> Silence
>
> 'You know the one who threw herself in front of the horse.' I say. 'Well, I felt so sorry for the horse.'
>
> 'But the woman was a martyr', the interviewer says.
>
> 'Perhaps she wanted to be a martyr, but the horse didn't . He had to be shot.'

> 'But surely you realise the desperate heroism in what she did?'
>
> 'Yes of course I know that but I was still very sorry for the horse ('Bricks without straws' 70 -71)

In a serious vein, Rhys like West,admired the courage and determination of the suffragists even if she held aloof. After spending five days in the hospital wing of Holloway prison, she commented on woman's inhumanity to woman as a grim legacy of the suffragettes' struggle : 'Why wasn't the place bombed? If you could see the unfortunate prisoners crawling about like half dead flies you'd understand how I feel. I did think about the Suffragettes Result of all their sacrifice?. . . Really human effort is futile' (Letters 56)

The attitudes revealed by Rhys and West seem to reflect a general attitude of women writers of that generation. They respected the militants for their courage, but the movement was not a happy stimulus to them as writers. Elaine Showalter concludes:

> [W]omen writers found themselves confronted through the suffrage movement by a number of challenges and threats; by the spectre of violence, by the ruthlessness of female authoritarianism, by the elimination of class boundaries, by a politics of action rather than influence, by collectivism, and the loss of the secure privacy in which they had been cultivating their 'special moral qualities'. The shift was too abrupt to be liberating, and a reaction against it many women writers of this generation seem to have retreated from social involvement into a leisurely examination of the sensibility (239)

If the women writers rejected the narrowly political in the suffragette movement, there is no doubt that the concern with themselves as women revealed in their fiction, would undoubtedly have been shaped in part by the social and political activities

of the feminists. The fiction of Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, as Showalter suggests, created a deliberate female aesthetic which transformed the feminine code of self-sacrifice

into an annihilation of the narrative self, and applied the cultural analysis of the feminists to words, sentences and structures of language in the novel.

Like their male modernist counterparts these writers had forerunners in nineteenth century fiction. Writers like George Egerton, Olive Shreiner and Sarah Grand all to some degree reject the realist tradition. Egerton's fiction avoided a realist mode and focused on the idealised , utopian rendering of women and women's lives in a world in which sexual discrimination no longer existed. Shreiner's vehicle is parables, allegories and dream visions.

Gertrude Stein, a wealthy American who moved to Paris in 1903, is another important forerunner in terms of technical innovations by women. Stein studied psychology and automatic writing before moving to Paris, An avid admirer of the works of Picasso and Matisse she sought a verbal equivalent of their art forms. Her techniques which drew heavily on Symbolism included synchronism, a-logical juxtaposition which was dependent on repetition, an accumulation of verbal motifs. These features dominate her novel Three Lives (1909) and The Making of America (1925).She sought to achieve lexical simplicity which would generate complexity of imagery and ideas. Her experimentation with language is seen most clearly in her use of repetition-with-slight-variation, both lexical and grammatical.

Richardson, Woolf, Stein preceded or were contemporaries of Edith Sitwell, Marianne Moore, Amy Lowell, Rebecca West, and Christina Stead. The Rhys oeuvre reveals that she shares a common literary heritage with the women writers of the time. She shares with Woolf and Richardson the extensive use of the stream of consciousness technique to render the feelings and perceptions of the female protagonists. Gertrude Stein anticipates many of the stylistic features in Rhys's novels, in particular the use of repetition-with-variation and ironic juxtapositions seen especially in Good Morning Midnight and Wide Sargasso Sea. Rhys's literary mentor, Ford Madox Ford, observes of Woolf's To the Lighthouse, 'it is the only piece of British writing that has really excited my craftsman mind - the only piece since the decline and death of Conrad' (Woolf: Critical Heritage 20). Since the work appeared in 1927 when Rhys was working on her early stories we can assume that she might have been directed to that work. To the Lighthouse demonstrates Woolf's deft handling of various narrative viewpoints, time shifts and stream of consciousness technique - features which Rhys uses increasingly in her writing.

If the Rhys oeuvre demonstrates stylistic and technical similarities with the women writers of her generation, it reveals more directly a connection in terms of one major theme - the denigration of women in life and in art. 'I Spy a Stranger', written during the Second World War reveals a clear connection with the concerns of Richardson and Woolf in particular. In

The Tunnel(1919) Richardson's protagonist Miriam comes to the conclusion that "life is poisoned for women, at the very source". Miriam concludes this after she reads an insulting entry on 'Woman' in an encyclopaedia. Virginia Woolf who reviewed Richardson's work also uses the same concern in her essay A Room of One's Own (1929). The persona in the essay is doing research in the British Museum Reading Room and imagines a definitive treatise by a Professor on female inferiority. The work is entitled The Mental Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex. As Hermione Lee argues (viii - ix)the arguments in A Room of One's Own are intimately connected to another major Woolf Essay Three Guineas (1938). The recommendation which A Room employs as a metaphor for the woman writer's ideal state of mind ('there must be freedom and there must be peace') is the literal theme of Three Guineas. Women can create freedom and peace and prevent war by using their recently acquired incomes and independence to ensure that the daughters of educated men should not be educated as their fathers and brothers have been since the products of that education are incapable of preventing war. Women should form a society of outsiders, alien, critical, ironic and indifferent to the imperatives of bellicose nationalism.. Three Guineas as Woolf acknowledges was designed as 'a sequel' to A Room and the essays reflect each other at many points.

Rhys in 'I Spy a Stranger' anchors her concerns to those of the Woolf essays in explicit and implicit ways.

The sophisticated narrative technique of the short story relates the destruction of a woman considered different, hence threatening and finally mad. When the story opens her ignominious end is already known to the other characters. Laura's story is refracted through the vision of Mrs. Trant and Mrs Hudson two 'respectable' members of conventional society. The women's story draws added importance from the fact that Laura's voice is coming through them from the grave of the asylum. They are implicated in the tragedy of Laura's life, but are only dimly aware that it is so.

The main crime that Laura had committed against her society was being a writer. Mrs. Hudson does not condemn Laura for writing, but for not hiding the fact and pretending to be like other people:

> 'Well, why was there all this trouble? Did she seem crazy? Did she look crazy?'. . .
>
> '-Careless! leaving the wretched book lying about, and that daily woman I had spread a rumour that she was passing information to the enemy. She got on the wrong side of everybody - everybody (62)

One of the people who she particularly irritated was a neighbour who named his dog 'Emily Bronte' and then abused it. Laura also incurred the terrible hatred of Fluting an army officer.

When he complains about the odour of the "Waafs", Laura replies heatedly: "Sir, they smell; you stink". The direct echo of Dr. Johnson's remark links the thematic concern of the short story to Woolf's <u>A Room of One's Own</u>. When the narrator in Woolf's essay seeks to find some grain of truth about women's

lives in men's books, she finds only contradictions. One literary figure who thought highly of women was Dr. Johnson. Woolf footnotes the allusion:

> 'Men know that women are an overmatch for them, and therefore they choose the weakest or the most ignorant. If they did not think so, they never could be afraid of women knowing as much as themselves.'. . . In justice to the sex I think it but candid to acknowledge that, in a subsequent conversation, he told me that he was serious in what he said.' - Boswell, The Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides)

When Laura, a woman writer who seeks to protect 'Emily Bronte' from denigration, attacks a military man engaged in warfare, through the use of a literary allusion, the text is making explicit connections between the attitude to women in society and war. Woolf's work has the same preoccupation.

The allusion to Woolf's work is even more explicit through the use of pieces of writing left behind by Laura. She had been forced to leave Europe and to return to England at the outbreak of the war. While she lives in her cousin's house she collects newspaper clipplings and sticks them in a scrapbook, writes many letters and keeps a diary. The two women who remain behind after Laura had been taken to the asylum read together her observations about the condition of women and the nature of society:

> There is something strange about the attitude to women as women. Not the dislike (or fear). That isn't strange of course. But it's all so completely taken for granted, and surely that is strange. It has settled down and become an atmosphere, or, if you like, a climate, and no questions it, least of all the women themselves. There is no opposition The effects are criticised, for some of the effects are hardly advertisements for the system, the cause is seldom mentioned, and then very gingerly. The few

> mild, ambiguous protests usually come form men. Most of the women seem to be carefully trained to revenge any unhappiness that they feel on each other, or on children - or on any individual man who happens to be at a disadvantage. In dealing with men as a whole, a streak of subservience, of servility, usually appears, something cold, calculating, lacking in imagination. But no one can go against the spirit of a country with impunity and propaganda from the cradle to the grave can do a lot.
>
> Titles of books to be written ten years hence, or twenty, or forty, or a hundred: Woman: an obstacle to the Insect Civilization. The mechanization of woman, Misogyny -well call it misogyny - Misogyny and British Humour will write itself. . . . Misogyny and War, The misery of wom an and the ev il in men or the great revenge that makes all other revenges look silly (69 -70)

The title which most offends the women reading the notebook is Misogyny and War. Mrs Trant is annoyed that at such a time of war Laura could have found something other than women's problems to occupy her mind. It is at this point that the concerns in Rhys's short story intersect with those of Three Guineas.

When Woolf first published her essay her critics resisted its arguments and expressed anxiety about the author's coherence and mental stability. The idea that the position of women in England, rather than the threat of Fascism in Europe, could be a major topic in 1938 was considered frivolous; the connection was not willingly perceived. These critiques refused to admit to the essay's most challenging assertions - that patriarchy and fascism are akin (Lee xix). In 'I Spy a Stranger' Rhys also links the oppression of women with the spirit of the society which produces war and destruction. The end that the text plots for Laura suggests that her perceptions and insights will lead only to her destruction. When Mrs. Trant finishes reading Laura's words

she remarks: 'Too much light, don't you think?'. The word light is deliberately placed so as to recall for the reader that the pretext under which Laura was arrested was that she was burning her light during an official blackout. Faced with the terrible lucidity of Laura's insights the community banishes her to an asylum.

There is a clear connection between Richardson's protagonist, Woolf's narrator and Rhys's character. These women through their perusal of newspapers, encyclopaedias, books, come to understand that the woman and the woman who writes are considered a menace and a nuisance. This theme is also carried through in Doris Lessing's A Golden Notebook (1962). As the protagonist's breakdown gathers momentum, she keeps a diary, writes copious letters, cuts out newspaper reports and sticks them in a scrapbook.

Despite the affinities with other women writers when Rhys is asked about influences on her work, she refers specifically to the Russian and French writers of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She also points out that she 'escaped' an exclusively Anglo-Saxon influence at the start of her career and she never returned to it. When comparisons are made between herself and Colette, she cites an important difference:

> I do admire Colette, her wonderful descriptions of flowers, trees and animals especially. But she uses different subjects. Colette was a practical, natural writer; she was brought up in the country whereas my life has been mostly lived in towns (Burton 109)

The question of Rhys's influence on other writers is less easy to answer. However, her contemporary Rebecca West described her as one of the finest writers under middle age and Rosamund Lehman was a great admirer of her work. American writer Evelyn Scott was drawn to Rhys by the technical accomplishment of her second novel After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie:

> On our way back from London to America, my husband and I are carrying with us, as our happiest recent impression, the pleasure we had in After Leaving Mr Mr. Mackenzie. Within the circumference chosen by the author, it seems to us a perfect book. The quiet irony kept us in perpetual chuckles. The beautiful and exact measure of character delighted us. The flawless ending which so completely avoided the sentimentalisation of a situation full of poignant suggestion, was a joy. We feel grateful for the pleasure given us by so fine an artist as the author is and cannot resist expressing it while the mood is fresh. . . . I feel so keenly that stumbling upon After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie. . . was an important discovery that I should like to spread the good news. . . . My husband and I are writers and at least have the acquaintance which should learn (if it doesn't already know) of the existence of such a rare, subtle and sensitive talent (Letters 21)

This letter was particularly heartwarming to Rhys as she felt that her efforts at writing had not been recognised adequately. Speaking of her early efforts, she says: "After a book of short stories I wrote two long novels which cost me quite a lot though no one took them very seriously" (How I became a novelist 5). If Rhys shows connections and affinities with the women writers of her generation as well as with the modernist male writers she still remains separate in some important respects from that body of writing. The following section will discuss this separateness.

(4)

RHYS IN A DIFFERENT VOICE

Despite similarities of techniques, styles, motifs and thematic concerns, Jean Rhys does not fit easily or completely within the body of modernist writing or women's fiction of her generation. Her distinctive voice which revealed itself from her earliest work does not accommodate itself to the groups or concerns which I examined. Jean D'Costa points to the difficulties created by this particular voice:

> A reader new to Rhys usually puzzles over her viewpoint looking both ways cross the Channel and the Atlantic, she seems "for" and "against" both perspectives. Her insider-outsider's treatment of England, France and the Caribbean gnaws at comfortable ethnocentrisms. Her characters play out the pathologies of exploitation as lovers, siblings, as neighbours, as whole social groups. Looking for some kind of familiar ground, the reader tries to fit Rhys into available models of contemporary fiction, and fails. . . . She belongs to no recognizable school; fits into no ready-made slot.
>
> Rhys's fiction belongs, as she did, to worlds whose mutual understanding has 'the feeling. . . of. . . things that. . . couldn't fit together'. . . The dissonances of seemingly different worlds inform the Rhysian novel, finding coherence in her art: in order to read Rhys adequately, the reader must be alive to her use of class structures; of colonialism and the metropolis seen from within and without; of love and sex defined by money, race and gender; of exile as a human universal; and of the solitary, observing, experiencing self. All her work is charged with a sense of belonging in many wheres at once (D'Costa, 1986. 391 and 395)

D'Costa's isights take account of the author's peculiar position

in Europe and the West Indies. [9]

As a white, female West Indian, her cultural heritage would have bequeathed an odd double vision born of the place of the white West Indian in her nativeland. She was white and not English or European, West Indian and not Black. She was taught the language and customs of a land she had never seen, England, while living in and being shaped by the reality of the West Indies. Her sense of belonging to the West Indies would necessarily be charged with an awareness of being part of another culture. The ambiguity of being an insider/outsider in both the metropolis and the colony is what shaped Rhys's apprehension of the world. This ambiguity would be further complicated by the complexity of the West Indian society in which she lived - the ambivalences inherent in the colour/class relationship and the simultanaeous existence of different cultural modes, creole, black, indigenous. The interaction among the groups was regulated by strict social and political norms, but at a psycho-social level, the relationship was a syncretic one. In Dominica, the creole culture consisted of a blend of French and English, further complicating the social and historical setting. Out of this reality and as a means of rendering her vision of the world Rhys as a writer developed an ideology of secular individualism and psychological privacy combined with a self -image of isolation expressed through 'the solitary, observing, experiencing self' which moves through all of her fiction.

The relationship between the complexity of her personal history and the nature of her art is mediated by several factors, the most relevant of which is her writing itself. In talking about herself as a writer she observes:

> I can't make things up, I can't invent. I have no imagination. I can't invent character. I don't think I know what character is. I just write about what happened. Not that my books are entirely my life - but almost. . . . Though I guess the invention is in the writing. But then there are two ways of writing. One way is to try to write in an extraordinary way, the other in an ordinary way. Do you think it's possible to write both ways?. . . I think so. I think what one should do is write in an ordinary way and make the writing seem extraordinary. One should write too about what is ordinary and see the extraordinary behind it (Plante 52, Emphasis added)

If Rhys uses her life as a pretext for art,she insists repeatedly that life in one thing, a book is quite another. One of the major strategies used by the author is pastiche and parody. In analysing the functions of parody and pastiche in contemporary English writers, Robert Burden offers a useful definition of terms. His definition applies to my understanding of Rhys's attitude to the literary traditions, styles and principles of Europe and her relationship with them:

> One of the fundamental purposes of parody in literature has long been that of literary criticism; that is to say, the literary technique of parody often pre-empts the activity of the would-be literary critic by offering within the text degrees of self-interpretation, It focuses on the limitations, personal or historical of past forms; it often does this by suggesting the obsolescence of 'previous' styles. . . . [P]arody is distinguished as a mode of imitation in a subversive form. This distinguishes it from pastiche, which implies a non-subversive form of imitation, which depends on systems of borrowing: a patchwork of quotations,

> images, motifs, mannerisms or even whole fictional episodes which may be borrowed, untransformed, from an original in recognition of the 'anxiety of influence' Pastiche may be the result of the conscious recognition of influence and of the fact that the condition of writing is in fact a condition of re-writing. . . . [I]t may be used to stress the ironic awareness that language, literary forms, themes and motifs regularly come to the writer in, so to speak, second-hand form(The Novel Interrogates Itself' 134 -35)

In the Rhys canon pastiche and parody represent an inbuilt aesthetic discourse with the European literary tradition and the ideological framework which defines, constricts and to some extent distort her as woman, artist and West Indian.

The use of pastiche and parody is combined with the relentless honing of language to 'deconstruct' the literature and language to which she is heir, and to expose their absences and render her own philosophical and critical position. As Yeats observes this enterprise engages all good writers:

> All artists, all writers of any kind, in so far as they have had any philosophical or critical power, perhaps just so far as they have been delicate artists at all have had some philosophy or criticism of their art and it has often been this philosophy or criticism of their art; that has evoked their most startling inspiration (Literary Criticism 29)

What is of seminal importance and peculiarity for Rhys's work and what differentiates her position from the world out of which Yeats wrote in her 'background of nothing'. In using and criticising the literary resources of Europe while aiming for the simplest and clearest form of expression she seeks to create a space for her work and necessarily for the works of later writers who also experience their 'nothingness' in terms of the metropolitan canon.

In a career spanning more than fifty years, Rhys insists repeatedly upon the connection between simplicity and artistic truth: 'I have written upon the wall "Great is truth and it shall prevail". Simplify - simplify - simplify' (c 1939). The writer believes that even artists who operate within the conventional framework of English society were often challenged by the need to tell their truth but bowed instead to the domination of the prevailing ideology. Referring to the organization of English society as a kind of ant civilization, she points to the connection between art and life,and the damaging constraints whch convention imposes upon literature:

> I believe that if books were brave enough the repressive education [of the ant civilization] would fail but nearly all English books and writers slavishly serve the ant civilization. Do not blame them too much for the Niagara of repression is also beating on them and breaking their heart (Jean Rhys Collection, Folio152 British Library)

In 1953, part of the period in which Rhys produced little, she continued to read extensively. In a letter to fellow writer Morchard Bishop she reacts fiercely to what she perceives as a dangerous attempt to control and coerce the production and reception of works of art:

> I read a letter in the Observer last Sunday from some editor. . . promising to accept an story up to (of) the standard of "Boule de Suif" [by Maupassant]. Well I should damned well think he would. And Hemingway's [The Old Man and the Sea]. Why not add Prosper Mérimée's "Carmen" for good measure. . .
>
> Poor 'Boule de Suif'. They won't let her rest-

> The thing is I very much doubt whether any story seriously glorifying the prostitute and showing up not one but several British housewives to say nothing of two nuns! - their meanness cant and spite - would be accepted by the average editor or any editor.
>
> And "La Maison de Tellier" [Maupassant] - Well imagine -
>
> Of course I may be quite wrong. . . But I do read a lot and have a very definite impression that "thought control" is on the way and ought to be resisted. But will it be resisted?
>
> Why say as Mr. Green does 'I demand a positive and creative view of life'. What is that? And why demand a view of life? Not his business surely.
>
> It's all very well to talk about The Old Man and the Sea but what about Hills like White Elephants or A Way You'll Never Be. . . . .Would those be up to his 'positive and creative' standard? (Letters 99 -100) 10

Maupassant and Hemingway were two writers whom Rhys admired greatly for their economical use of language.

The clearest expression of Rhys's attitude to literature and ideology is contained in an unpublished essay of uncertain date entitled "The Bible is Modern". The manuscript of the essay suggests that it was written in her late years:

> God said, "Let there be Light and there was Light". There is something short, snappy and utterly modern about this sentence. You have only got to alter 'God said' to 'Said God', put a stop in the middle,and you could almost call it a quotation from the newest, starkest American novel.
>
> The real English of this obviously is "In His great wisdom the Deity commanded that the firmament should be illuminated, and it was amply illuminated." Or you might say excessively, putting in the fantastic touch, "Allah, bestriding the universe with the sun in his right hand and the moon in the left, uttered these words to his chief attendant Gabriel, 'The constellations and the orbs shall march in

their places.' So saying, he flung the sun and the moon into the firmament. Gabriel, obedient but disapproving stamped with his foot, and there were the stars. Behold the earth and all the angels.

Instead of this, you get the stark, modern touch- "Let there be Light, and there was Light." In this marvellous book, the Bible - which I am sure you have yet to discover -there are many such stories expressed in the modern manner. And, though it is obvious that the significance of this manner is entirely dependent on the intensity of feeling let us remember that we are dealing with primitive people who express themselves in the primitive way These people are an Oriental people who have never learned to keep a stiff upper lip.

So buy the Bible. More modern than you know.

. . .

You cannot understand it, unless you understand the English social system. It is a great crime to feel intensely about anything in England, because if the average Englishman felt intensely about anything, England as it is could not exist; or, certainly, the ruling class in England could not continue to exist.

Thus you get the full force of a very efficient propaganda machine turned on the average Englishman from the cradle to the grave, warning him that feeling intensely about anything is a quality of the subject peoples or that it is old-fashioned, or that it is not done, or something like that.

The idea that books written in short, simple sentences depending for their effectiveness on the intensity of feeling of the author, are inferior books, follows automatically, because the whole solidarity of the English social system is extraordinary. It is based on the idea that poor English man must not think very much, they certainly must never feel, and as for expressing their feelings - Never. . . . When you think of the mentality of the average Englishman , all this is understandable. But then what is difficult for us black people (sic) to understand is the ingenious way they set about making money out of 'God said "Let there be Light and there was Light.'

Inscribed in this essay is a Rhysian poetics. The writer is attacking the ideology sustaining imperialism and class divisions which provides the discursive field of literary works in English society. It

is an attack on the received form of the novel and the rhetorical and ideological shape of the literary tradition. Rhys's relationship to Anglo- European tradition is two-fold: (1) the connection which exists between her work and her precursors and contemporaries and (2) the process of creating a literary language based on 'simplicity' and 'truth' which allows her to posit a structure of feeling that simultaneously criticises both the metaphysical presuppositions inherent in European ideas and forms of writing and the metaphorical system in which the otherness of her experience has been validated as a 'natural' absence.[11] Rhys's reference to 'us black people' suggests her awareness of her otherness and absence from the canons of metropolitan writing and underlines the way in which she makes explicit the buried connections between language and ideology. Rhys sees imperialism and capitalism within the English society as a cultural and economic enterprise, supported by the distortion of Biblical principles. She sees the resultant exploitation and suppression of 'black people' as a system which entraps not only them but those who perpetuate the system. She says so aphoristically but clearly when she talks about what she hopes to do in Wide Sargasso Sea. One of the themes of the novel, she observes is "the emancipation of slaves (so white black coloured) [are freed] (Letters 203). For Rhys the liberation of language from a stranglehold of an ideology which seeks to make itself invisible is concomitant with the liberation of people, of society and of art. Since all cultural artefacts are related she asserts that the same conventions and beliefs which

limit writers like herself also affect the writers within the mainstream of society - ' the ant civilization'.

The most effective means of liberating language, she implies, is through its simplification and renewal. This enterprise is an inherently political one as her essay suggests. It is ridiculed and undermined because it is ultimately subversive.

' The Bible is Modern' not only conveys Rhys's ideological standpoint it reveals a working aesthetic - to create " books written in short, simple sentences depending for their effectiveness on the intensity of the feeling of the author". A study of the process of her literary composition, emendations of manuscripts, replacements of one stylistic variants with another, suppressions and elaborations can further elucidate the way in which the author uses form as ideology. In her letters (often to impatient editors or Selma Vaz Dias who 're-discovered' her and adapted some of her work) Rhys repeatedly refers to the labour involved in her artistic creation: 'I do toil you know and even a short story is written six times or more before I am satisfied. .. . Of course some things have to be done over and over before the words are in the right place' (Letter to Vaz Dias December 1963)

Rhys discloses that in order to get the right word in the right place she must search for each word individually; 'I [think] very hard of each word in itself' (Plante 53). Rhys's strategy recalls that of her mentor Ford who insists that the

writer's mind has to choose each word and her ear has to test it until she can no longer go wrong. The insistence on the *mot juste* extends even to Rhys's finished work. When Vaz Dias adapts *Good Morning Midnight*, the author advises her that every word must be exact:

> This is about the end of Good Morning Midnight . . . It's fine - except that. . . I don't think rustle is the right word for a man's dressing gown. . .Taffeta rustles and so do stiff silks I suppose but wouldn't a man's dressing gown be a heavy silk? Please don'tthink me pernickety but every word must be exact (*Letters* 137).

Before giving permission for the reprinting of her early works after the success of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys was 'very anxious to make a few alterations in *Postures* which they are going to publish as *Quartet*. . . .These alterations are all cuts of words or sentences. . . .' Of *Voyage in the Dark* she observes 'the revisions. . . are small but important - making it a better book - for now 1964 (*Letters* 197) .

To demonstrate Rhys's concern with honing language to find her particular voice I shall examine the draft manuscripts of the short story 'Before the Deluge'. Only some of the many drafts have survived in the University of Tulsa Collection. The first draft is undated. The next surviving manuscript is the fourth draft dated October 25, 1974, the fifth January 22, 1975 and the sixth January 26 1975. The story was published in her last collection of short stories *Sleep if off Lady* (1976). Since the first draft is merely the outline of the story she set out to create, I shall focus mainly on the fourth, fifth and

sixth drafts.

The _mot juste_ which is the cornerstone of Rhys's literary artifice depends for its effectiveness not only on the selection of each word individually but on the correct placing of each word in the sentence in relation to the other words, the length of each sentence and the overall arrangement of the words, clauses and sentences. In the fourth manuscript the author constructs two possible sentences to render the dilemma of the character, Daisie:

> On the contrary, she said that she now realised that sometimes it was quite a strain and that when she came off the stage she'd feel giddy, ill
>
> On the contrary, she told me that now she often felt giddy and ill and realised it was a very great strain (MS 4)

Of the two possibilities she chooses the second sentence which contains twenty two words to the twenty eight in the first. By polishing the sentence and cleaning out the periphrasis and gratuitous words the emphasis of the meaning shifts to call attention to Daisie's 'very great strain'. The writer deletes 'sometimes it was quite a strain' and 'when she came off the stage' to create a clearer crisper perception of Daisie's dilemma. Daisie whose stage career is a failure resorts to fainting and temperament to compensate for her lack of success. The writer deletes some lexical items and rearranges what remains for purposes of concision and tightness. The use of the descriptive phrase 'very great strain' and its place at the end of the sentence underlines Daisie's emotional state. 'She said that' changes to 'She told me' to suggest a more direct and intimate awareness on the part of

the narrating consciousness. The slight shifts and changes in the sentence which Rhys selects highlight the character's emotional state.

The emphasis on the mot juste also extends to the way in which the author uses factual, geographical or social data. When the story opens the narrator describes Daisie as one of the most beauutiful women she had ever seen. Unfortunately her striking appearance does not across on stage. In the fourth draft, the author observes, 'In Regent Street people would turn and stare at her'. In the fifth and subsequent drafts, this changes to 'In Bond Street. . .'. The change of location is from a busy shopping street to another associated with exclusivity, glamour, wealth, beautiful clothes and beautiful women. Through this shift, Daisie's extraordinary beauty is highlighted and her failure on stage dramatised and rendered more heartbreaking for her. The concern with placing her characers, even the minor ones, in an exact setting preoccupied Rhys throughout her career.

In a reference to "Till September Petronella" which she cut from a fifty thousand novel to a short story, Rhys says:

> The date is, of course, late July 1914. It's not filled in because I wanted to find out more about market day in Cirencester at that time (too fussy you see!) I am not certain if Norfolk people do say Fare you well or perhaps just farewell (the farmer) (Letters 170)

The location , setting or ambience and lived realities are important scaffolding in the construction of the Rhys fiction as they are a means of shaping character response and behaviour and also of rendering

artistic truth. This attention to visual detail, an important aspect of Ford's literary impressionism, and to lived reality, and the manner in which these are worked into fiction affect the shape of the narrative, its rhythm and the ultimate beauty of the artefact. In reviewing After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie one of Rhys's early critics points to a feature of her writing which applies to the *oeuvre* as a whole:

> The book is written with something of the balance and beauty of verse. The shifting of a phrase would be a threat against the whole. Words are used like little weights,placed with an almost fractional delicacy. Phrases and words that are lovely and beguiling in their form but ruthless and explicit in their content march the pages undeterred (Graham 5)

The principle of selection which shapes the ordering of details, words and sentences is also used as a means of compressing the emotional or psychological impact and manipulating almost imperceptibly the response of the reader:

> Her mother appeared from the kitchen. She stared venomously. One look at her and I knew I was in for a torrent of abuse (MS 4)

> Her mother appeared from the kitchen. She stared at me so venomously that after one look at her I knew I was in for a torrent of abuse (MS 5)

> Then her mother appeared from the kitchen. One look at her I knew I was in for a torrent of abuse (MS 6)

In the final draft the number of sentences is contracted from three to two. The explicit feelings conveyed in the word 'venomously' are suppressed. In the final version the mother's look is not described but rendered through the protagonist's reaction. 'She stared venomously' is replaced by 'one look' and the reader is required to imagine or feel the venom and hostility conveyed in the look.

Rhys also uses the technique of suppression as a means of self-censorship. Referring to a book of short stories written during the Second World War, Rhys says: 'I can't try to sell it with passion for I know it's faults. I tried too hard for one thing, and was so afraid of offending that I wrote and rewrote the life out of things". In 'Before the Deluge', the suppression is used apparently to avoid a socially unacceptable word 'syphilis': 'I mean to say, everyone knows he's perfectly rotten with syphilis too' (MS 4); 'Everybody knows he's rotten with it' (MS 5) The elimination of the word syphilis shifts the weight of the sentence to 'rotten' with suggests not only physical but moral putrefaction. The suppression, then, reinforces rather than detracts from the situation being described.

The progression d'effet, the accumulation of details and long slow-moving passages to heighten the effect of a quick crisis, is another technique which Rhys exploits fully. 'Before the Deluge' , for most of the way seems to be a concern with the events of Daisie's stage life and her failure to become a worthwhile actress. Yet the experiencing consciousness of the short story is the unnamed narrator. The structural status of the narrator's consciousness is not presented as part of the narrated events, but reveals itself through the use of imagery. After detailed narration of Daisie's fainting spells and social life, the narrator unexpectedly describes her friend's curtain and the effect it has on her. The butterflies which form part of the pattern of the curtain make her afraid and she does not enjoy her visits to Daisie's house. The image of the butterflies and the feelings they engender is

organically linked to the narrator's consciousness, not to the events in Daisie's life. Phanopoeia - the piling up or interweaving of imagistic detail to replace in part a direct narrative - is an important technical strategy in the Rhys oeuvre It is a technique used extensively by Ezra Pound in his Imagist poetry, by Joseph Conrad and the Symbolist poets. In 'Before the Deluge' the events of Daisie's life, the narrator's fear of her curtain, precede an urgent summon from the former for her friend to visit her flat. The draft manuscripts demonstrate how Rhys wrestled with the words to render the most effective dramatisation of the narrator's encounter with Daisie and the crisis it unveils:

> One day she asked me to be at her flat about noon. She said she wanted to speak to me about something very important (MS 4)
>
> One day - the last time I say Daisy - she had asked me to be at her flat about noon. She said she wanted to speak about something very important (MS 5)
>
> One day she asked me to be at her flat about noon. She said she wanted to speak to me about something important (MS 6)
>
> One day she asked me to call and see her about noon. She wanted to speak to me. Something important (Sleep 84)

Rhys notes : ' I know it seems stupid to fuss over a few lines or words, but I've never got over my longing for clarity and a smooth firm foundation underneath the sound and the fury. I've learnt one generally gets this by cutting, or by very slight shifts and changes.' (Letters 113) . Some of the slight shifts and changes include , in the first sentence, the deletion of the word 'flat' - to call to see Daisie as opposed to calling at the flat.

It implies that the narrator is not being invited for a social visit, she is being summoned. Instead of 'she said she wanted to speak to me' the sentence becomes ' she wanted to speak to me'. The sense of urgency is underlined by the polishing of the sentence to render with clarity 'the sound and fury' of Daisie's anger. The complex sentence in the sixth draft is transformed into two, with the second sentence being staccato and verbless. The taut construction of the sentences underlines the tension and the unpleasant atmosphere. The 'Something important' which Daisie wants to discuss with the narrator is rumour that she is gossiping about her. The narrator denies this hotly and Daisie faints and the latter hurries from her house..

The last sentence in the Rhys short story is almost invariably the most important. She uses extensively 'the twist in the tail' or the '<u>coup de canon</u>' a technique refined by Maupassant. Ford's advice on how the impact of the last sentence should be achieved bears quoting as it throws light on Rhys herself employs this narrative strategy:

> You must state your argument, you must illustrate it, and then you must stick in something that appears to have nothing whatever to do with either subject or illustration, so that the reader will exclaim 'what the devil is the fellow driving at?' And then you must go on in the same way - arguing, illustrating and startling and arguing, startling and arguing until at the very end your conventions will appear like a ravelled skein. And then, in the last few lines you will draw towards you the master-string of that seeming confusion,and the whole pattern of the carpet, the whole design of the net-work will be apparent (MacShane 48)

The strategy which Rhys uses in the construction of the key sentence is elaboration:

> I never saw her again (MS 1)
>
> Shortly after this my own life changed very much and I never saw her or heard of her again (MS 4)
>
> Shortly after this my life changed, everything changed and I never saw or heard of Daisy again (MS 5)
>
> Very soon after this my life changed, everything changed and I never saw or heard of Daisie again (MS 6)

The last sentence directs the reader again to the title of the story 'Before the Deluge' which suggests that the rendering of Daisie's dilemma was in some respect secondary to the portrayal of the life and times of the narrator. The aim of the story is to capture an experience filtered through the consciousness of the solitary, observing, experiencing self. Daisie's faintings, temperaments and tantrums are no more than an incident in the life of the narrator. The last sentence further implies that it was a minor incident compared to the deluge which follows.

Rhys's attention to the *mot juste*, her emendations, deletions and corrections, demonstrate that her simple sentences are achieved after careful attention to social detail, linguistic selection, literary tradition, and the sound and rhythm of the words themselves. The meaning of her work is processed by the form. Between the fourth and fifth drafts there are almost ninety corrections, deletions and transformation of sentences. Between five and six, there are nine changes and ten deletions. Most of the corrections

to the fifth draft include the deletion of descriptive words like 'very' and 'almost', the substitution of shorter phrases for long ones and the re-arrangment of words in a sentence. The length of the individual sentences varies to provide a rhythm to the flow of the story. The average length of a sentence is about twenty words, but longer sentences are followed by very short ones, In the second paragraph, for example, the first sentence is forty one words, followed by eight.

Critics who insist that Jean Rhys's 'life' must be used to explain her 'art' would encounter some resistance from the draft manuscripts not only of her short stories and novels, but also those from which she works to produce an explicitly autobiographical work 'How I Became a Novelist'. (Many details from this long essay are reworked into Smile Please). The first draft of the manuscript for the essay is undated but believed to be circa 1974. It is heavily marked and includes alternative versions of several passages. The second text of the manuscript is entitled "Two Beginnings" of Leaving School. . .". It is also undated and is very heavily revised and the opening sections differ completely from the first text. The third manuscript is dated September 14, 1974 and bears close resemblance to the second. Another text of the same manuscript includes a full page insert which carries the story forward. The next manuscript undated is much longer, twenty three pages to the previous thirteen, and includes manuscript versions of pieces from Wide Sargasso Sea. The last available version is heavily revised and sometimes the handwriting is indistinct.

It is part of an earlier draft and was published as 'Overtures and Beginners' in Smile Please. Part of the short story 'Kismet' has also been worked into this manuscript.

An examination of the various manuscripts reveals that the autobiographical work undergoes a series of remarkable transformation which are not essentially different from the technical methods Rhys uses when she is processing her literary projects to produce a work of fiction. The reworking of text which involves concision, clarity, the *mot juste*, suppression and re-arrangement demonstrates that the author's writing is an end in itself. If there are parallels between her life and the motifs of her fiction, the transformation which takes place under the technical and linguistic pressure of writing makes the real connection between writing and living, art and life, impossible to prove. The most effective way of understanding and using Rhys's oft-quoted statement 'If you want to write the truth you must go out from yourself. . . I am the only real truth I know' is , as Harriett Blodgett suggests, is to make a clear distinction between 'truths' and 'facts' or 'events':

> The most important debt of her fiction to her life actually remains inaccessible, except by inference. Her novels. . . reproduce a sensibility rather than a biography. . . . Rhys produces experienced reactions, sensations, and attitudes more consequentially than she does events or circumstances. Thus, not Jean Rhys, but how life educates the sensibilities becomes the subject of her fiction. She recaptures the effects of the pressures on her life; she also extracts from them a perspective on suffering which gives her novels a humaneness not yet acknowledged by her critics (229).

Facts are fidelity to reality but truth suggests a world that gives the semblance of reality and includes more. To work toward this

more is a mark of literary devotion, not a confession of life experiences.

In discussing how she proceeds as a writer Rhys says that she imagines a shape for her work and leaves in whatever fits into that shape and omits what does not (Cantwell 219). It is this same method which she applies to her autobiographical writing. The two different beginnings of the second manuscript are useful as a means of examining the way in which shape or form not only produces but accretes meaning:

> We were sitting by the fire in the small sitting room when Camilla said: 'I simply hate my father, don't you?' Hail was rattling against the red-curtained window. I'd been told about snow long before I left the West Indies but hail was a surprise and exciting in its way. Another red curtain hung over the door which led into a long passage and the empty classrooms
>
> It must have been a very cold winter for we spent a good deal of out time huddled near the fire in the small dining room. That evening I was listening to hail rattling against the red curtained windows while Camilla talked about her love affair. She was seventeen - a year older than I was

The first beginning is the one which she uses in all subsequent drafts. This choice demonstrates how the process of conscious selection of narrative detail is used to construct the shape of the project. The reference to Camilla's father opens the way for a recounting of how Jean Rhys (as a construct within this piece of writing) came to be in England, how she left the West Indies and the part her father and other members of her family played in her move. In choosing one aspect of the conversation (whether the words are indeed factual is not germane) to open her work, Rhys is selecting from and thereby distorting the substance of her lived

reality to make it serve for art. The facts of her existence cannot be recuperated fairly or accurately from her words. If such ambiguity arises in an overtly autobiographical piece, how much more so. would it apply in a deliberately constructed fictive piece? What the writer seems to be proposing in her autobiograhpical writing is the construction of a fictive self through which she can render the 'truth' of her perceptions, sensibility and intellect.

The penultimate draft of the manuscript is an extended piece which includes details suppressed in the other drafts. One piece of factual information contained in the manuscript is that Rhys's father died when she was at Drama school and she was forced to leave for financial reasons. The form through which his death and its effects upon her is rendered demonstrates the way in which the transformation from life to art distances the former and makes the writing the subject and object of enquiry:

> I was to spend a vacation with relatives in Yorkshire and one morning ~~very~~ early my uncle woke me with a cablegram, the news of my father's sudden death. I was quite calm and he seemed surprised. The thing was I didn't really believe him. All that early autumn Harrogate was full of music concertinas, harpists, barrel-organs ~~and~~ one afternoon in an unfamiliar street I heard a man's voice singing 'It may be for years and it may be forever' I burst into tears. Once started I was unable to stop and was soon packed off to responsible Aunt Clare in Wales. 'You cry' she told me the day after I arrived, 'without ~~any~~ reticence'. I thought 'And you watch me without ~~any~~ reticence.' HOwever in a week or two my mind played its usual tricks. I remembered him vividly, photographically what he looked like, the way he talked. I hardly remembered him at all. Also I was still quite certain that in some way impossible to explain it was not true. They were all making a great mistake. He was not dead (sic)

The 'event' in Jean Rhys's life invites close scrutiny and practical criticism. The use of the musical instruments as a catalysis to underscore and render the experienced emotional trauma and the way in which the feelings erupt suddenly and intensely after a period of numbness/silence is a narrative device used in the creation of fiction. The 'hesitations' and 'recastings' seen in deletions and punctuation changes are staple techniques of narrative discourse. The changes she makes are demanded by the internal requriement of the writing. As a writer Jean Rhys consciously crafts the techniques of narrative writing to render immediately and vividly the pressures on the sensibilities of certain life experiences.

Her draft manuscripts reveal that the raw material of Rhys's art is not her life, but language itself, a literary tradition which she manipulated to render her own vision of the world. Ultimately the selcted events of her life which form a base for her imaginative writing cannot be considered important *in themselves* to the Rhysian *oeuvre*.

If Rhys is constantly struggling with language, to mould it, to render her particular vision and truth,she accepts the government of language and literary tradition. Language shapes and limits her enterprise. It dictates the nature of the writing itself and what can be written. It is in this sense that Rhys accepts that she is an amanuensis, a pen in someone else's hand:

> 'I'm a pen. I'm nothing but a pen.'
>
> 'And do you imagine yourself in someone's hand?'

> 'Of course. Of course. It's only then that I know I'm writing well. It's only then that I know my writing is true. Not really true, as fact. But true as writing. That's why I know the Bible is true. . . . the writing is true, it _reads_ true. Oh to be able to write like that! But you can't do it. It's not up to you. You're picked up like a pen, and when you're used up you're thrown away, ruthlessly, and someone else is picked up. You can be sure of that: someone else will be picked up (Plante, _A Remembrance_ 257)

The view of herself as an intrument of language and literary tradition is shared by two of the outstanding modernist practitioners, often praised for their innovative techniques - Joyce and Proust. Joyce observes; "I am content to go down to posterity as a scissors and paste man for that seems to be a harsh but not unjust description" (Josipovici 119) The narrating consciousness of Proust's autobiographical work _À la Recherche du temps perdu_ observes; " Je m'apercevais que ce livre essential, le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n'a pas, dans le sens courant, à l'inventer, puisqu'il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire. Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur" (119).

Although Rhys repudiates some of the ideological assumptions of Western cultural values and practices manifest in writers like Proust, Joyce and her mentor Ford, her relationship with the European conventions remains a problematic one. Since the ideology is secreted in the language, the most careful selection and honing, notwithstanding, her work still reveals areas of compromises with the dominant culture. These compromises reveal themselves in different but inter-related ways. The most useful and complex evidence of her compromise or 'silence' (in the sense coined by Macherey)

is her creation of the character of Christophine in Wide Sargasso Sea and her own statements about what she hoped to achieve through this character. (This will be examined in Part Three).

Another important area of compromise relates to the circumstances of publication for what, perhaps not suprisingly, is her favourite work, Voyage in the Dark. On June 10th 1934 Rhys wrote to fellow writer Evelyn Scott about the problems she was encountering with her novel:

> I'd been feeling down as hell. The book is having decidedly stormy weather. I minded more than I would have believed possible as I've always prided myself on being more or less indifferent to what most people thought about a book once it was finished. Self-deception obviously - because after Cape [her publishers] had written and told me how grey I was, without light or shade, how people would dislike it, that he couldn't hope to sell it even as well as Mackenzie etc. and so on, then Hamish Hamilton wanted it cut so much that it would become meaningless. . . .
>
> Sadleir of Constable likes it and has written very kindly about but he also wants it cut. Not of course his own taste he explains but to please prospective readers (Letters 25)

Rhys accepts that her writing is part of an industry, a commodity produced by publishers and sold on the market at a profit. Since her publishers insist that she must write work which will sell, the internal nature and form of what she writes is determined by this factor. The writer realizes that since the reading of her work is an important part of the writing she must compromise:

> Evelyn, I don't know what to do. I suppose I shall have to give in and cut the book and I'm afraid it will make it meaningless. The worst is that it is precisely the last part which I am most certain of

> that will have to be mutilated.
>
> My dear it is so mad - really it is not a disgusting book - or even a very grey book. And I know the ending is the the only possible ending.
>
> I know if I tinker around with it I'll spoil it without helping myself a bit,from the being popular point of view (Letters 25)

Despite her very strong feelings about the rightness of her work Rhys was forced to accommodated the wishes of the publisher in order for her work to be disseminated.

Some thirty years later she recalls that experience and insists that she was right and the publishers wrong:

> I remembered the last part of "Voyage in the dark" written. . . [with] time and place abolished, past and present the same - and I had been almost satisfied. Then everybody said it was "confused and confusing - impossible to understand etc" and I had to cut and rewrite it (I still think I was right, and they were wrong, tho' it was long ago). (Letters 233)

Rhys's statements are contained in a letter to the editor of Wide Sargasso Sea which she was composing at the time (August 1963). She recalls her experience for the editor because she wanted to explain why she had changed her mind about the form she first selected for her last novel: "I thought 'if they fussed over one part of a book, nobody will get the hang of a whole book written that way at all"' (233). The editor, however, does not consider that Rhys's points are valid:

> Diana Athill [the editor] speculates that by this time (1964) Jean Rhys no longer preferred the original ending, and says it is her impression that story of how she was forced into changing the ending became one of her "automatic 'anti-them" stories, rather than a comment on the book (Brown, Nancy 43)

The writer was always aware that her work would be read/consumed by an English public and this affected the shape and content of her work, specifically Wide Sargasso Sea. She said she wanted to make the events in the novel possible if not probable to English people (Letters 237) . She was also ambivalent about the responses to her writing as a whole:

> As a matter of fact I hate publicity and the public I hate to think of them pawing at my book - Not understanding. This of course is idiotic forI long too for it to be understood and read and so on (Letters 235)

I have tried to show the connections between Jean Rhys and the literary traditions and styles of Europe, how she sees herself in relation to the aesthetic and ideological values, and her own compromises with the dominant culture. Her major ideological and technical strategy can be termed 'critical signification' Since the developments by Saussure in the nineteen twenties signifying has become an important concept of literary theory and practice. Many Rhys critics have recognised partially this important aspect of her work especially in relation to Wide Sargasso Sea and Jane Eyre. Yet as Gardiner's analysis of Quartet and The Good Soldier demonstrates, Rhys uses this technique from almost the beginning of her writing career.(Please see Part 2 'Rhys. . . and Modernism'). If as Geoffrey Hartmann suggests all critical theories possess their own 'text milieu' it is possible to suggest that Rhys's attitude to language was shaped not only by the creative but the critical assumptions of the period in which she developed her craft. If modernist aesthetics altered the face of literature in England

and Europe so do did the critical presuppositions of structuralist thinkers. The language of structuralism has become a commonplace in literary criticism. While acknowledging my debt to the insights of these critics my approach is influenced by my understanding of the author's own relationship to creative and critical enterprises of Europe.

The problematic relationship between language and ideology compounded by the standpoint in history of writer (and critic) is searchingly discussed by Wole Soyinka in an essay which uses as a point of departure the works of one of the key figures of structuralism, Roland Barthes. The French thinker argues for the death of the author, the absolute subject of literature as a means of of liberating the text from the authority of a presence behind it which gives it meaning. Once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text to furnish it with a final signified , to close the writing. . . . Everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered, the strucure can be followed at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath; the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. Refusing to assign an ultimate meaning to the text is an activity that is revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God. . . . reason and law . (Belsey 103 -24)

Soyinka praises the honesty which leads Barthes to explore in concrete terms, the social situation of the critic/teacher

in relation to the practice of his profession, and the attempts by Barthes to 'prune language of its bourgeois accretions'. Soyinka, concludes , however, that grave difficulties arise from Barthes's stance. I shall quote at length from his observations as they help to shape my approach to Rhys's art:

> [W]ords do not lose their meanings or - shall we call-it their signified because of any one ideology. Even if we spoke entirely in the language of manual signs, every gesture, curve or slice of fingers, every conjunction of motions in wrists and palm, would still signify a field of values, whatever the colour through which the user were to subject such a signifier at its moment of application. When we use the expression 'sadist',therefore , we are not insisting on an irreducible condition of humanity even as we prove that such a quality cuts across class, ideology or history . Specific cases of sadism can be accounted for by an individual's history or social conditioning some economic privation in the midst of other's luxurious existence which warped his or her humanity, and so on. Every explanation merely confirms that there is conduct that is observable in human beings which cannot be termed exactly kindness, consideration, humaneness etc. On the contrary, the expression codifies one simple observation that some human beings enjoy inflicting pain. 'Sadism' then is a linguistic convention which is used to signify that predilection of certain human beings to inflicting horrific pains . . . on others. A psychologist, painter, musician, historian, linguist, teacher, social worker, dramatist, novelist, poet or architect may therefore each in their individual way become preoccupied by this isolable human condition which clearly falls into a category of its own, and not merely in a linguistic sense since it does not belong exclusively to any other categories we know: social ideological, class. . . Picasso's Guernica is one famous illustration of the correspondence of. . . art to psychological values within human experience. . . [T]he language of art and creativity continues to pose problems beyond the merely linguistic or semiological ('On Barthes and Other Mythologies' 25)

My approach to Rhys's motifs and techniques in the subsequent sections will borrow from a point of view by Barthes which his later statements attacked by Soyinka seem to repudiate. I still, however, find it a useful one. Barthes identifies an 'author' and a 'writer'. The author,he asserts, sees language as neither instrument nor vehicle but as structure. It can never explain the world, or it does so only the better to conceal its ambiguity. The author radically absorbs the why of the world into a how to write. The writer, he continues, restores the language to the nature of an instrument of communication, a vehicle for 'thought'. The writer tells society what society does not always ask of her: situated at the margins of institutions and transactions, her language appears paradoxically more individual, at least in motifs, than the author's. The contradiction between the two is rarely pure, Barthes observes, and every artist of the modern period moves more or less between the two postulations. The age produces a bastard type - the bastard author-writer. The conflict or contrast is also joined at the level of language for language is this paradox: the institutionalisation of subjectivity ('Authors and Writers 185 - 93). I find this a useful summary of the demands of Rhys's fiction - language as structure and language as a means of communication.

PART TWO

EUROPEAN TRADITIONS AND STYLES IN EARLY WORKS

(1)

TECHNIQUE OF SHORT STORIES

In Part One I argued that Jean Rhys's work is founded on a paradox not only of language and her relationship to it but of the ideological antagonism and compromises for her as a colonial in the metropolis, as a woman in a patriarchal system. In this section I shall seek to demonstrate through close scrutiny of the writing itself how she takes up particular stances in relation to the literary and ideological models. My aim in this section is threefold: to examine how Rhys immerses herself in the European literary traditions, experiments with and manipulates the styles and practices of her precursors and contemporaries; to analyse each work as a discrete artefact possessing particular points of stress in terms of techniques and motifs; and finally through this method of analysis, to argue for a discernible movement in her *oeuvre* which culminates in *Wide Sargasso Sea* which is at one and the same time a distillation of her artistic forms and her most completely West Indian work. Her most overtly West Indian work is a result of cautious ransacking and sifting through of the forms and ideas of Europe.

Jean Rhys began her writing career as a short story writer. The form of the short story is associated with Chekhov and Maupassant mainly, but also with other Russian writers such

as Turgenev and Gorky. In English, Edgar Allan Poe and Katherine Mansfield have also been considered accomplished practitioners of the genre. In referring to her development as a writer, Rhys reveals that at the beginning of her career she read nothing but the French and the Russians. Her immersion in the writings of the continental artists and the tutelage of Ford helped to shape her own technical strategies. One of the major distinctions between the short story and the novel is that the former deals with or dramatises a single incident or perception. Edgar Allan Poe's definition of the techniques and concerns of the genre are still relevant and useful

> A skilful artist has constructed a tale. If wise he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out he then invents such incidents - he then combines such efforts as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted with leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this end is unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem, but undue length is yet more to be avoided (Edgar Allen Poe, quoted by Walter Allen, The Short Story, 6, 1986

Ford, Rhys's literary mentor, would have agreed with Poe's perceptions. He also provides certain guidelines and instructions for the production of a short story. As in the construction of a novel he insists that the beginning of the work is crucial: If the function of the subject be to grow into a short story one will start with

a short, sharp definite sentence so as to set the pace. If it is a long short story, we shall qualify the sharpness of the opening sentence and damp it down.

'Hunger' a short short story of less than seven hundred words records with apparent straightforwardness and intensity the brooding stages of wretchedness of the narrating consciousness deriving from hunger caused by poverty. The first sharp sentence sets the pace of the story; 'Last night I took an enormous dose of valerian to make me sleep'. The narrator, in addressing the listener/reader directly, beckons her into the life and the world which she describes:

> For the first twelve hours one is just astonished. No money; nothing to eat. . . Nothing! . . . But that's farcical. There must be something one can do. Full of practical commonsense you rush about; you search for the elusive 'something'. At night you have long dreams about food (169)

The narrator continues in a conversational, almost confiding tone to recount that with each passing day, food becomes more unattainable and the hunger pangs less immediate. She uses the state of hunger as an enquiry into the failures of her life:

> On the third day one feels sick: on the fourth, one starts to crying very easily. . . A bad habit that, it sticks. On the fifth day
>
> On the fifth day. . .
>
> You awaken with a feeling of detachment; you are calm and godlike. It is to attain to that state that religious people fast (170)

The narrator continues to tell the listener about the efforts

she had made to pull her self together and the futility of it all. She thinks about how ridiculous women are when they try to struggle and how women try to destroy other women. She observes that had she been French she would have dealt with her life and problems differently. After examining all her options the narrator decides that giving up, letting go is the only thing to do.

The tone shifts abruptly and she observes that retrospection is a waste of the fifth day of hunger and it is better to spend the time reading books or daydreaming. Yet despite her intentions she is again forced to reckon with the nature of hunger:

> I love her most before she has become too vicious.
>
> It is as if your nerves were strung tight. Like violin strings. Anything: lovely words, or the sound of a concertina from the street; even a badly played piano can make one cry. Not with hunger or sadness. No!
>
> But with the extraordinary beauty of life.

The narrator's story uses the physical and material discomfort of hunger to meditate on her life, on life in general and on forces within her society. The transparency of her musings ,the honest self-revealing posture is undermined by the <u>coup de canon</u>. The twist in the tail throws into disarray the motives and utterances of the narrator through an implied comment to the implied reader, the 'you':

> I have never gone without food for longer than five days so I cannot amuse you any longer (171)

The implied community of viewpoints between reader and narrator is brusquely undermined. Through this sleight of hand the reader

is distanced from the narrator while ironically being drawn into the story itself. The narrator suggests that she has not been 'listening' out of concern or interest, but as a self-appointed judge who was ridiculing the character's life and experiences. The tension of the story derives from apparent urgency with which she recounts her problems, combined with a detachment with which comes from her awareness of the manner in which her words are being received, interpreted and judged. Her perception of herself as one who suffers is also sharpened by her insight into the way this suffering is partially imposed by the ridicule and judgement of others.[1]

Another interesting piece in Rhys's first collection is 'La Grosse Fifi'. 'With its crime passionnel, its seedy boarding house, and its evocation of the painfully beautiful and the indifferently sordid,' Jean D'Costa observes, 'La Grosse Fifi' points the way in which Rhys's talent would grow. Her spare, controlled style, her extreme care with diction,her gift for speech patterns and her striving for form are all evident. . .' (15) Another important feature of the short story is the use of literary allusions - another staple in the Jean Rhys canon. I shall examine her use of diction, speech patterns and literary allusions.

The story opens with careful attention to visual detail and a concentration on the seemingly casual aspects of human relation. Using this basic tenet of literary impressionism the author shades in the character of Fifi 'stout, well corseted - her stomach carefully

arranged to form part of her chest. . . her rouge shrieked. . . and the lids of protruding eyes were painted bright blue. . . Fifi was obvious in fact - no mistaking her mission in life. . . With her was a young man of twenty four' (Tigers 178). Roseau the protagonist defends Fifi against the Anglo-Saxon residents and despises them for their snobbery and hypocrisy toward the older woman. Roseau herself has problems. She has been discarded by a man and cries in her room. It is Fifi who comes to her assistance:

> 'I am very unhappy,' remarked Roseau in French in a small, tired voice. Her swollen eyelids were half shut.
>
> 'And do you think I have not seen?' said Fifi earnestly laying one plump hand on Roseau's knee. 'Do you think I don't know when a woman is unhappy? - I - Besides, with you it is easy to see. You look avec les yeux d'une biche' - It is naturally a man who makes you unhappy?'
>
> . . . . 'Ah! le salaud: ah! le monstre!. . . . He is perhaps jealous?'
>
> 'Oh no' said Roseau.
>
> 'Then perhaps he is méchant - there are men like that - or perhaps he is trying to disembarrass himself of you.' . . . .
>
> 'Ah,' said Fifi wisely. She leant closer. 'Mon enfant,' said she hoarsely, 'do it first. Put him at the door with a coup de pied quelque part.'
>
> 'But I haven't got a door,' said Roseau in English beginning to laugh hysterically. . . .
>
> 'Comment?' said Fifi suspiciously. She disliked foreign languages being talked in her presence (178 - 79)

Dialogue and speech patterns are an important element in Rhys's composition: 'Everybody talks differently. To make a dialogue

truthful(and in some way truth gets over) one character's speech will sound wrong spoken by another. . . . [D]ialogue is important in a novel' (Letters 227).

Rhys resolves the problem of rendering truthfully a francophone speaker within an English text by a transliteration of French form into English and the use of key words, phrases and expressions in the original language of the character Fifi. In this way she guides the reader to hear and appreciate the conversation in French. The sense that French is actually what is being spoken, in the English text, is rendered even more realistically when Fifi becomes suspicious at Roseau's sudden switch to English. The dialogue reveals the women's attempts to communicate with each other, but their difference and separateness is exposed through their different languages and different ways of speaking,which suggests different worldviews.

Fifi returns to comfort Roseau the following day and instead of bringing her a detective story, the French woman reads poetry to her:

> Dans le chemin libre de mes années
> Je marchais fière et je me suis arrêtée.
>
> 'Thou hast bound my ankles with silken cords.
>
> 'Que j'oublie les mot que ne disent pas mon amour,
> Les gestes que ne doivent pas t'enlacer,
> Que l'horizon se ferme à ton sourire. . .
>
> 'Mais je t'en conjure, ô Sylvius,comme la plus humble des
> choses qui ont une place dans ta maison - garde moi

> In other words: you won't be rotten - now. Will you, will you? I'll do anything you like, but be kind to me, won't you, won't you? .
> Not that it didn't sound better in French (180 -81)

Roseau is disturbed that Fifi, ' a ruin of a woman' is voicing her own moods and thoughts and asks instead for a detective story. Yet when she does get the detective story, she finds herself looking again at the poem and repeating : 'Sylvius, qu'en feras -tu?'. . . Later she meets Fifi's gigolo who she dubs Sylvius and is surprised to find that there is nothing of the blond beast about him. He is incredibly handsome with a sweet mouth.

The Parnassian poem which suggests the writings of Théophile Gautier (1811 -72) and Leconte de Lisle (1818 -94) is placed in an incongruous context - that of two women using it as a means of expressing their grief and consoling themselves. The incongruity derives from the position of these women as social outcasts removed from the ideological framework which produces and sustains 'l'art pour l'art' which was an organising principle and a slogan for les Parnassiens. The poetry is not only interpreted and used by the characters to express their emotional suffering,it is also treated in a bathetic manner; 'not that it didn't sound better in French'. The bitter and banal comments remove the mystique and beauty from the words uncovering the sordid and humiliating state of being which it describes. The relationship between the poem and the character is a dialectical one. If the social reality of the two outcasts exposes the poem, the use of the poem as a metaphor for their suffering constructs an explicitly literary ambience for the characters' lives and problems. The structural

status of the poetry and the characters is on the same level.

When Fifi's gigolo kills her for her obsessive jealousy Roseau reads about the incident in the newspaper and considers it a horrible and sordid affair. She feels little regret that Fifi has died and hates herself for not feeling more:

> But next morning while she was packing she opened the book of poems, slim. much handled, still lying on the table, and searched for the verse Fifi had read:
>
> > 'Maintenant je puis marcher légère,
> > J'ai mis toute ma vie aux mains de mon amant
> > Chante, chante ma vie aux mains de mon amant.'
>
> Suddenly Roseau began to cry.
> 'O poor Fifi! O poor Fifi!
>
> In that disordered room in the midst of her packing she cried bitterly, heartbroken.
>
> Till, in the yellow sunshine that streamed into the room, she imagined that she saw her friend's gay and childlike soul, freed from its gross body, mocking her gently for her sentimental tears. (187)

The words of the poem are revealed ironically to have come true. Fifi, in death, can now walk lightly as her life had been laid in the hands of her lover. It is the life of the character that evaporates into something ephemeral , a streak of yellow sunlight, and the work of art which remains.

In her first literary effort Rhys reveals explicitly her West Indian background in three short stories. When Ford observes that she controls her technical crafting with deliberation, refusing to introduce Flaubertian atmosphere into her work, he also suggested a possible source for her thematic concerns:

> Her business was with passion, hardship, emotions: the locality in which these things are endured is immaterial. So she hands you the Antilles with its sea and sky - 'the loveliest, deepest sea in the world - the Caribbean! - the effects of landscape on the emotions and passions of a child being so penetrative but lets Montparnasse, or London, or Vienna go. She is probably right. Something human, should indeed, be dearer to one than all the topographies of the world (Tigers 139)

Ford's observation is worthy of close examination because it provides obliquely useful clues to Rhys's art. When Ford observes: 'she hands you the Antilles with its sea and sky. . . the effect of landscape being so penetrative, but lets Montparnasse go,' he is suggesting that the West Indies is no more than a picturesque landscape which penetrated Rhys's passions and emotions as a child. To challenge or criticise this perception is outside the scope of the study. It is possible to discern in Ford's comments, however, a recognition that the West Indies shaped irreversibly and more deeply than anywhere else the sensibility of his protégée. I wish to suggest that it is more than the effects of the landscape on a child which emerges from her work.

In Part One I tried to demonstrate the way in which Rhys's writing was almost at the expense of her life. For the writer, art is self-contained and its creations and changes are determined by the internal force of the writing itself and the readjustments within it of its own elements, than by external forces. Underlying my argument is the recognition that in using the forms of Europe and ultimately in her last novel, distilling these forms to create a wholly West Indian work, she changes and transmutes not only the forms themselves but the 'reality' which

the techniques seek to render. For the purposes of my discussion I have had to emphasize the distinctions perceived by Rhys between the two cultures. In her oeuvre Rhys insists on the wide sargasso sea of historical ,social and spiritual differences, even as she recognises the connections which inhere in the common language itself. It is language and a literary tradition which bonds the two aspects of her reality.

The short story 'Mixing Cocktails' provides an interesting study of the way in which Rhys mixes elements of European art forms with aspects of West Indian landscape and nature to produce a literary artefact. The story introduces a recurring leitmotif in the Rhys oeuvre - the sun. The overtly West Indian setting suggests sunshine associated with that region of the world:

> It was very difficult to look at the sea in the middle of the day. The light made it so flash and glitter: it was necessary to screw the eyes up tight before looking. Everything was still and languid , worshipping the sun (163)

The sun in this passage is the focus of attention. The rest of the environment and the narrating consciousness are bedazzled and subdued by the power and pervasiveness. However, the perception of the sun and the environment is refracted through the vision of an observing self and external phenomena become an image and instrument of consciousness. The child narrator places perception, reverie, thoughts and dreams over action. The day and the passage

of time is divided up into dreams:

> Lying in the hammock, swinging cautiously for the ropes creaked one dreamt. . . . The morning dream was the best - very early, before the sun was properly up. The sea was then a very tender blue, like the dress of the Virgin Mary, and on it were little white triangles. The fishing boats. . . .
>
> The midday dream was languid too - vague, tinged with melancholy as one stared at the hard blue, blue sky. . . .
>
> The afternoon dream is a materialistic one. . .
>
> A warm,velvety, sweet-smelling night but frightening and disturbing if one is alone in the hammock (163 -64)

Apart from the descriptions of the sun and sea, the actual place name is given; 'A wild place, Dominica. Savage and lost'. Yet the evocation of the landscape tends to the plasticity of visual arts: 'the very tender blue' of the sea with 'little white triangles', 'the endless blue' of the day which intensifies into 'the hard, blue, blue sky' seen through the rays of the midday sun and ' a purple sea with a sky to match it' are clusters of image which make the reader 'see' the setting being rendered. Rhys's use of the West Indian sun to render a West Indian sensibility incorporates the techniques not only of Symbolist poets, but suggests Van Gogh's sun worship, Cézanne's 'terrific' sun.

Virginia Woolf's <u>The Waves</u> (1931) a work published after Rhys's short stories also uses the sun - the morning, midday and afternoon sun. Woolf, like Rhys had an interest in the plastic arts and her

closeness to Roger Fry who introduced the Impressionists and Post Impressionists to London would have increased her contact their work. In her short story, Rhys demonstrates her own connections to the European Zeitgeist and manipulates some of the prevailing artistic concerns. The organisation of colour, scenery, images and refractions through the consciousness of the viewer/protagonist also bears affinity to the Renaissance preoccupation with perspective. Modernist artists also used this technique extensively. It makes possible a mode of presentation in which the fictional world is rendered as a unified spectacle - the viewer of the landscape/picture and the landscape itself are both constructed within an artistic frame. 'Mixing Cocktails' reveals far more than the effects of landscape on the writer's imagination. It demonstrates her selection of aspects of European technical practices to render not so much a reality, but a perception.

The use of the colours and images of the plastic arts is a familiar motif in Rhys's art even from the earliest stages. In another story in her first volume, 'Tea With an Artist', James Lindroth identifies a 'Whistlerian moment' (Arrangements in Silver and Grey' 135 -39). He suggests that the story demonstrates an arrangement of colour which evokes the works of Post Impressionist painter, James Whistler. The story describes an afternoon spent, an English woman in the company of Flemish Impressionist painter, Verhausen, who is a friend of another painter Van Hoyt.. The visual details of the room in which he keeps paintings he refuses to exhibit or sell are carefully rendered: the room is large, the walls unencumbered,

on the floor the pictures are all turned down. The table is spread with a white cloth and there are blue cups and saucers , a plate of gingerbread cut into slices and thickly buttered. Verhausen's overcoat was spotted with the reminiscenes of many meals. The descriptions evoke visual images. The colours of the paintings are withheld , suggesting blank spaces; the blue of the cups and saucers are echoed in the blue of the painter's eyes. The yellow is suggested by the thick slices of butter. The "reminiscences of many meals" preserves the suggestion of a multi-coloured picture, and the word 'reminiscences' renders the distasteful description formally distant.

The work which strikes the protagonist as 'great art' was a picture of a peasant woman who was entirely destitute of lightness or grace; 'but all the poisonous charm of life beyond the pale was in her pose, and in her smouldering eyes - all its deadly bitterness and fatigue in her fixed smile' (Tigers 159) . As the narrator is about to tell him that it reminds her of a portrait of Manet's, the original comes carrying a bag of grocery. The real person, the artist's mistress threatens the artist's arrangement. In the picture, the mirrors, the glass of green liquer, and the sofa on which the girl has been carefully posed hold the quotidian at bay; outside of the picture the same person 'becomes, heavy, placid , uninteresting' (160) She turns to Verhausen and remarks that she had brought two artichokes. As the narrator departs she recalls a yellow dog which she had seen at the entrance to Verhausen's house .. The vivid colouring suggested by the artichokes and the yellow enhance. the sense of a palette of colours. As she walks home the narrator remembers the model's

hands and the way it had touched the artist's cheeks. Through the final emphasis on the framing of hands, Rhys duplicates the aesthetic transformation of the mundane achieved by Verhausen in his picture of the girl holding the glass of green liquer, and the story ends not with the ugliness of the everyday but with a Whistlerian reverie.

I shall return to Rhys's use of colour imagery and symbolism as a means of demonstrating how her use of this motif evolves to render a West Indian sensibility in Wide Sargasso Sea.

(2)

QUARTET

The use of musical forms and techniques in the novel is as typical of the period in which Rhys wrote her early works as is the use of painting. Nineteenth century antecedents can be traced to Balzac's Gambara which fuses the arts of paintings and music in the novel; De Quincey's Dream Fugue in English Mail Coach (1849) and the poems of Edgar Allan Poe who insisted that music was essential to poetry. Baudelaire adapted and translated the work of De Quincey and Poe into French. He was also interested in the music of Wagner's opera seeing the multiple associations of words and sound as part of a stage-representation, the fulfilment of his own dream of a synesthetic experience through art. In 1887 Walter Pater apparently influenced by the French Parnassiens and Baudelaire's aesthetic issued the dictum that fiction "must stenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting and to the magic suggestiveness of music - which is the art of all arts" (Aronson 11). Another influential writer of the period was Edouard Dujardin, especially his Les lauriers sont coupés (1887). The novel accommodates musical and poetic devices to the fictional form and uses these as instruments to separate the work from an externally defined world. English writer George Moore said of the novel, 'You have discovered the form the

most original in our time (Letters of George Moore to Edouard Dujardin 40). James Joyce also praises the novel for what was later called 'the interior monologue' - a feature of the Irish writer's work which he 'learned' from Dujardin.

The similarities and affinities between Joyce's Leopold Bloom and Dujardin's Daniel Prince are examined by Melvin J Friedman in 'The Symbolist Novel: Husysmans to Malraux' (Modernism 453-66). In Good Morning Midnight Sasha Jansen also evokes the malaise of the Symbolist hero-monologuist in her concern with the interim between past and future and the repeated identifications of time and place; the accumulation of image and symbolic device to extract meaning and shape from her life experiences. Musical devices are also used to shape the character's perceptions. Recalling her life in Vienna she uses a line from Heinrich Heine's Lyrical Intermezzo 'aus meinem grossen Schmerzen mach ich die kleinen Lieder' - out of my great pains I make little songs.

If the use of music in the novel became important in the work of nineteenth century artists, it is in the fiction of the modernist writers that it gained ground. The sonata form whether employed in compositions for solo instruments, for chamber music, or large orchestral works was taken as a significant parallel for fiction writing. Literary criticism often rendered their appraisal of outstanding novels in the idiom of music criticism. Woolf's Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse were compared to the sonata form. Forster's The Longest Journey and A Passage to India were said to be planned as 'symphonies'. Ezra Pound observed that the sonata was a clearer model

for Ulysses than the epic. Thomas Mann's Tonio Kröger was seen as an obvious sonata form. Herman Hesse repeatedly insisted that Steppenwolf was written 'as strictly and tautly . . . as a sonata' Proust's work À la Recherche du temps perdu became known to English readers at about the time that Forster and Woolf were working on their novels. T. S. Eliot was also committed to the use of musical techniques in the creation of verse stressing that there were 'possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instrument; there are possiblities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject matter' (On Poetry and Poets 32).

In her first novel which she named Quartet (a name which her publishers found unacceptable) Rhys uses the musical techniques of a quartet. Employing musical structures and techniques she seeks to render the complexity of human relations by establishing a polyphonic pattern of images and musical motifs interwoven with colour symbolism and borrowed features of the plastic arts. As I suggested in Part One Section Two Rhys borrows from Ford's The Good Soldier the recurrent images of entrapment and these are cross-referenced throughout her text with nature, animal and musical imagery. Quartet is divided into twenty three chapters or sequences of markedly different lengths. Conventional narrative is broken up into small scenes in which imagistic details replace a direct story line. Through cross-referencing the reiterative images qualify the verbal narrative until the novel becomes like a rendition of a song or a dramatic poem.

I shall begin with an analysis of the way Rhys experiments with the basic features of a musical quartet. The *obligato* - one voice or instrument in a rigid register out which it cannot move forms the base of the arrangement, with the other voices acting as embellishment- is represented by the character of Stephan whose imprisonment forms the basis for the action of the other three. The musical motif of counterpoint, also a feature of a quartet, reveals the sound of voices in an apparent clash, but essentially the melody is the same, only the rhythm is different. Lois and Marya seem to clash, to maintain dissonantal positions, yet as women in a society which oppresses their gender, their dilemma is similar. Marya and Heidler's relationship is based on exploitation and need with each person's viewpoint being opposed to the other's. Yet they are both searching for release from isolation. Although Stephan is fixed at the base of the quartet at one level, the imperceptible passage of time, symbolised through nature images, shows him in relation to Marya in an ascending/descending order - another feature of a quartet. His prison sentence is diminishing, Marya is becoming more firmly entrapped in the jail of the Heidlers' largesse.

I shall examine through close scrutiny the way in which the images I have highlighted are cross-referenced and reiterated throughout to render the text's meaning. All the characters, the novel implies are caught in a trap. There is, however, a fundamental qualitative difference of entrapment between the Heidlers and the Zellis. The Heidlers have deliberately trapped themselves to avoid facing uncomfortable truths about their own lives and motives.

Both Heidler and Lois react with savage cruelty when their 'mania for classification' is thwarted. Marya observes of her situation:

> What mattered was that, despising, almost disliking love, he was forcing her to be nothing but the little woman who lived in the Hotel du Bosphore for the express purpose of being made love to. A petite femme. It was, of course, part of his mania for classification. But he did it with such conviction that she, miserable weakling that she was, found herself trying to live up to his idea of her (92)

As Shirley Hazzard points out' error and grief and absurdity have no place in (the Heidlers') life-defeating formula for "success". And their destruction of Marya is in keeping with the elimination of all such unclassifiable threats from their program'. A necessary corollary of their desire to classify is a view that life is an absurd metaphysical dilemma, an inevitable from which one cannot be freed. Heidler says: "I am sick of myself. . . And yet it goes on. One knows that the whole damn thing is idiotic, futile, not even pleasant, but one goes on. One's caught in a trap, I suppose" (53). When he is tired of Marya, however, he does not tell her that he is sick of himself, but sick of her.

On the other hand when Marya talks about the 'essential craziness of existence', she concretises her perceptions by referring to the penal system which changes and diminishes the poor; "[A]s she took her place in the queue she felt a sudden, devastating realization of the essential craziness of existence. She thought again: people are rum. With all their arrangments, prisons and drains and things tucked away where nobody can see" (44). The prisons and drains being tucked away.

shows the hypocrisy practised by the society to hide their classifications

Stephan's prison is more visible yet it is no more enclosed than Marya's in the Heidlers' home. Her path is to the top of a 'narrow staircase to a little room which smelt clean and cold'. (44). The focus on Marya's and Stephan's imprisonment alternates with rhythmic sequence. When Marya goes to visit him in jail 'she sat down on a wooden bench and stared steadily through bars that were like the bars of an animal cage. . . Stephan appeared on the other side. Suddenly, as if he had somehow been shot out of a trap' (30). When he refuses to communicate with her she felt as an 'iron band round her head was drawn tighter'.

Stephan is placed in prison for his crime against society which involves money. Marya is imprisoned in her situation because of her lack of money. After her husband is taken away, Marya is invited to one of the Heidler's parties. The claustrophobia of Stephan's prison is equalled by Marya's sense of being oppressed at the party; 'the grey-blue room seemed to be growing larger, the walls had receded, the bulbs of the electric lights had expanded mysteriously. Now they looked like small moons"(34) After Stephan is sentenced the image of entrapment re-appears with a new cluster of associational symbol drawn from animal imagery. He sits huddled up on the wooden bench,staring at her with sunken reddened eyes. 'The loud conversations from the neighbouring cubicles were like the buzzing of gigantic insects. Inexorable, bewildering noise' (36). He withdraws from Marya into his own pain. When the warder summons him back to his cell, he

starts like a horse.

In the next small scene Marya is being beckoned into the apparent haven of the Heidlers' home. Lois points to Marya's poverty and dispossession and suggests that her only motive is to help the younger woman. As the story unfolds Lois will become the vindictive warder who guards the door against Marya's escape, telling her that she sees no reason for her to go despite Heidler's avowed intention to make her his mistress. Marya agrees to live with the Heidlers partly to soothe Stephan's worry about her and partly out of a sense of futility.

It is through the use of nature images ironically juxtaposed with the circumstances of Marya's life that her own imprisonment is suggested. As Marya walks along the street on an early Spring day, the narrative enters her consciousness and she ruminates on the nature of imprisonment and freedom: 'Fancy being shut up in a little dark dirty cell when the Spring was coming. Perhaps one morning you'd smell it through the window and then surely your heart would nearly burst with the longing for liberty (54). The allusions to Stephan's imprison- suggest that Marya thinks she is free walking about on a lovely day in Spring. However, as she walks she meets Miss De Solla a close friend of the Heidlers' and the woman expresses a strong disapproval at Marya's arrangement with the English couple. It is De Solla who introduced her to them in the first place but her attitude to Marya reveals that she is passing judgement on the young woman's role in the _ménage à trois_. Marya is no more free from the judgement and condemnation of society than is her husband in a prison cell.

The musical structure of _Quartet_ also employs the technique of the 'cut' - an abrupt seemingly unmotivated break, an accidental _de capo_, an hiatus of the action. This 'cutting' technique enhances the break-up of the novel into image clusters charged with associational material. After Marya's meeting with De Solla who passes her swift but inexorable judgement, the scene shifts to depict Heidler's _milieu_, the Bal du Printemps, which despite its name is a small, dingy cafe, with a stagnant, incestuous atmosphere. Even the music is stagnant; 'The band struck up Valencia for the sixth time' (55). It is in this environment that Lois puts into action her plan to have Heidler consummate his desire for Marya. The effect of Heidler's proposition to Marya is rendered through images wed to a sense of recall which creates a matrix of musical symbolism:

> Marya bolted the door of her room, collapsed on the bed and undressed dizzily and with difficulty. The nasal music of the concertina of the _bal musette_ was still in her ears. 'I love you' they played, and _Valencia_ and _Mon Paris_. The sound was still in her ears. And the voice of that funny little man. What was his name? The little sculptor. 'You're a victim. There is no endurance in your face. Victims are necessary so that the strong may exercise their will and become more strong'
>
> 'I shall have to go away,' she decided. 'Of course. Naturally.
>
> Sleep was like falling into a black hole (58)

The simultaneous recall of the music about 'love' and the sculptor's statements about victim suggests a trenchant criticism of a society in which words like 'love' are used to barely disguise the exploitation and self-interest of those with power and privilege.

The criticism of the society is reinforced by the dramatic

contrast between the nature images and the ugly, dirty reality of the prison:

> It was a cloudless, intoxicating day. The light pale gold, the sky silvery blue, the breeze sweet and fresh as if it blew up from the sea.
>
> . . . she began to think of the women who stood in the queue at the prison of Fresnes and of the way they would edge forward mechanically and useless pushing her as they edges. So that she was always forced to stand touching their musty clothes and their unwashed bodies (58)

The women with their unwashed bodies arouse distaste in Marya as she sees in them a grim manifestation of the squalor and degradation imposed upon poor people in a society organised to benefit the rich and privileged. The images of nature, the sense of beauty and purity dramatises the condition of human beings entrapped in a system created to benefit a minority. Marya's dilemma is sharpened by her own awareness of the sordid nature of the society in which she is trapped and she longs to be free: "[H]er longing was for joy, for any joy, for any pleasure was a mad thing in her heart. It was sharp like pain and she clenched her teeth. It was like some splendid caged animal roused and fighting to get out. It was an unborn child jumping, leaping, kicking at her side" (59).

It is this longing for joy which textures her response to Heidler. Yet when she does give in to him, the trap closes more tightly around her and freedom becomes like a distant dream. To render the crucial scene in which Marya and Heidler are about to consummate his desire for her, the text brings together the matrix of images - music, animal, entrapment- to form a contrapuntal modulation of

themes and to render several different levels of meaning:

> As she lay in bed she longer for her life with Stephan as one longs for vanished youth. A gay life, a carefree life just wiped of the slate as it were. Gone! A horrible nostalgia, an ache for the past seized her.
>
> Nous n'irons plus au bois;
> Les lauriers sont coupés. . .
>
> Gone, and she was caught in this appalling muddle. Life was like that. Here you are, it said, and then immediately afterwards. Where are you? Her life, at any rate, had always been like that.
>
> 'Of course,' she told herself, 'I ought to clear out.'
>
> But when she thought of an existence without Heidler her heart turned over in her side and she felt sick.
>
> A board creaked outside.
>
> She watched the handle of the door turning very gently, very slowly. And during the few moments that passed from the time she heard the board creak to the time she say Heidler and said, 'Oh, it's you then, it's you,' she was in a frenzy of senseless fright. Fright of a child shut up in a dark room. Fright of an animal caught in a trap. (70 -71)

The evocation of Banville's poem is used to render Marya's sense of a lost world. Set as she is between the past represented by Stephan's gaiety and freedom and the oppresive world of Heidler, she is caught in an emotional turmoil. Rhys, like many of contemporaries, is in search of linguistic correspondences for human experiences inaccessible to logical analysis. She is drawn to that borderland of the mind where concepts, values and attitudes, acquire , as it were musical features, where a sequence of thoughts is shown to be related to some imaginary modality of sounds. The musical experience is an objective correlative to portray Marya's state of mind,

If the musical experience is used to render Marya's emotional state it used at this particularly sensitive point to reveal certain social and cultural significances - the difference between the world of Heidler and the world of Stephan. The contrast is sustained through the images of freedom and gaiety associated with her husband and those of entrapment which surround Marya when Heidler enters her room. The ' animal caught in a trap' suggests a network of correspondences in the lives of the quartet. Heidler sees life as a trap, Stephan looks like an animal in a trap when he is in prison and Marya feels trapped. Lois too is trapped in her role as the wife who must satisfy her husband's needs , even if they extend to another woman. Each character's entrapment is modulated and deepened by the other.

Marya's entrapment is what forms the core of the novel and it is insisted upon by the narrative: 'Marya sat squeezed between the Heidlers, listening to the melancholy sound of the hoofs and the rattling of the old cab' (77). It is shortly after this that Heidler installs her in a hotel. The clearest expression of her imprisonment and her growing away from Stephan is conveyed through her observation that his prison seems familiar, but he does not; 'She began to have a dreadful feeling of familiarity with the place: the whitewashed corridor that smelt of damp and rot, the stone staircase, the queue of women awaiting their turn the cubicles. . . . The drably terrible life of the underdog' (85) The concrete detail of the women in the queue emphasizes Marya's and the others imprisonment as they wait their turn literally to visit their men, symbolically to become prisoners within the wider social system. Marya identifies with the prison. The

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images of physical decay and rot parallel the emotional and sordidness of the 'outside' world which is a macrocosm of the prison cell. "The prison was familiar, but it seemed to her that Stephan was a stranger" It is he who points out to Marya that her desire for freedom is an illusion. She tells him that she left the Heidlers' home because she was not free there. His response is angry:

> Because you aren't fee there? Mais, tu es folle, Mado. What do you want to be free for? Have you got a job? What are you going to do now? Really you must be mad to do a thing like that (85)

Without the protection of a job, a husband or privileged members of society, the word 'freedom' can have no meaning. Heidler places her in the Hote .l du Bosphore for the purpose of making love to her. Her role of petite femme is another form of prison. Her dilemma is rendered through images of music and nature:

> Marya woke early and dressed slowly, listening for the man with the flock of goats who passed uner her window every morning. . . playing a frail little tune on a pipe. . . . [S]he listened to the music of the pipe dwindling away in the distance, persistent at the hope of happiness (87)

When Heidler visits her in the hotel in the month of August, he is assaulted by the smell of drains and face powder. The word 'drains' creates an allusive link with Stephan's imprisonment (47). The face powder identifies the gender of the prisoner in the hotel. Underdog males are placed in penal institutions. Underdog women are labelled prostitutes and kept in the service of those who control power, money, prisons and drains.

As Marya's self-confidence becomes increasingly damaged by her relationship with Heidler she is unable to let go of him. Stephan's

prison term on the other hand, has been fully served. When he is released, Marya says that she feels safe and happy with him, the musical images suggest that her feelings are an illusion: "It was oppressively hot and airless in the little bedroom. From some distant - probably subterranean - region came the sound of a laboriously played piano" (104) The musical image once again precedes the imagistic detail of animal and entrapment:

> She said suddenly, 'If anybody tried to catch me and lock me up, I'd fight like a wild animal; I'd fight till they let me out or till I died.'
>
> Stephan laughed, 'Oh no, you wouldn't, not for long, believe me. You'd do as the others do -you'd wait and be a wild animal when you came out.'
>
> He put his hand to his eyes and added: 'When you come out - but you don't come out. Nobody ever comes out.'
>
> She stared at him, impressed by this phrase (106)

Stephan's observations of the stigma of prison life and the inerasable scars also infer that there is no liberty for anyone. Marya's words within the context of her own life are seen to be naive.

The quartet are brought together only once in the novel. They form a partie carrée and the meaning of their interaction and their destiny is rendered in the wailing of the violin: 'The violin wailed with pathos; "Laugh Pagliacci, for your love is ended"' The climactic scene is underplayed. There is no accusation or raised voices, despite the undercurrents of hatred and fear revealed in the long silences. It is the wailing of the violin which suggests the tragic absurdity and distortion of love which has been practised. Despite their mutual dependencies they were at all times trapped in their own individual

dilemma. After this incident the quartet disbands. Lois disappears from the action of the story, having completed her task.

Heidler and Stephan, each in his own way, takes turn to complete Marya's destruction. When Marya is with Stephan the violin motif is re-introduced. It recalls the meeting of the quartet and anticipates his ultimate rejection of her. While in a café Marya observes a good-looking young violinist playing sentimental music on muted strings. Stephan goes to have a long conversation with him. While he is gone, Marya realises that the 'problem of her existence had got beyond her, her brain had given up grappling with it'. When the violinist begins to play again it seems to Marya that 'the music had fate in it'. The song links Marya and Stephan as he observes that he thought about it constantly while he was imprisoned. The name of the song is _Par Pitié_. It is Stephan who asks for the song to be played and it contains a message to Marya that there is indeed little pity and what there is is not enough to over-ride self-interest.

When Heidler, in his turn, brings his relationship with Marya to an end, 'the sound of music reached them faintly,as it were with regret'. While Heidler delivers a savage speech on Marya's worthlessness she recalls the name of the tune she is hearing, _'Si, j'étais roi_ . . . and the jingling tune began to run in her head' (114) The suggestion is that Heidler is indeed king and he can appropriate, exploit and discard Marya as he pleases. After the episode ends, Marya walks along the street, pained and disoriented . She enters a cafe in which the band had just finished playing the _Huguenots_

and is arranging the music for The Barber of Seville.

The slow and calculating work involved in the cross-referencing and interweaving of images culminates in the scene in the South of France where an emissary of the Heidlers completes their denigration of Marya. The images of entrapment and animals are brought together in the scene when Mrs Nicholson and Marya visit the zoo. The older woman's advice and observations barely mask the viciousness which motivates her curiosity toward the protagonist:

> There was a pungent smell of animals in the air. Miss Nicholson still discoursed , gradually approaching her climax: Montparnasse, her darling Lois,the husband of her darling Lois, men in general, men who get tired of their mistresses and send them away into the country to get rid of them. Marya listened with a curiously helpless feeling. It was as if bandages were being torn from an unhealed wound (123)

The helpless feeling is imaged in the animal who is actually caught in a trap:

> There was a young fox in a cage at the end of the zoo - a cage perhaps three yards long. Up and down it ran, up and down, and Marya imagined that each time it turned it did so with a certain hopefulness, as if it thought that escape was possible. Then of course, there were the bars. It would strike its nose, turn and run again. Up and down, up and down, ceaselessly. A horrible sight really.
>
> 'Sweet thing,' said Miss Nicholson (124)

Colour symbolism is also used as part of the architectonic material of Quartet. As in her early short stories colour is often transformed into images and instruments of consciousness instead of incoming data:

> It was raining and the lights of the Moulin Rouge shone redly through the mist: Salle de danse, Revue.

> The Grelot was illuminated. The Place Blanche, sometimes so innocently sleepy of an afternoon, was getting ready for the night's work. People hurried along cowering beneath their umbrellas, and the pavements were slippery and glistening with pools of water here and there, and little mirrors with the reflections of the light tinted with a dull point of red. The trees along the Boulevard Clichy stretched ridiculously frail and naked arms to a sky without stars (22)

The colour images suggest contrast - the light of the grelot illuminated against the sky without stars. The adverbalisation of the colour red intensifies the scenery and paints a picture of intensity against the contrasting light and dark. 'Red' is a recurrent motif in the novel.

sometimes juxtaposed with other colours:

> She stayed there for a long time watching the trembling reflection of the lights on the Seine. Yellow lights like jewels, like eyes that winked at her. Red lights like splashes of blood on the stealthy water. Necklaces of light over the dark, slowly moving water(22)

The play of light on water and the moving reflections, motffs used by Symbolists, dramatise the protagonist's troubled emotional life. The personalisation of the river Seine suggests a seductive, malevolent female who beckons the protagonist. As she looks a passing youth shouts , 'Is it tonight for the suicide?' When Marya goes home and tries to sleep her fear metamorphoses into a 'redly lit street':

> But as soon as she put the light out the fear was with her again - and now it was like a long street where she walked endlessly. A redly lit street, the houses on either side tall, grey and closely shuttered, the only sound the clip-clop of horses' hoof behind her, out of sight (33)

The writer also experiments with synaesthesia, a technique which she uses with increased sophistication, in <u>Good Morning Midnight</u>.

> [H]er tired brain could only conjure up disconnected remembrances of Brussels: waiters in white jackets. . . the Paris train clanking in the dark station, the sun on the red-striped umbrellas in the flower market, the green trees on Avenue Louise.
>
> She sat there, smoking cigarette after cigarette.. . . Every time that the door of the cafe swung open. . . she saw the crimson lights of the tobacco shop opposite and the crimson reflection on the asphalt and she began to picture the endless labyrinth of the Paris Street, glistening hardly, crowded with hurrying people (38)

The use of visualization, colours, shadows suggest through the appeal to the senses, an objective correlative for Marya's confused and disoriented mind. She had been trying to recall an incident in Brussels which was ultimately responsible for her husband's imprisonment, but instead of recalling the details of his experience her mind could only register her confusion. The colour symbolism, which bears affinities to Baudelaire's 'correspondances horizontales', captures the character's emotional and intellectual complexity.

In Quartet the accumulation and accretion of clusters of images, colour motifs and symbolism moves toward an ultimate goal. The action of the story begins in October and ends exactly one year later, the following October. As Judith Kegan Gardiner suggests, Rhys uses the imagery and symbolism of her mentor's The Good Soldier, but to different effect. In Ford's Edwardian England, life is an ordered minuet which must be preserved despite the sickness,madness and discord imprisoned underneath the harmonious surfaces.

> [W]e knew where to go. . . always to the music. . . You can't kill a minuet de la cour. . . . NO, by God,it is false! It wasn't a minuet that we stepped; it was a prison – a prison full of screaming hysterics, tied down so that they might not outsound the rolling of our carriage wheels (The Good Soldier 6-7)

For Ford's character the entrapment is part of an existential condition. For Rhys's character the metaphors of entrapment, music, sickness and animal imagery, reveals that she is the victim of a specifically oppressive social reality. In constructing her own novel around Ford's in particular and the literary traditions of Europe, in general, Rhys uses an explicitly self-reflexive technique to demonstrate the voice of the outsider. When Marya sits down to write to Heidler to try to commuicate her point of view she is concerned not only with words as instruments of consciousness but with their physiognomy:

> Marya sat. . . and looked for a long time at the blank sheet of writing paper in front of her, imagining it covered with words, black marks on white paper. Words. To make somebody understand (120)

This scene can be interpreted as the dilemma of the artist-outsider who examines the words, not only as linguistic and aesthetic constructs, not only as structure, but as a means of communication. The basic design of Quartet, that of a geometric novel, is one which Rhys refines and extends in her major work, Wide Sargasso Sea. As in Quartet , the West Indian novel is structured around patterning of imagery and points of view of the major characters.

(3)

AFTER LEAVING MR. MACKENZIE

In order to write her second novel, Rhys left England which had again become her home, and returned to Paris to compose the novel in the very setting it evokes: "I started it in London but then I got some royalties from the American sales (of Postures) and I rushed back to Paris and wrote most of it there. You see it took a long time to shake free of Paris" (Burton 107). If the novel is set largely in the Paris of the 1930s its narrative structure and formal properties provide an interesting index to Rhys's critical approach to her literary precursors and contemporaries and their ideological framework. The preoccupation of After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie is with the literary model of nineteenth century realism and the concerns of modernism which seeks in some measure to repudiate the aesthetics of its precursor. Rhys's attitudes to these literary traditions are based on her gender and on her status as an outsider.

Joseph Boone ("Breaking Ideologies of Gender and Genre in James's The Golden Bowl" 374 -87) offers some useful insights into the problematic relationship between the nineteenth century realists and their depiction of the lives of women:

> In ironic contrast to the concluding visions of social order promoted by Victorian plot structures, an uneasy awareness of abuses in real life marriages, coupled with the growing agitation for legislative reform in regard to the status of women and wives, left Victorian society uncertain of one of its deepest, most cherished verities. One literary consequence

> .was that serious novelists like Howell, Meredith, and Hardy began to explore tragedies of disintegrating unions with increased insight. . . . But . . . the continuing presentation of failed marriage or reformulated relationship as a closed tragedy tended to preclude a thorough interrogation of the sexual and social ideologies of power perpetuating wedded discord. In this regard(the bestsellers of the 1890s) Jude the Obscure and The Woman Who Did share a similar failing; for, despite the vastly superior quality of Hardy's critique of institutionalised marriage, his analysis is ensconced as Allen's is in a conventional view of sexual opposition and in a traditionally shaped plot paradigm whose irrevocable movement toward tragic frustration conserves the social ideology it purports to eschew.

The realist writers in English at that period had as their literary precursors Balzac, Zola, Flaubert, Tolstoy and Turgenev. Another important writer of the realist tradition omitted by Boone's analysis is George Moore, who perhaps more than his contemporaries was influenced by Zola in particular. Writers like Hardy and Allen were limited in their depiction of women's lives not only by the weight of received ideological assumptions but also by the limitation of the form of the genre in which they worked.

One writer who sought to tackle this problem was Henry James. He was antagonistic to the feminist movement of his day and his perception of womanhood is sometimes ambiguous, but critics such as Annette Niemtzow ('Marriage and the New Woman in The Portrait of a Lady 377 -95) and Judith Fetterley (The Resisting Reader) have offered radical re-readings of the form of James's novels and his critical theories which demonstrate how he sought to confront the problems relating to the form of the novel and the depiction of womanhood.

James longed for a more psychologically accurate depiction of relationship between the sexes which meant attacking the forms and themes typifying the conventional novel of love and marriage. Embodied in these forms and themes was a constricting ideology of sexuality whose entire network of meanings, values and presuppositions became a potential target for attack subjected to a 'modern' unraveling in the name of innovation (Boone 374). James looked forward to the day when 'the female pen smashes with final resonance the window of restrictive convention, prophesying that nothing will be more salient in sparking the needed renewal of the novel than the revolution taking place in the position and outlook of women - and taking place much more deeply in the quiet than the noise of surface demonstrations'. As a forerunner of modernism James laid the groundwork which would be built on. In Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, Christina Stead's The Man Who Loved Children, among others, it is possible to observe that at least part of James' hopes and predictions has been realised.

In After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie Rhys smashes the window of restrictive convention even more resonantly by dispensing with the convention of marriage as the forum in which sexual relationships were often played out even by James's heirs. In her novel Rhys draws upon the conventions of nineteenth century realism to expose the ideological embodiment of the genre. Her criticism is deflected into narrative structures and formal experiments which reveal an unsettling critique of the sexual and social values endemic to the sexual and social values of traditional realism. The novel has

a dual structure: (1) an imitation of the plot of the realist novel and (2)formal and structural experiments which are clearly modernist and which disrupt the expectations invested in the precursory mode of writing. Mr Mackenzie seeks to plot the contradictions embedded in the form and ideology of realist fiction by juxtaposing formal innovations with an anachronistic mode of plotting. In grounding the narrative in a confrontation of two distinct novelistic conventions Rhys attempts to judge one in terms of the other, while revealing an ironic sense of the limitations of both to render her own vision. The thematics of the novel further suggest that despite the repudiation of the aesthetics of traditional realism, modernist writing discloses similar perceptions of the woman who is outside of the enclosure of marriage and wedlock, and outside of the social groups which provide the grist for the artistic creation.

Evidence of Rhys's immersion in the nineteenth century writing is scattered throughout her texts and her letters. Anna, the naive protagonist of Voyage in the Dark reads from Zola's Nana, which describes in moralising tones the demise of a woman of ill-repute. Maudie, Anna's friend observes that it is a 'dirty' book:

> [I]t's about a tart. I think it's disgusting. I bet you a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another. Besides, all books are like that - just somebody stuffing you up (Voyage 10)

Anna, whose name is an acronym for Nana is treated like a 'tart' by the doctor who attends to her after a botched abortion. Norah the dutiful sister in Mr. Mackenzie echoes ironically Ibsen's Norah in A Dolls' House. Rhys expresses a deep and lasting affection

for George Moore's Esther Waters which she read about 'sixty'times. 'It's beautifully done and doesn't date a bit. . . I don't know why Esther Waters has this magic effect on me. . . . Still there it is. . . Magic for me. . . Every time'(Letters 73 & 103) Rhys's interest in Esther Waters could possibly be due more to the form which is strongly influenced by French writers.

After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie is in one sense a quest novel, a kind of picaresque work. The social outcast Julia wanders from place to place observing with sharpness and insight the contradictions and repressions in society which organises itself to exclude those it considers not respectable and not valuable. Each chapter of the work has a standard heading which provides a more or less straightforward clue to the contents.[2] The linear development and careful plotting of Julia's chilling odyssesy are staple techniques of the realist tradition. Catherine Belsey cites features of 'classic realism' which are pertinent to a discussion of the intention of Mr. Mackenzie

> Classic realist narrative. . . turns on the creation of an enigma through the precipitation of disorder which throws into disarray the conventional cultural and signifying systems. Among the commonest sources of disorder at the level of plot in classic realism are murder, war, a journey or love. But the story moves toward closure which is also disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order, recognizable as reinstatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself (Critical Practice 70)

In crude terms, Julia's journey is a quest for love, acceptance and identity. After leaving Mr Mackenzie her life plots a journey through the streets of London and Paris searching for and not finding acceptance and support. The novel closes with her return to Paris to meet again

Mr. Mackenzie who gives her a drink and money, closing the events and reinstating the order which we understand to have preceded the telling of the story itself.

The expressive aspects of the novel are subverted by the structural techniques of symbolic representation, temporal and spatial dislocation, juxtapostion, stream of consciousness and mirroring techniques. I shall examine these aspects through close scrutiny of some of the key episodes in the work The novel opens with a description of the room in which Julia is hiding until the sore and cringing feeling which is a legacy of her relationship with Mr. Mackenzie has departed. However she receives a letter advising her that the sums of money provided by his lawyer for her support are now being suspended. Her determination to hide away is undermined by the power of Mackenzie and his lawyers. When Julia does leave her room, a strategically placed image suggests her destiny:

> That afternoon she stood for a long time. . . looking at the picture representing a male figure encircled by what appeared to be a huge mauve corkscrew. At the end of the picture was written, "La vie est un spiral, flottant dans l'espace, que les hommes grimpent et redescendent très, très, très sérieusement" (13)

The work of art is suggestive of Julia's attempts to seek human contact by journey from Paris to London back to Paris again in decreasing circles of hope and possibilities. The image of the work of art objectifies the character's existence and suggests the absurdity not only of her life, but of all life.

Art is not only a symbolic representation of the life of the protagonist, it is also a means of giving shape and meaning

to her existence. A painting by Impressionist painter Amadeo Modigliani becomes the node by which Julia tries to centre her experiences. The protagonist recalls that even as she tried to explain to another woman the events and experiences she had known,it was the woman in the Modigliani painting who seemed to be listening to her:

> I felt as if the woman inthe picture were laughing at me and saying: "I am more real than you. But at the same time I am you . I'm all that matters of you. And I felt as if all my life and all myself were floating away from me like smoke and there was nothing to lay hold of -nothing (40 -41)

Embedded in the passage is a core preoccupation in the Rhys oeuvre - art as a means of experiencing and giving meaning to the world, and art as a means of communication. Julia fails in her efforts to communicate with the other woman and the painting mocks her. She is frightened by the sense that her inability to reach out makes her essentially nothing; "I was frightened, and yet I knew that if I could get to the end of what I was feeling it would be the truth about myself and about the world and about everything that one puzzles and pains about all the time" (41) What frightens Julia is her confrontation with the void. Her efforts at seeking meaning through the work of art fails. Art does not represent an illusory world without contradictions. It is not a means by which suffering is redeemed. It reveals and imposes pain and bewilderment as a necessay precondition of creation and understanding.

Julia dreads the anonymity of pure negation even as she accepts the need to embrace it. It's this process which will push

her to an ending, to understanding. She is being pushed toward the terrifying freedom of individuality. The mockery of the woman in the painting, the disbelief of the other woman assert even as they appear to deny Julia's selfhood and existence in the world. Julia's sense of void bears affinities to Mallarmé's concept that the ideal lies hidden in the emptiness of the void; that "l'infini' is contained within 'le néant'. It also suggests Rimbaud's 'Je est un autre' through her experience of the woman in the Modigliani painting.

The woman to whom Julia was trying to communicate was 'all shut-up' and she refused to believe that anything outside of her social and cultural setting possessed authenticity of any kind. Her rejection of Julia's point of view anticipates the way the protagonist will be spurned by members of the conventional society. The social setting of the novel supplies a standard of conformity against which Julia's thoughts, emotions and actions can be measured. Julia's inner world and the framework of the society in which she lives provide two contradictory and mutually exclusive ways of looking at life She is a misfit who is compelled by the circumstances of origin to live among those who have chosen a life of acquiescent and complacent affirmation of things as they are. The standards by which she is judged are foreign to her way of thinking and feeling. Each effort at communication with others throws her back on herself, and makes of her experiences a kind of mirror image in which she seeks to find meaning.

Sitting at the bedside of her dying mother, Julia tries to make contact not only with the woman who is gravely ill, but with

herself:

> The things one did. Life was perfectly mad, really. And here was silence - the best thing in the world.
>
> It seemed as if she had been sitting there for many years and that if she could go on sitting there she would learn many deep things that she only guessed at before.
>
> She began to whisper soundlessly: 'Oh darling, there's something I want to explain to you. You must listen' (70)

The silence of which Julia speaks is the zone of nothingness suggested by her mother's encroaching death, that space beyond all questions and activities except being and nonbeing. Sequential time becomes irrelevant as she tries to come to terms with the Eternal Now, to isolate the stillpoint in the turning wheel. She wants to talk to her mother not simply to unburden herself, but to use her personal world of experience as a means of potentially endowing the external world with meaning. It is a willed impregnation of life through self-awareness and communication. She fails, absurdly. Julia dissolves into hysterical laughter and her mother, briefly conscious, registers anger and rejection.

Her mother's funeral scene is the climax of Julia's attempt to grapple with the void:

> she was obsessed with the feeling that she was so close to seeing the thing that was behind all this talking and posturing, and the talking and the posturing were there to prevent her from seeing it. . .
>
> But all the time she stood, knelt and listened she was tortured because her brain was making a huge effort to grapple with nothingness. And the effort hurt; yet it was almost successful. In another minute she would know. And then a dam inside her head burst, and she leaned her head on her arms and sobbed (94)

The thing that is behind all the posturing and talking is the ungraspable essence of life. In the hour of death, she is trying to come to terms with its other face, life. The rituals of the ceremony in the Church are intended to obscure the search for knowledge, to veil reality, in the same way that the hollow rituals of society are meant to hinder truth and communication. Julia is struggling to pare away the props, masks and defences. She wants to confront the void and find within something of substance. Her painful efforts indicate that the meaning of existence is not a given. It must be quarried from unyielding matter. Her efforts fail. What she attempts to do is nothing less than to generate herself out of nothingness. Julia responds to her failure with tears:

> Julia had abandoned herself. She was kneeling and sobbing . . . . She was crying now because she remebered that her life had been a long succession of humiliations and mistakes and pains and ridiculous efforts. . . . At the same time, in a miraculous manner, some essence of her was shooting upwards like a flame. She was great. She was a defiant flame shooting upwards not to plead but to threaten. Then the flame sank down again, useless, having reached nothing (94 -95)

Julia is in many ways the archetypal modernist hero seeking to come to terms with the nothingness of her existence. Her multiple failures to find meaning as she wanders through a succession of experiences are in part 'explained' by the 'Childhood' section. "When you are a child you are yourself and you know and see things prophetically. And then something happens and you stop being yourself; you become what others force you to be. You lose your wisdom and your soul" (115) The narrating consciousness recalls an incident in childhood during which she was catching butterflies;

> That was the first time you were afraid of nothing - that day when you were catching butterflies - when you had reached the patch of sunlight. You were not afraid in the shadow, but you were afraid in the sun.
>
> The sunlight was still, desolate and arid. And you knew that something huge was just behind you. You ran. . . .
>
> The last time you were happy about nothing; the first time you were afraid about nothing. Which came first ? (115 -16)

The use of 'nothing' again suggests the void. In the void, destruction and creation, sunshine and shadow, fear and happiness are one. There is a unity and inseparability of things which appear to be opposites. Contradictory feelings are experienced at the same time, apparent dualities and opposites collapse.

The perception of the Void and Julia's experiences of it bear affinities to the Nietzschean concept of art and life and of nature:

> [T]he innocence of the child . . . shatters and rebuilds in playful guileless joy. . . It is the freedom and purity of nature that creates and destroys without goals and purpose in the eternal rhythm of the cycle of life. . . . In the Heraclitean concept 'play' assumes an important role. Nature and art create in a playful manner, 'building and destroying in innocence' disinterested in practical, utilitarian ends, unconcerned with traditional concepts of good and evil (Pfeffer 54)

Nietzsche's philosophy and ideas especially those contained in The Birth of Tragedy(1871) exercised profound influence on modernist writers. Artists as different as Henry James, Conrad, Musil, Kafka and Mann are among those whose works examine aesthetically the Nietzschean concepts of the contradictory and dangerous quality of existence, the 'destructively creative' and 'creatively destructive' essence

of art. Nietzsche's insights, Franz Kuna observes, 'seem essential to the ideas of modern poets and novelists; and the dialectical scheme that [he] offered seemed to become a blueprint for nearly every major twentieth century novel (Modernism 443). Rhys draws on the intellectual currents of her age to produce a work which manipulates the preoccupations and sensbilities of the modernist age.

Rhys also follows in the footsteps of women writers in repudiating the ideological perceptions of womanhood through the rejection of the realist mode to convey the relationship between the sexes. The kindly, conventional Mr Horsfield makes love to Julia because she asks him to spend the night with her. He interprets her request as an invitation to sexual intercourse. The technique which Rhys uses to render this encounter in non-realist. It is not wholly a stream of consciousness technique. It is almost as if she canalizes the stream of consciousness in a manner reminiscent of May Sinclair's oratio oblicua in Mary Oliver : A Life (1919). The Chapter heading signals the non-realist mode of presentation, 'It Might Have Been Anywhere':

> The stairs were solid; there was not a creak.
>
> They mounted silently, like people in a dream. And as in a dream he knew that the whole house was solid, with huge rooms - dark,square rooms,crammed with unwieldy furniture covered with chintz; darkish curtains would hang over the long windows. He even knew the look of the street outside when the curtains were drawn apart - a grey street, with high, dark houses opposite. .
>
> When he kissed her her body was soft and unresisting. There was a suddued rumble of trains in the distance. He thought again: 'The Great Western'.

> You are thirsty, dried up with thirst, and yet you don't know until somebody hold up water to your mouth and says: 'You're thirsty, drink.' It's like that. You are thirsty and you drink.
>
> And then you wonder all sorts of things, discontentedly and disconnectedly.
>
> 'But the worst of it is,' he thought,'that one can never know what the woman is really feeling.' (109 - 11)

The episode is cast as a dream sequence. The solidity and stability of the furniture,which suggests traditional , 'respectable' values, acts as a contrast to the drifting and obscure emotional connections between Horsfield and Julia . The sexual act is dramatised through its absence. It is deflected by the allusion to the passing train - The Great Western. The account rendered in the _oratio oblicua_ is close to Horsfield's viewpoint. Julia is removed from the event. For him it is a quenching of his thirst. This perspectival dialectic underlines the sexual division which bars access of the one to the other's subjective thoughts, feelings and needs. In the process the erotic experience is channelled into the image of the passing train and the divergence into two modes of subjectivity. The episode points to the way in which sexuality can emphasize isolation, loneliness and need by its failure to create meaningful intimacy. The physical closeness mocks and exposes the immense distance between man and woman.

Mr Horsfield is linked structurally and thematically to Mr. Mackenzie through the use of mirroring techniques. The younger man had observed Julia and Mr. Mackenzie during their quarrel in a cafe in Paris. He deliberately goes in search of Julia and suggests to her that she visit London. He recalls his first sight of Julia;

"There had been something fantastic, almost dreamlike, about seeing a thing like that reflected in a looking-glass. A bad looking-glass too. So that the actors had been slightly distorted, as in an unstill pool of water". From where he had been sitting, he was able to see the reflection of Mr.Mackenzie's head, round and pugnacious . . . and the face of the young woman, who looked rather under the weather' (28). He does not see himself reflected in the mirror. However, his relationship with Julia ends in almost identical manner, with both of them in a restaurant and he trying desperately to get rid of her.

The features of narrative structure which I have highlighted are combined with presentation of character designed to dismantle traditional notions of identity and to undercut the legitimacy of the pattern. A vertical probing into the internal motivations and attitudes unearths deeper ambiguities of character. The relationship with Mr Mackenzie is the grid against which Julia's interaction with the other characters is measured. A lengthy description of Mr. Mackenzie reveals him to be English, approaching middle age and apparently benevolent. He echoes a member of the ruling class of Edwardian England typified in many of Ford's novels. His lack of a Christian name suggests that he is more of a type than a person. The description of Mr Mackenzie paints a devastating portrait of a 'respectable' man who practises acts of calculated brutality and hides behind the conventions of his society, which are especially designed to accommodate him. Yet there are contradictions within him of which mores do not take account, although they can be used to hide his 'kinks':

> His code was perfectly adapted to the social system and in any argument he could have defended it against any attack whatsoever. However, he never argued about it, because that was part of the code. You didn't argue about these things. Simply, under the circumstances you did this, and under other circumstances you did that.
>
> Mr. Mackenzie's code, philosophy or habit of mind would have been a complete protection to him had it not been some kink in his nature - that volume of youthful poems still influencing him - which morbidly attracted him to strangeness and recklessness, even unhappiness. He had more than once allowed himself to be drawn into affairs which he had regretted bitterly afterwards, thought when it came to getting out of these affairs his business instinct came to his help and he got out undamaged (18 -19)

When Julia comes to him to explain her reaction to his cruel rejection of her he only half listens to what she says. He mocks and belittles her point of view: "As far as he could make out she had a fixed idea that her affair with him and her encounter with Maître Legos [his lawyer] had been the turning point in her life. They had destroyed some necessary illusion about herself which had enabled her to live her curious existence with a certain amount of courage and audacity" (24). The ironic portrayal of Mr Mackenzie demands that the reader cleanse his comments of the vocabulary of denigration in order to understand what the protagonist is trying to convey and the distortions he imposes. Mr. MacKenzie has made clear his dislike of Julia for having been so 'easy'. With this in mind, we know that as far as he can make out will not be too far from his self-interest and duplicity. He presents Julia as a strange, inexplicable pariah. The ironic attitude toward him forces the reader to understand that Julia's 'curious existence' is a function of the relationship between them.

The 'necessary illusion' which had been destroyed by Mackenzie and Maître Legos is her belief that she could be treated with decency. As the detailed history of Mr. Mackenzie indicates, he carries the power and privilege sanctioned by his class, history and tradition which enable him to practice his code of self-empowerment by reducing Julia and other women who are single and unemployed to examples of strangeness, recklessness and curiosity. In Mr Mackenzie, Julia is pitted against the whole force of organised society and she cannot win.

The ensuing action and the conclusion of the novel show that after leaving Mr. Mackenzie she does not leave behind the scars and the effects of that experience. Her meeting with him shapes and adumbrates Julia's subsequent encounters. She speaks at once prophetically and retrospectively when she notes that her encounter with him is the watershed of her existence. "I was alright till I met that swine Mackenzie. But he sort of I don't know - he sort of smashed me up. Before that I'd always been pretty sure that things would turn out all right for me, but afterwards I didn't believe in myself anymore" (38)

Julia's meeting with her sister Norah carries forward the theme of rejection and denial. Norah is the repressed, dutiful daughter who maintains her place in the social order with great difficulty and resentment: "Her expression was not suppressed or timid, as with so many her kind. Her face was dark and still, with something fierce underlying the stillness." Misunderstanding and rancour congeal any positive emotional currents. Julia understands that the gulf between

herself and her sister is too wide for understanding to take place:

> Then [Julia] stopped. 'If a car hoots before I count three, I'll do this. If it doesn't, I'll do that. . .' To know that this was the only reasonably way to live one thing; to explain and justify it to somebody else - especially to Norah - was quite another (51)

The incident of the taxi is often used by Rhys critics to illustrate the passivity and lack of will of the 'composite heroine' in her fiction. Frank Baldanza reveals a characteristic view:"The apparent ease and simplicity of self judgement, along with unreflecting passivity remain highly typical traits throughout her career. . . This passive-emotive decision-making reaches a frozen impasse when one protagonist decides on whether or not to go from France to visit an ailing mother by the chance of a taxi's horn blowing before she counts to three" (56). Yet a deeper truer reading could pinpoint Julia's awareness of the chaos and contingencies which make up her life - a life in which forces from outside (for example Mr. Mackenzie and Maître Legos) can affect and infect her deepest feelings and responses. Given such an awareness, an apparently arbitrary factor, like a taxi hooting three times is no less likely to determine what happens to Julia as is Mr. Mackenzie's whim or moment of 'recklessness'. Julia knows that Norah, who accepts albeit grudgingly, the configuration of domination and dependence of Mr. Mackenzie's world would not begin to understand her point of view.

As the relationship between the two women unfolds it becomes clear that the sister who is considered a worthless outcast arouses powerfully negative feelings of envy and vindictiveness in the other:

> And yet every time she looked at Julia she felt a fierce desire to hurt her or to see her hurt and humiliated. She thought in a confused way, 'It's because I'm so tired.' All day she had felt like that, as if she could not bear another instant. . . And all last night she had lain awake, instead of sleeping. . . She had lain awake thinking and crying - and to cry was a thing she hardly ever did.
>
> It was as if meeting Julia had aroused some spirit of rebellion to tear her to bits. She thought over and over again, 'It isn't fair, it isn't fair' (74)

Norah hates and envies Julia for being the one who escaped the deadening strictures imposed by society. She scorns and despises her because she did not make a success of her escape. Yet Norah does not allow her negative emotions to remain in the open for long. She represses them and blames her feelings on her well-earned tiredness and difficult life. Her life is hard and monotonous, bitter in its own way as Julia's is. Yet their common suffering does not unite them but drives a wedge between them. Their interaction does not lead to shared experience and breaking down of artificially imposed barriers, but a plurality of solitudes. 'The shred of a family life,' concludes Naipaul, ' emphasizes the emptiness and the threat outside. . . Pity and concern are submerged by jealousy, brutality and hysteria' (31).

The breakdown of relationships with Norah and other family members is echoed in Julia's encounter with her first lover, who feels distaste at seeing her again. Neil James is a rich, privileged, conventional member of society who never questions the accepted order of things. From his point of view, the organisation of society is natural,and the natural order

benign. Julia's problems seem bewildering, irrelevant and of her own making. When she asks him for money she tries to explain herself, to maintain her human dignity and emotional sensitivity against his impersonal attitude. She wants to make him see that she is not being irresponsible and parasitic: "She said rather stubbornly: 'But I always meant, when I saw you to explain. . He brusquely interrupts her telling her not to 'harrow' him.

Although Neil James does not want to hear about Julia's life he says that the war had made him more sympathetic to people he viewed as failures, noting that before he used to despise them. Julia wonders why he would despise failures. The questioned is not asked of James, a hollow man, but forces itself on the reader. Why would someone who is sure of himself and his success despise others who fail? His attitude implies doubt, a dim awareness that his success and their failures are somehow connected.

The character is also subtly exposed through his observations about the problems faced by men and women. He recognises that the problems faced by both genders are very different, but he attributes the unevenness of the relationship between the sexes to a biological difference, 'the life of a man and the life of a woman can't be compared. They're up against entirely different things the whole time. What's the use of talking nonsense about it? Look at cocks and hens; it's the same sort of thing, said Mr. James" (83) The situational irony conveyed through the placing of what James feels to be astute and sensitive observation beside

an episode in which he remained aloof, hostile and judgemental to a woman who did not 'get on'. It also suggests that it is James who is 'talking nonsense' when he makes a parallel between cocks and hens and men and women. The problems encountered by women are not a function of biology and nature but of the human and social arrangement of the world in which they live.

Before he dismisses Julia Neil James reveals that he too has weaknesses and insecurities. He is not always sure of himself within his ordered world. In front of a painting which he loves, he becomes 'modest, hesitating, and unsure of his opinion'. The wealthy man who smugly judged Julia's life and experiences cannot decide whether his judgement of a work of art is correct and acceptable:

> ('I wish I could get somebody who knows to tell me whether it's good or not,' he said talking to himself He was anxious because he did not want to love the wrong thing. Fancying wanting to be told what you must love!) (83)

If he has to be told what he should love, on what basis then, does he despise His security and respectablilty are born of his total conviction that one's life and freedom must be bent to the pursuit of acceptance by the social system.

Through the portrayal of Neil James and other conventional members of society, the text pries loose the meanings of words from the properties that have become fixed by their social uses. These words are called into question by the complex reality of even so hollow a person as James. Julia who is not 'socially respectable', 'strong' or 'successful' possesses deeper insight

and self-knowledge. These are the sources of her power. Her dilemma is that the power of knowledge and awareness has no practical value in a society organised according to money. She had hoped that apart from helping her with money, this self-styled 'friend for life' would communicate with her to help her to vindicate her sense of self and of communion with others through sympathy and understanding. 'She had hoped that he would say something or look something that would make her feel less lonely' (84). Julia wants to use communication and dialogue as instruments for straightening things out. James demonstrates a different fundamental structure of experience and consciousness. Yet the ambiguous view of character discloses that the smug, complacent, respectable man of conventions is in some sense more fragile than Julia.

It is through the character of Julia that the author's perceptions about society's attitude to single, unprotected women are rendered . Mary Lou Emery ('The Politics of Form' 418 -30) offers a reading of Rhys's heroes which places them within the context of the social and aesthetic contexts of women's lives in Europe. Although I do not accept the reading which sees all the protagonists as a composite figure, her insights are useful with specific reference to Julia:

> Jean Rhys's heroines [are] ambiguous figures of a demi-monde that throws into relief, broader social transformations. No longer confined, like Woolf's heroines, in familial relationship, but not yet free, like Lessing's or Atwood's more contemporary heroines, to explore their new selves, Rhys's characters disrupt illusions of moral and narrative order with their ambiguity. Were they to walk the streets of a nineteenth century novel, the authorities would

> arrest these women under the rule of the Contagious Disease Acts and subject them to the medical examinations required of all suspected prostitutes perhaps they would be confined in workhouses or asylum. Thus the Victorians attempted to control the potential ambivalence created by woemn who ventured alone in public territory; an independent woman could only be a prostitute and was most likely mad

Julia's desperate and useless struggles to establish meaningful links with her family and lovers are enclosed within two short narrative envelops. The first, a chapter entitled 'The First Unknown' comes shortly after Julia decides to go to London to escape the pain associated with Paris. Even as she argues with herself about the difficulties which she knows will occur, "a feeling of foreboding and anxiety, as if her heart were being squeezed never left her" (44)

The chapter itself is divided into two sections. The second of which recounts an incident in which Julia is approached by a man'muttering proposals in a low, slithery voice'. She told him sharply to go away. But he caught hold of her arm, and squeezed it as hard as he could by way of answer' (45) The man's persistence and Julia's angry reaction is carefully rendered in short, swift sentences to convey the moral and psychological import:

> She stopped. She wanted to hit him. She was possessed with one of the fits of rage which were becoming part of her character. She wanted to fly at him and strike him, but she thought that he would probably hit her back

The opening staccato sentence, followed by a slightly longer one, followed by increasingly longer ones suggest the build-up of fury and tension within the character.

> She faced him and said: 'Let me tell you, you are -you are. . . ' The word came to her. You are ignoble'
>
> 'Not at all,' answered the man in an aggrieved voice. 'I do have some money and I am willing to give it to you. Why do you say that I am ignoble?
>
> They were now arrived at Julia's hotel. She went in, and pushed the swing door as hard as she could in his face.

Julia feels an almost hubristic sense of satisfaction after her act of self-assertion.

> She could not have explained why, when she got to her room, her forebodings about the future were changed into a feeling of exultation.
>
> She looked at herself in the glass and thought: 'After all, I'm not finished. It's all nonsense that I am. I'm not finished at all (45)

The vision which controls the creation of the character of Julia and of the work as a whole is ironic, bitterly ironic. The anonymous man who comes from the darkness of the quay in Place St Michel approaches Julia and assumes that she is a prostitute only because she is walking alone. Her forceful reaction to his assumptions and behaviour bewilders him since he has the money to pay for her services. The incident calls attention, as Emery suggests, to the presuppostions of a (Victorian) society which will not tolerate a free single woman. What is being suggested is that the values of the Victorian ethos are alive and well in the Europe of the 1930s, at least with respect to certain kinds of women. Julia's attempts at asserting herself and her feeling of pride and accomplishment are brutally undermined by the novel's dénouement.

In the second envelop which encloses Julia's experiences with friends and lovers, entitled 'The Second Unknown', she is back in Paris after the catalogue of rejections. As she leaves a cafe, 'she turns her back on the Place Michel[where she had encountered the first man]. She realises, however, that a man is walking just behind her and getting ready to address her. She wanted to say 'Go away, you're annoying me,' but a ridiculous bashfulness kept her from doing so. They walked on side by side – tense, like two animals" Julia decides that when she gets to the light-post she will tell him to leave her alone:

> When they reached the next lamp she turned and looked at him. He was young – a boy – wearing a cap. . He gave her a rapid glance
>
> 'Oh,la la,' he said. 'Ah, non, alors.'
>
> He turned about and walked away. . . .
>
> She began to laugh, and on the surface of her consciousness she was really amused. But as she walked on her knees felt suddenly weak, as if she had been struck a blow over the heart. The weakness crept upwards.
>
> As she walked she saw nothing but the young man's little eyes, which had looked at her with such deadly and impartial criticism.
>
> She thought again: 'That was really funny. The joke was on me that time.' (135)

The Chapter heading, the concrete detail and the narration of the encounter are deliberately shaped to recall the first encounter. In the first unknown she had possessed enough desirability to attract a man and enough guts to assert her dignity and dismiss him. After the repeated rejections from family and friends and the pasage of time, she is now rejected even as a commodity. The

use of the young man is a sharp criticism of the way in which female oppression perpetuates itself in society. His youth indicates that such treatment toward women does not belong to an older generation but is is being practised continually.

The ironic portrayal of the circumstances of Julia's life also includes a critical attitude toward the character herself. As Harriett Blodgett observes:

> Given plentiful demonstration that the world goes one way, Julia would have it go another. Most of the narrative recounts how Julia accumulates fresh wounds after leaving Mr. Mackenzie. . . . Amidst her tribulations,however, a series ofjuxtposed passages confirms our growing impression that it is Julia's refusal of realities which invites her disasters ('Tigers and Rhys' 234)

Blodgett's observations are sound in relation to Julia's stubbornness but it does not seem to take sufficient account of the trenchant criticism of 'the world that goes one way'. Julia's tragedy is due in part to her refusal of realities, but perhaps much more so to her inability to generate a self-sustaining vision which will guide her actions and protect her against the world which seeks to diminish her. An interviewer once suggested to Rhys that her novels reveal her irritation at the way men behave. She replies; 'Yes I do [feel irritated] but I feel far more irritated with women' (Burton 109). If her words can be taken to have meaning in terms of her fiction, her 'irritation' toward Julia seems to be rendered in the character's self-deception:

> "After all why give up hope when so many people had loved her?. . . . 'My darling'. . .'My lovely girl' . . . Mon amour. . . Mon petit amour (sic). But when the men who passed glanced at her, she looked

> away with a contracted face. Something in her was cringing and broken, but she would not acknowledge it (131)

The emphasis on the word 'love' suggests the deformation of an emotion as a means of satisfying appetites. The juxtaposition of her recall of the words spoken to her with the men who ogle her on the street underlines the meaning of her experience. Love and sex in the society which Julia inhabits are defined by money.

After the Second Unknown, the final chapter of the work is entitled simply 'Last'. And Julia comes inevitably in the spiral of her life to meet with Mackenzie again. Yet, interestingly, it is Mackenzie who initiates the final encounter. Julia sees him and ignores him. He calls her buys her a drink, lends her some money and leaves her. Her end is rendered symbolically through the image of a woman in the upper room

Shortly after we meet Julia the narrator tells us that she always applies her makeup carefully and elaborately, not out of love, but as a substitute for the mask she would have liked to wear. There is also another more important reason:

> To stop making up would have been a confession of age and weariness. It would have meant that Mr Mackenzie had finished her. It would have been the first step on the road that ended in looking like that woman on the floor above - a woman always dressed in black, who had a white face and black nails and dyed hair which she no longer dyed, and which had grown out for two inches into a pepper-and-salt grey.
>
> The woman had a humble, cringing manner. Of course, she had discovered that,having neither money nor virtue, she had better be humble if she knew what was good for her. But her eyes were malevolent, the eyes of an old, forsaken woman. She was a shadow kept

> alive by a flame of hatred of somebody who had long ago forgotten about her (11 -12)

Julia's earliest preoccupations were that Mackenzie should not finish her off no matter what. But after leaving Mr. Mackenzie, the combined efforts of the conventional family and friends,the social values which label single women prostitutes or worse, took their toll. It is only left for Mr. Mackenzie to complete the process by re-defining her through his approaching her , buying her a drink and giv ing her money. He does not need to take her to bed since that aspect of their liaison has already been completed.

Julia's avatar,the woman in the upper room , returns as the image which signals her own end. When Mr. Mackenzie indifferently asks her about her whereabouts she says that she is back in the same hotel [Hotel St. Rapahel, where she received his letters]. He has no idea what she is talking about. She also tells him that the woman upstairs makes her uncomfortable. Mackenzie's reply is not to Julia's comments,but is an index to her fate. This technique follows one of her mentor Ford Madox Ford's dicta: No speech of one character should ever answer the speech that goes before it. Mackenzie suggests things must be a bore for her at the moment,while observing:

> She looked untidy. There were black specks in the corners of her eyes. Women go phut quite suddenly, he thought. A feeling of melancholy crept over him (137)

The recall of the ugly and forsaken woman juxtaposed with Mackenzie's observations about Julia's untidiness and decline in attractiveness

are intended to underline how close to the woman in the upper room she is now becoming and where she is headed. The ironic approach to Mackenzie further suggests that she has not suddenly become unattractive but that it is a long process of exploitation and hypocrisy which wears her down.

The end of the novel violates the closure of the realist tradition, but it also avoids the completely open-ended style of modernist writing. As dusk falls, Julia's dilemma is not resolved. She continues to endure. She remains outside the accepted definitions of life and of art. The point of view which shapes the formal, narrative and thematic structures is also that of an outsider. The character delineation, especially that of Mr. Mackenzie, reveals a sensibility far removed from the values of English society. He is very much an outsider's creation. Woolf or Richardson could not have created the character from that angle of vision. Rhys's treatment of modernist and realist ethics and aesthetics in this novel anticipates the intention of Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook . A comment by David Lodge on the work by the South African writer comes close to what I believe Rhys to be doing in Mr. Mackenzie.

> Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook. . .seems to be using the conventions of realistic fiction while being aware of their limitations and building this awareness into the novel itself, so that you have. . . a very interesting, fruitful sort of tension between novelistic commitment to rendering experience through traditional forms and yet an enquiring, adventurous, very candid questioning of those conventions, ultimately raising all kinds of questions about art and reality (Bradbury and Palmer 143)

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie shows an important difference from Quartet not only because of the distinct stylistic and thematic preoccupations, but also in relation to portrayal of character. In her first novel, the other characters are presented as crucial but secondary actors in the drama of Marya's life. In Mr Mackenzie, the narrative strategy renders all the characters more ambiguous, more fully realized; and they are more ironically portrayed. The narrating consciousness moves within and without of the characters' lives and thoughts to reveal their true and their false natures. Rhys's second novel also anticipates Wide Sargasso Sea in its questioning of the ethics and moral values of the fiction of the nineteenth century. The attack on the formal strategy of the Victorian novel of Charlotte Brontë reveals itself to be a culmination of Rhys's artistic enterprise, not a departure.

(4)

VOYAGE IN THE DARK

My aim, as outlined in the introduction to Part Two, is to demonstrate aspects of Rhys's writing in relation to the literary traditions, styles and models of Europe, and to show a movement in her oeuvre which culminated in the distillation of these forms to render a West Indian reality and sensibility in Wide Sargasso Sea. Voyage in the Dark has often been analysed in conjunction with the last novel to show Rhys's West Indian concerns. (Please see, for example, the works of Louis James and Helen Tiffin cited in Bibliography). I have chosen to place it among her 'European' works for purposes of chronology, and in an attempt to retain strict focus on the central argument of my study. I shall pay particular attention to aspects of technique suggested by the writer herself in a letter to fellow writer, Evelyn Scott:

> The big idea - well. . . [s]omething to do with time being an illusion I think. I mean that the past exists - side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was - is.
>
> I tried to do it by making the past (West Indies) very vivid - the present dreamlike (downward career of girl) - starting of course piano and ending fortissimo.
>
> Perhaps I was simply trying to describe a girl going potty (Letters 25)

Voyage in the Dark is told entirely from the point of view of the protagonist. Anna's artless language conveys her youth, simplicity and complete guilelessness. Yet while maintaining her character's simple idiom ("It's written almost entirely in words of one syllable. Like a kitten mewing,perhaps" Letters 25) , the author through imagery, structure and characterization thickens the structure of the novel to communicate more than her protagonist can say. By withdrawing her presence from the narrative flow, Rhys is at once invisible and ubiquitous, controlling the shape of the story and the measure of character. (The author's attitude suggests that of Flaubert). She uses verbal suggestivity in place of commentary, terse dialogue, the capturing of tone of voice, inflection of thought to replace or undermine the point of view of the character she wants exposed, condemned or effaced, while remaining at all times sympathetic to the protagonist. My analysis of the novel will focus on her attitude to time and the stream of consciousness technique, and the use of dream states.

Rhys says of her protagonist:

> The girl is divided, two people really. Or at any rate one foot on sea and one on land. . . Her dream [is] so vivid that you are left in doubt as to which is dream and which reality (And who knows?) In the end her dream takes her entirely so perhaps that is the reality (Letters 241)

The ending of the published version of Voyage in the Dark is not intrinsic to the novel,but was rewritten to accommodate the wishes of her publisher. (Please see Part One, Section Four). In the original ending which Rhys insists is the only possible one the

stream of consciousness technique climaxes to abolish all sense of time and space, obliterating the character's present 'reality' and culminating in her death. My knowledge of this ending will affect my reading of the novel and the meaning of the protagonist's life.

The author's complex attitude to time, as suggested in her letter, is more easily accessible in the short story 'Temps Perdi' written admittedly after Voyage. Yet our understanding of the novel will be enhanced if we understand her approach to time in the short story.

Rhys loosely adopts the narrative method of Proust's À la Recherche du Temps Perdu. She focuses on three different times and places which form part of the experiences of the narrating consciousness - Vienna, England and the West Indies. The work derives its unity and structure from the consciousness of the protagonist who reveals an awareness beyond chronological time and visible reality:

> Yes, I can remember all my dresses, except the one on the chair beside me, the one I wore when I was walking on the cliffs yesterday. Yesterday - when was yesterday?. . . I am free again, knowing that nobody can stop me thinking of my dresses, of mirrors and pictures, of stones and clouds and mountains and the days that wait for you round the corner to be lived again (Tales of the Wide Caribbean 154)

In an ironic gloss on Proust's novel, the narrating voice observes that 'temps perdi' speaks of a different reality to that of the metropolitan ethos:

> Temps Perdi is Creole patois and does not mean, poetically, lost or forgotten time, but, matter-of-factly wasted time , lost labour. There are places which are supposed to be hostile to human

> beings and know how to defend themselves. When I was a child it used to be said that this island was one of them. You are getting along fine and then a hurricane comes, or a disease of the crops that nobody can cure, and there you are - more West Indian ruins and labour lost. It has been going on for more than three hundred years - yes, it's more than three hundred years ago that somebody carved 'Temps Perdi'on a tree nearby, they say (155)

The passage suggests that it is not time that is lost but that human effort can seem futile against the indifferent and unrelenting register of time, which embraces space. It is not time that is lost, but human beings and their actions, because of their transient nature, represent labour lost. Time and its progression erode human endeavour and render their efforts meaningless. Yet the passage of time is an illusion. The essential paradox remains - temporal succession exists side by side with the Eternal Now, which is indifferent to the needs and desires of humans: "'Why do the flowers last only a day?' the girl says. 'It's very sad. Why?' The mother says 'One day and a thousand years are the same for Bon Dieu.' I wish I could remember it all but it is useless trying to find out because nobody sings old songs anymore." The relation of the words to each other underscores the paradox. The little song speaks of the illusion of time - one day and a thousand years are the same -; the narrating consciousness points to the passage of time by suggesting that the song is now old and nobody sings it anymore. The concern with the simultaneity of time and temporal progression is what shapes the rendering of the protagonist's life in Voyage.

Anna herself as the naive protagonist is unaware of how the paradoxical nature of time functions in her life. She experiences a deep ontological split in terms of the West Indies and England:

> Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream but I could never fit them together (7-8)

Like the narrating consciousness of 'Temps Perdi' she inhabits different times , but unlike her she is unable to hold the two in her consciousness., and to make sense of her experiences. Her experiences, however,suggest that the present and the past interpret each other. Sitting in her room in England on a Sunday morning her mind turns to the West Indies and the way religion is linked to the structures of power and wealth:

> The feeling of Sunday is the same everywhere, heavy, melancholy, standing still. Like when they say, 'As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.'
>
> I thought about home and standing by the windows on a Sunday morning. . . .
>
> The poor do this and the rich do that, the world is so-and so and nothing can change it. For ever and ever turning and nothing can change it (36 -37)

Implicit in the character's observations is the awareness that poverty and dispossession such as she experiences in England is a feature of a wider social system which has existed for a long time and is seemingly inexorable.

The connections between imperialism and sexism linked to a sense of historical and experiential time is revealed during a love-making episode with her lover Walter. As in the episode

between Horsfield and Julia in After Leaving Mr Mackenzie the sexual act is cancelled out by the thought and feelings of one of the participants, even as the other remains virtually silent: The sexual act is suggested, not described, and Anna's thoughts recall her catechism which she used to say in the West Indies and which focus on death. The use of the word 'death' also suggests the sexual act:

> Lying down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut.
>
> 'Walter, will you put the light out? I don't like it in my eyes.'
>
> Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte Boyd, aged 18 But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this.
>
> 'Are you asleep?'
>
> 'No, I'm not asleep.'
>
> 'You were lying so still,' he said.
>
> Lying so still afterwards. That's what they call the Little Death. . . .
>
> All the way back . . . I was still thinking about home and when I got into bed I lay awake, thinking about it (48 -49)

The narrative selection establishes a clear link between Anna's relationship with Walter and the condition of slavery. Maillotte Boyd is a slave woman who was being sold. Anna's position as Walter's sexual companion parallels the objectification of the slave woman's humanity . Through the careful selection of detail the text offers a critique on the connections between imperialism, established religion,and exploitation of womanhood. These injustices are processed through the consciousness of the naive protagonist who

apprehends the weight and injustices of history as part of her most intimate relationship and even within the deepest structures of her consciousness.

After she is abandoned by Walter Anna sings:

> Blow rings, rings
> Delicate rings in the air;
> And drift,drift
> something - away from despair. . .
>
> And drift, drift
> Legions away from despair (65)

The little song is an organising principle which catalyses a further enquiry into the meaning of womanhood and the meaning of colonialism. Before she begins her little song, Anna observes on the mantlepiece a geisha in a kimono and a little naked woman lying on her stomach. After she finishes the song, she recalls that she had first heard it being sung by a girl with a 'long, stupid face' who had gone down very well with the audience. The images of women as sexual beings mindlessly displaying themselves are linked to the historical situation of the Caribbean through the little song. Anna thinks to herself that she must have remembered the words of the song inaccurately: 'It can't be "legions". "Oceans" perhaps. Oceans from despair'. The word ocean sets her thinking about sea:

> But it's the sea I thought. The Caribbean Sea. 'The Caribs indigenous to the island were a warlike tribe and their resistance to white domination, though spasmodic, was fierce. As lately as the beginning of the the nineteenth century they aided one of the neighbouring island, under British rule, overpowered the garrison and kidnapped the governor, his wife and three children. . . . They had or used to have, a king, Mopo, his name was. Here's to Mopo, KIng

> of the Caribs! But they are now practically exterminated. 'Oceans away from despair' (90 -91)

The inequities in sexual relations are continuous with other forms of social relationships and depend on the assumptions underlying imperialism and capitalism both within England and the West Indies. Anna's life in Europe at a fixed historical period of time cannot be separated from the events of centuries past when the two geographical locations which shape her existence 'collided' Her past in the West Indies contains much more that her own personal experiences. The weight of history and the way history transforms the spiritual resources of humans are both reflected in her 'personal' dilemma. The events and cataclysms of the past are ever present.

Jane Miller (Women Writing About Men) asserts that it was peripheral writers like Rhys, Christina Stead and Doris Lessing who exposed the contiguous connections of the class society, imperialism and racism:

> It took writers like [these] who had grown up as colonials and become immigrants, to see that their situation as women, and the possibilities of change, could not be addressed outside an understanding of the effects of a class society, imperialism and racism on all forms of human relations. It was becoming impossible to tinker with the relations between the sexes, to hope to modify marriage as an institution, . . . without understanding that sex and marriage are ultimately connected with - some would say determined by - property, ownerhsip, inheritance, conservatism, capitalism and class. To propose alternative ways for women to live their lives inevitably meant confronting class, race and economics (209)

The social and historical ramifications of time in the experience of the protagonist are also paralleled by the

psychological conditions. As Rhys suggests in her letter the present for Anna is always nebulous while the memory of the past is vivid. The people with whom she interacts in England describe her as looking 'potty' and she says that she often feels as if she were going out of herself, as if she were in a dream (21). The dream-like quality which surrounds her personality climaxes in a real dream when she discovers that she is pregnant:

> I dreamt that I was on a ship. From the deck you could see the small islands - dolls of islands - and the ship was sailing in a doll's sea, transparent as glass.
>
> Somebody said in my ear. 'That's your island that you talk such a lot about.'
>
> And the ship was sailing very close to an island, which was home except that the trees were all wrong. These were English trees, their leaves trailing in the water. I tried to catch hold of a branch and step ashore, but the deck expanded. Somebody had fallen overboard.
>
> And there was a sailor carrying a child's coffin. He lifted the lid, bowed and said, 'The boy bishop,' and a little dwarf with a bald head sat up in the coffin. He was wearing a priest's robes. He had a large blue ring on his third finger. . . .
>
> When he stood up, the boy bishop was like a doll, His large, light eyes in a cruel narrow face rolled like a doll's as you lean it from one side to the other. He bowed from right to left as the sailor held him up.
>
> But I was thinking, 'What is overboard? And I had the awful dropping of the heart.
>
> I was still trying to walk up the deck and get ashore. I took huge climbing flying strides among confused figures. I was powerless and very tired, but I had to go on (140 -41)

The dream is a metaphor for Anna's existence. The confusion of English trees in a West Indian landscape suggests

her own ontological disjunction. The somebody who had fallen overboard is one of her selves . The image of her seeing someone in the water echoes the image of drowning which renders her sense of abandonment when Walter left her: "It was like letting go and falling back into water and seeing yourself grinning up through the water, your face like a mask,and seeing the bubbles coming up as if you were trying to speak from under water. And how do you know what it's like to try to speak from under water when you are drowned?"

The recurrent image of Anna drowning and seeing herself drowning uses the sea as a kind of looking glass, and further suggests that one of the selves will become more dominant. After the dream her downward career becomes more precipitous and her English reality which defines her as a woman of easy virtue is more pronounced. Images of the West Indies recur mainly in the final section (in both versions) when she is in a state of delirium from the effects of the abortion that went wrong. The sea voyage and the image of someone being thrown overboard suggest that her West Indian reality is being forcibly submerged. That they return to dominate her consciousness in the final section (before she dies in the original ending or during her delirium in the published version) suggests that the individual's only strength or refuge in a hostile world lies in accepting the complexities of one 's identity. (The ending bears striking parallels with the ending of Wide Sargasso Sea in which the author explores the reality of Antoinette's dream and consciousness suggesting that

these are more real than the 'reality'itself. The past which shapes identities, consciousness, dreams, present and future, is perpetual. Like Anna, Antoinette dies after her dream.

Anna's dream is a metaphor for her dark voyage through life. When she tries to jump ship, the deck expands. There is no escape. The diminution of the human figures in the dream heightens the sense of distance which dreams possess and at the same time suggest a sense of compressed, dread and evil. The images of the priest's cruel face and the coffin are minatory, sharply counterpointing the accepted expectation of redemption implied in the Christian religion. The dream powerfully conveys a sense of the futility and absurdity of Anna's existence. Her dream is her reality.

The displacement techniques of mirroring and dream states to render the protagonist's status in time are enhanced by an apparently unrelated vignette which concretises the mood and tone of the narrative, suffusing the story of Anna's life with a sense of an inherent malignant plan, and an ultimate destruction which she cannot escape. In a Park at Savernake, where she will be abandoned by Walter she observes two little boys in play:

> Just behind my chair a big boy and a little one were playing with a rope. The little boy was being tied up elaborately so that he couldn't move his arms or legs. When the big one gave him a push he fell flat. He lay on the ground,still laughing for a second. Then his face changed and he started to cry. The boy kicked him - not hard. He yelled louder. But then he saw that I was watching. He grinned and undid the rope. The little boy stopped

> crying and got off. The little one's legs were short and dimpled. When he ran he could hardly keep up. However, he didn't forget to turn round and put his tongue out again as far as he could
>
> There was no sun, but the air was used up and dead, dirty-warm as if thousands of other people had breathed it before you (65)

An amusing and apparent digression about two little boys carries sinister undertones. The image of children at play juxtaposed with the lack of sun and the dirty-warm used up air suggests an environment of mindless cruelty and staleness. The 'play' between the two boys demonstrates how human beings inflict pain on others and derive satisfaction from doing so. The <u>vignette</u> alludes to the ubiquitous heredity of cruelty, which forces us to question the meaning of free will, especially with respect to Anna's circumstances.

In the end (in original version) when Anna's consciousness merges past and present the image of the tongue being stuck out recurs. This is linked to Carnival in the Caribbean: watch it and a slobbering tongue comes out do you know I believe the whole damned business is like that don't you think the idea of a malevolent idiot at the back of everything is the only one that fits the facts" . Anna's outpourings reveal the multiplicity of her personal world which incorporates the religious, social historical and psychic legacies of England and the West Indies. Her West Indian reality dominates yet her relationship in England with Walter is woven around the recall of home. While Anna was 'conscious' one reality would cancel out the other, but in her delirium her stream of consciousness can acknowledge and

hold together the disparate realities. The ultimate irony is that having confronted this complexity she dies. In the published ending the merging and interfacing of the two worlds is not as vividly or deeply rendered. What is conveyed is more a spiritual death rather than an obliteration of time and place:

> [T]he ray of light came in under the door like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh And about mornings, and misty days when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again (159)

Anna's comments about starting over again echoes the doctor who contemptuously observes that 'she'll be alright. . . ready to start all over again in no time, no doubt". His derisive attitude suggests that he has labelled Anna as a woman of loose morals and he cynically predicts that her life will continue its cycle The repetition of the phrase forms a reverberation which suggests that Anna's personal and timebound tragedy will repeat itself endlessly until it becomes a part of the eternal cycle of women's oppression.

The connection between experiential and chronological time is made in other ways in the novel. If Anna is unable to clearly separate the times of her life, her dilemma is recorded in precise chronological detail: Shortly after she meets the man who will become her lover, he invites her out. She puts him off, but agrees to see him 'on the 17th of November'. Almost a year later, "at the beginning of October" Anna receives a letter from Vincent, Walter's cousin making it clear that Walter is no

longer interested in her. When she is evicted by Ethel and moves in with Laurie, Ethel writes a letter denigrating her. The date is 'March 26th 1914'. The precision with which the text calls attention to the chronology of events even as it renders the simultaneity of past and present points to an examination of the coexistence of psychological time and temporal succession.

The analysis of time, stream of consciousness and dream states is enhanced through the use of dialogue which enlarges on the social setting in which Anna's tragedy is staged. Rhys demonstrates her extreme care with diction and dialogue, combined with a manipulation of a contemporary stylistic device used to undermine Walter, a representative of the upper echelon of the English class system:

> 'Wait a minute,' he said. 'Don't drink that.'
>
> The waiter knocked a long, elaborate knock and came in to take away the soup.
>
> 'This wine is corked,' Mr. Jeffries said.
>
> 'Corked, sir?' the waiter said in a soft, incredulous and horror-stricken voice. He had a hooked nose and a pale, flat face.
>
> 'Yes, corked. Smell that.'
>
> The waiter sniffed. Then Mr, Jeffries sniffed. Their noses were exactly alike, their faces very solemn. The Brothers Slick and Slack, the Brothers Pushmeofftheearth (17 -18)

The false values of the world which Walter represents and the criticism of these values are rendered through the dialogue form and through the workings of the protagonist's mind. The use of agglutination - the merging of several words into one simultaneously reveals Anna's simplicity and exposes Walter.

If dialogue exposes, undermines and reveals character the epistolary method is also an important aspect of structure and meaning. Since the letter writers are necessarily absent, the missives reinforce the sense of loss and isolation felt by the protagonist. The letters are often letters of rupture. When Walter decides to get rid of her, he asks his cousin Vincent to write to her. HIs letter reveals his patronage and contempt toward Anna as he subtly warns her not to attempt to see Walter again: "If you really care for him at all you will do this, for believe me he is unhappy about you and he has a lot of other worries as well. . . .don't you think it would be just as well for your sakes if you don't see Walter just now?" His postscript advises Anna to return all of Walter's letters. When Anna reads Vincent's letter her consciousness weighed down under the cruelty of words shifts back to the West Indies and relives an episode in which her sleeping Uncle Bo with his false teeth protruding seemed to have metamorphosed into a monster. The juxtapostion of the experienced terror of a loved one changing before one's eyes and the contents of the letter conveys the horror of betrayal and shock which Walter's abandonment and Vincent's insensitivity mean for Anna.

As Thomas Staley asserts the recall of Uncle Bo links his own betrayal of her to that of Walter's, as revealed in his letter to Hester:

> The sleeping picture of Uncle Bo is like a horrible mask. The mask and the letter work in reverse, they reveal rather than hide ugliness. The power of the image suggests . . . that appearances are

> never to be trusted, for they mask human cruelty and abuse only for long as it is convenient (Jean Rhys 65)

Uncle Bo's letter reveals that considerations of money and gain are considered more primary than Anna's wellbeing. Accepting that as a young woman she lacks the preparation to make her own way in the world, he makes it clear that he is not prepared to help her. The harsh sentiments of his letter contrasts with Anna's memory of him as her favourite uncle:

> If you feel that you don't wish her to live with you in England, of course her aunt and I will have her here with us. But in that case I insist. . . that she should have her proper share of the money you got from the sale of her father's estate. . . Tell her from me to be a sensible girl and try to settle down. . . (52 -53)

The epistolary method enriches the texture and meaning of the novel by rendering absent or minor characters important to the plot even as the intensity of focus remains on the protagonist.

The first person narration expands rather than limits the narrative field of vision. Anna's simplicity and innocence throws into relief the weight of her existential crisis and the wider social, historical and psychological paradigms which shape her life. The use of the naive protagonist increases the emotional intensity even as it forces the reader to look past her life as it appears to Anna to examine the moral and ethical framework.

<u>Voyage in the Dark</u> anticipates more strongly than the earlier works some of the key technical strategies of Rhys's masterpiece, <u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u> – the use of dreams as an organizing principle, the stream of consciousness technique, the examination of time and

the human personality, and the evocation of carefully selected and concrete details of West Indian life. Published exactly ten years after she started her writing career, Voyage is the product of a mature craftswoman who , with slow laborious work, draws upon the raw material of literary models and precursors to carve out a distinctive artefact which renders her own point of view. If her viewpoint is distinct from the European models, she reveals an increasing sureness in her adroit handling of technical forms.

With each novel the prose becomes more taut, more spare. Descriptive writing is reduced to a minimum and increasingly the emphasis is on the recreation of even more complex states of being. Rhys progressively challenges herself to refine her approaches to form, structure and characterization, and to move beyond a conçern with art as mimesis. There is an acclerated movement in her oeuvre to construct with increasing complexity the artifice of a literary world. In Voyage , an unnamed island situated 15 10' and 15 40' and 61 14' and 61 39' - the exact location of Dominica-is the ballast on which she constructs a literary recall of the West Indies. Her next novel, her outstanding achievemnent of the interbellum years Good Morning Midnight, uses the concerns of modernist Europe as the raw material out of which she creates her own fictional world.

(5)

GOOD MORNING MIDNIGHT

The essential business of Good Morning Midnight is an enquiry into the nature of language, fiction and a literary tradition. Through an examination of the aesthetics of modernist Europe, its sexual politics, class distinctions and 'silences' are laid bare. Judith Kegan Gardiner (Good Night, Modernism' 233-51) argues that Good Morning Midnight criticises modernist pretensions even as it is a sustained critique of polarizations about sex class and moral values that oppress women and the poor. The polarizations are reinforced by bourgeois and male domination of language and of the literary tradition.

A literary tradition as the raw material for the fiction is announced immediately by the title of the work taken from a poem by the American poet Emily Dickinson:

> Good morning, Midnight!
> I'm coming home,
> Day got tired of me -
> How could I of him?
>
> Sunshine was a sweet place,
> I liked to stay -
> But Morn didn't want me - now-
> So good night, Day

The rhetorical polarities suggested by the poem are examined in Rhys's novel to suggest how apparent oppositions collapse when brought into close juxtaposition. I shall analyse this concern later through an exploration of the mirroring techniques.

Good Morning Midnight opens with Dickinson's poem and closes with an allusion to the modernist classic Ulysses. In between it also suggests, evokes, mentions or alludes to Aeschylus, Keats, Rimbaud, Verlaine, Anatole France, Oscar Wilde, Colette. References to music and painting are also scattered throughout the text.

The relation of the female outsider to the language of modernist Europe is searchingly discussed through an episode in which Sasha speaks bitterly of trying to fit in. As she sits and watches a poor working class woman being exploited under the most inhuman conditions, she observes that the young girl would remain one of the oppressed despite Rimbaud's assertions that after the revolution hers were the hands that would be kissed. The girl's predicament sharpens Sasha's awareness of her own as an outsider, who by virtue of history and language, needs to try for acceptance:

> Faites comme les autres, damn you.
>
> This is my attitude to life. Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis, and miss., I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try. . . Every word I say has chains round its ankles; every thought I think is weighted with heavy weights. Since I was born, hasn't every word I've said, every thought I've thought everything I've done, been tied up, weighted, chained? And mind you, I know that with all this I don't succeed. Or I succeed in flashes only too damned well. . . . But think how hard I try and how seldom I dare. Think - and have a bit of pity. That is, if you ever think, you apes, which I doubt (88)

The problematic inheritance of ideology-laden language for the outsider is what is being discussed in this passage. The weight

of language and received tradition for those, like Sasha, who are outside of the ideological framework that shapes language and discourse throttles her even before she can speak. Language is antecedent to her and what she can say or think is in large measure determined by the language itself.[3]

Sasha describes as 'apes' those members of society who implicitly force her to conform. The idea conveyed is that those who conform are also trapped and limited by the language even though they belong within the framework that produces language. Their inability to think and test and to confront the dead weight of language also reduces the language they speak to clichés:

> 'Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?' These phrases run trippingly off the tongues of the extremely respectable. They think in terms of a sentimental ballad. And that's what terrifies you about them. It isn't their cruelty, it isn't even their shrewdness - it's their bloody naivete. Everything in their whole bloody world is a cliché. Everything is born out of a cliché, rests on a cliché, survives on a cliché. And they believe in the clichés - there is no hope (36)

The language of the respectable members of conventional society is a dead language, reduced to cliché by the compliant and acquiescent who refuse to question or to confront.

To question or confront the ideology that sustains language is not, however, an easy task. Sasha discovers for herself that the appropriation of language by the monied class is not accidental but crucial to the organisation of society. The material circumstances

of her life are directly and profoundly altered by her ignorance of the way in which the powerful manipulate language to suit their own ends and needs. Sasha once worked in a dress shop in Paris which had been bought by the boss of the London branch. The boss, who she calls Mr Blank, to suggest the generic features of his class, wants to know how many languages she speaks. She responds that she speaks French. He is annoyed because he expected her to know French and German. Mr. Blank calls her to his office, keeps her waiting until she is reduced to a state of nerves and then tells her 'Will you please take this to the kise?'. Sasha is completely confused by his request and starts to panic because she does not want to make a fool of herself. She wanders through endless corridors , always seeming to end up in the lavatory. Exhausted and confused, she takes the note back to him and he looks at her like a dog 'which had presented him with a very, very old bone'. She tells him that she couldn't find the person he had sent her to deliver the envelop to.:

> But how do you mean you couldn't find him? He must be there.'
>
> 'I'm very sorry. I didn't know where to find him.'
>
> 'You don't know where to find the cashier - the counting -house?'
>
> 'La caisse,' Salvatini says - helpfully, but too late.
>
> But if I tell him that it was the way he pronounced it that confused me, it will seem rude. Better not to say anything. . . .

> 'Extraordinary,' he says , very slowly, 'quite extraordinary. God knows I am used to fools, but this complete imbecility. . . . (sic) This woman is the biggest fool I've ever met in my life. She seems to be half-witted. She's hopeless (23 - 24)

Even as he denigrates her Sasha stands silently and listens, unable to defend herself. As Gardiner cogently expresses it; 'The rich and powerful take the words from the mouths of the poor and make them speechless. . . .[G]etting stuck in a nightmare of misdirection, [s]he has failed to understand that the destination of the language of the rich is always 'la caisse' the cashbox' (240)

However, Sasha does not so much fail to understand the mentality of the rich, as she recognises how pervasive and total is their domination, materially and linguistically:

> Now the circle is complete. Now, strangely enough I am no longer afraid of Mr. Blank. He is one thing and I am another. . . .
>
> Well, let's argue this out, Mr. Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray, there's no denying it. So you have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month, to lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings till you get me to the point when I blush at a look, cry at a word. We can't all be happy, we can't all be rich, we can't all be lucky - and it would be so much less fun if we were. Isn't that so Mr. Blank?. . . Let's say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple - no, that I think you haven't got And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit. (26)

Sasha's long and impassioned speech is a soliloquy which is essentially a re-writing of the past. What she says is what she wishes she could have said, but did not even think: 'Did I say all this? Of course I didn't. I didn't even think it' (26). What she did say was that she would leave to avoid the inevitable dismissal. Sasha's eloquent and powerful indictment of the social system is a metaphor for cultural oppression and the recuperative power of fiction During her confrontation with Mr. Blank she was rendered speechless and castrated, her legs cut off, but by herself , she uses the language which he had appropriated and invests it with the power of her anger and perception. She also demonstrates during her investigation in her situation a more efficient handling of French than Mr. Blank.

Sasha as a writer also confronts the problems of language, money and class when she 'writes up fairy stories for a very rich woman' in Antibes. The woman tells Sasha that her stories are not acceptable. The publisher feels that 'considering the cost of these stories, he thinks it strange that you should write them in words of one syllable. He says it gets monotonous, and don't you know any long words, and if you do please use them?. . . (139) Sasha tries to use the long words to accommodate the rich lady, but comes back to her monosyllabic language:

> Sitting at a large desk, a white sheet of paper in front of me and outside the sun and the blue Mediterranean. Monte Carlo, Monte Carlo, by the Med-it-er-ranyy-an sea-ee, Monte Carlo, where the boy of my heart waits for me-ee. . . . Long words

> Persian garden. Long words. Chiaroscuro? Translucent?. . . I bet he'd like catclysmal action and centrifugal flux, but the point is how can I get them into a Persian garden?. . . Well, I might. Stranger things have happened. . . . A blank sheet of paper. . . One upon a time, one upon a time there lived a lass who tended swine. . .

Sasha's rewriting of the woman's stories is based on simple, mostly monosyllabic words and suggests the lowest rung of the social ladder, a swine lass. If the woman wants Sasha to write fairy stories, in matters of property, class and money she is practical and clear-sighted: 'Fairies, red roses, the sense of property - Lilies in the moonlight - I believe in survival after death. . . -I never take people like that to expensive restaurants. Quite unnecessary and puts ideas into their heads - Pyschoanalysis might help. Adler is more wholesome than Freud, don't you think?' (140 -41). Sasha observes that these ideas of another life, psychoanalysis coexist with the strict class distinctions, and further, these mystifications are used to hide the realities of bourgeois property relations. The rendering of Sasha's observations of the writing of the rich woman demonstrates Rhys's perennial concern with form as ideology and the need to clean language of its bourgeois accretions, as a means of expressing her own 'truth'.(Please see Part One,Section Four)

If Good Morning Midnight is an artistic critique of the traditions and pretensions of modernism and the social and historical factors which shape the movement, I believe that in attacking these, the novel becomes one of the outstanding exemplars of the techniques of modernism. In much the same way Cervantes's

Don Quixote parodies the novels of chivalry and becomes a classic manifestation of the genre. Rhys's novel , in modernist tradition, demonstrates a preoccupation with the complexities of its own form with the representation of inward states of consciousness, with a sense of the nihilistic disorder behind the apparent ordered surface of life and reality, with the freeing of narrative art from the determination of plot (Bradbury 263). The novel's structure cautions a purely mimetic reading. It is technically introverted, analytical, incorporating its own critique. Its substance is memory, imagination, language and thought. From the outset, leaps in arguments, arbitrarily placed image clusters, fragments of theme are juxtaposed like a patchwork quilt to reflect the insufficiency of narrative. Text, sequential time and understanding are totally discontinuous elements:

> Lavabos. . . what about that monograph on lavabos -toilets - ladies?. . . A London lavabo in black and white marble, fifteen women in a queue, each clutching her penny, not one bold spirit daring to dash out of her turn past the stern-faced attendant. That's what I call discipline. . . The lavabo in Florence and the very pretty, fantastically dressed girl rushed in, hugged and kissed the old dame tenderly and fed her with cakes out of a paper bag. The dancer - daughter? . . . That cosy little Paris lavabo, where the attendant peddled drugs - something to heal a wounded heart (10, Ellipsis in the original)

Sasha's recall of these incidents in Paris, London and Florence is triggered by a fit of crying which causes her to rush to the bathroom of the cafe in which she is drinking. Through a focus on the word -lavabo- memory and imagination are used to recuperate

the past and interpret it. The word and its association lead to an assessment of the values of the English, tenderness in Florence and drugs as an anodyne for love's pains in Paris. Sasha ingeniously observes that the tears and the memories belong to last night. In a sense they convey an idea of the movement of the life and her experiences. In grasping each moment in its total significance, the text suppresses the usual perception of time and place.

The way in which words and language are used to transform events is demonstrated as Sasha recounts the difficulties she encountered when her baby was due to be born. The process of parturition is rendered in simple but poetic language - woman giving life, woman making words:

> 'Courage, courage,' she says. 'All will be well. All is going beautifully.'
>
> This is a funny house. There are people having babies all over the place. Anyhow, at least two are having babies.
>
> 'Jesus, Jesus,' says one woman. 'Mother, mother,' says another.
>
> I do not speak. How long is it before I speak?
>
> 'Chloroform, chloroform,' I say when I speak. Of course I would . What nonsense. There is no doctor to give chloroform here. This is a place for poor people. Besides she doesn't approve of chloroform. No Jesus,no MOther, and no chloroform.either. . . (50, Ellipsis in original)

The anguished cries which suggest the pain of labour are used to render the reality being described even as they are prised from their original context and invested with a social significance. No mother, Jesus or chloroform defines a community of women giving

birth without the emotional support of loved ones, without the financial security which would provide a less painful experience, and without Divine mercy. Their world is one in which they are the victims of social inequities, little emotional sustenance and Divine indifference..

After the baby is born, Sasha is wracked with worry at her poverty and his silence. Verbal echoes suggest an inexorable chorus of disaster:

> A beautiful, beautiful baby. . .
>
> Everything will come right for you. I'll send you in a tisane of orange flower water,and tonight you must sleep, sleep. . . (50)

The unnamed woman, the sage femme, who speaks her 'old, old language of words which are not words' swathes her in bandages to ensure that her body remain unblemished. The language creates a link between her bandages and the baby's:

> And there I lie in these damned bandages for a week. And there he lies swathed up too, like a little mummy. And never crying (50)

The word 'mummy' suggests at once mother and death. Sasha is bothered by her bandages and complains about them:

> When I complain about the bandages she says: I promise you that when you take them off you'll be just as you were before.' And it is true. When she takes them off there is not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease.
>
> And five weeks afterwards there I am, with not one line, not one wrinkle not one crease

> And there he is, lying with a ticket tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him , without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease (52)

The language itself intervenes to distil the essence of the experience. By an almost infinite toning down of language and the insistence on certain simple, key words - 'line', 'wrinkle', 'crease' -, the text renders the experience more distant and more intense, deeper and truer. The event is distanced and transformed,purified by the language acting upon it. It may appear less 'realistic' but it is truer to the essence of experience. The artful use of repetition-with-slight-variation, both lexical and grammatical, combined with an imitation of vernacular speech is a technique which is used also with telling effect by writers such as Gertrude Stein, who is credited with 'discovering' the stylistic device and Hemingway. Through this technique, the magical incantatory quality of Symbolist poetry is given without losing the effect of sincerity and authentically observed experience.

If _Good Morning Midnight_ demonstrates the author's competent handling of the styles and language of modernism, it also reveals a complex use of mirroring techniques - dream states, mirror images, dreams. These form an interlocking pattern in the intricate structure of the novel. Like the dreams in _Voyage_ and _Wide Sargasso Sea_ the first dream in _Midnight_ contains all the essential elements of meaning and plot:

> I am in the passage of a tube station in London. Many people are in front of me ; many people are behind me. Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This way to the Exhibition. This

> way to the Exhibition - I want the way out. There are passages to the right and passages to the left, but no exit sign. Everywhere the fingers point and the placards read: This way to the Exhibition. . . I touch the shoulder of the man walking in front of me. I say; "I want the way out" But he points to the placards and his hand is made of steel. I walk along with my head bent, very ashamed, thinking: 'Just like me - always wanting to be different from other people.' The steel finger points along a stone passage. This Way - This Way to the EXhibition. . . .
>
> NOw a little man, bearded, with snub nose, dressed in a long white night-shirt, is talking earnestly to me. 'I am your father,' he says. 'Remember that I am your father.' But blood is streaming from a wound in his forehead. 'Murder,' he shouts, 'murder,murder,' Helplessly I watch the blood streaming. At last my voice tears itself loose from my chest. I too shout: 'Murder, murder, help, help,' and the sound fills the room. I wake up and a man in the street outside is singing the waltz from Les Saltimbanques. 'C'est l'amour qui flotte dans l'aire à ronde,' he sings (12-13)

The world of steel which will recur in Sasha's surrealistic vision, is a symbol of a mechanized world, devoid of caring and warmth. The damage it inflicts is symbolised by the man who is bleeding from is forehead and is screaming that he is being murdered. The dream prefigures Sasha's neighbour, the Man in the Dressing Gown. He is, like the man in the dream, an important part of Sasha's life. He is an incarnation of the Sasha who has been reviled, scorned and bloodied by her sordid traffic with others.

The visual details of the surroundings in which Sasha and her neighbour live suggest the dereliction of their lives; 'It is a large landing, cluttered up from morning till night with. . . the wreckage of the spectacular floors below'. The physical setting defines and discloses the emotional and spiritual dereliction which Sasha feels and her neighbour too enhances the sense of sordidness.

Sasha describes him as 'the ghost of the landing' and she is always running in to him. The neighbour's description is rendered in images which suggest a Mephistopheles figure: 'He is thin as a skeleton. . . with sunken dark eyes and a peculiar expression, cringing, ingratiating, knowing. . . He is always wearing a dressing gown' (12 -13). Sasha, is not like Faust, a weary scholar, but she is weary of life and its apparent futility. In order to cope with the menace and chaos she orders her little life in terms of concrete experience: 'I have been here for five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner, I have arranged my little life'

The centrality of the role of the Man in the Dressing Gown is enhanced through the mirroring techniques which are used to structure the novel. A key incident which self-consciously foreshadows the work's end also introduces some of the interlinking motifs:

> I have just finished dressing when there is a knock on the door. It's the commis, in his beautiful dressing-gown, immaculately white, with long, wide sleeves. I wonder how he got hold of it. . . . He stands there smiling his silly smile. I stare at him. He looks like a priest of some obscene, half-understood religion.
>
> At last I manage; 'Well, what is it? What do you want?'
>
> 'Nothing,' he says, 'nothing.'
>
> 'Oh, go away,'
>
> He doesn't answer or move. He stands in the doorway smiling. (Now then you and I understand each other, don't we? Let's stop pretending.)

> I put my hand on his chest, push him backwards and bang the door. It's quite easy. It's like pushing a paper man, a ghost, something that doesn't exist.
>
> And there I am in this dim room with the bed for madame and the bed for monsieur and the narrow street outside (what they call an impasse), thinking of that white dressing-gown, like a priest's robes. Frightened as hell. A nightmare feeling. . . . (31, Ellipsis in original)

The Mephistopheles image is more strongly evoked. His half-understood religion is the spirit of evil and negation which can still hold the possibility for good. Or perhaps he represents a tragic morality beyond good or evil. He says he wants nothing from her, and he feels like something that doesn't exist. This points symbolically to his role as a submerged part of the protagonist. He does not exist so much as a person,but as a spirit. However,the reference to the two beds suggests the sexual nature of their relationship and further implies that the impasse will only be broken by a joining of the two. The dominant theme of sexuality which runs through the work is reinforced by the mirror-imaging of the commis with Rene the man Sasha says is a gigolo. The Man in the Dressing Gown is a shadow (in the Conradian sense) of Rene. Sasha's encounter with Serge and his own experience with the mulatto woman in London are linked by the theme of sexuality and the use of mirroring techniques.

The ideology which inheres in this configuration bears affinities with Schope nhauer's ambiguous concept of Nihilism :

> The doctrine that the visible phenomenal world we live in is unreal and represents only a mirror of the inner, true nature of reality leads Schopenhauer to the conviction that our separate individual wills are merely transitory, temporal phenomena of the true unified will. The true meaning of the multiplicity of selves with their private interests and desires is revealed only inthe metaphysical

> unity of the cosmic ,will. And with this identification of the individual will with the will of the whole, virtue begins. The tormentor and the tormented become one; the suffering of the whole world is felt as one's own. The moral man (sic) begins to see his face in the other's, to identify the 'I' with the 'Thou' (Pfeffer 71)

The ending of Good Morning Midnight when Sasha says 'I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time. . .' suggests her coming to terms with her responsibility as a moral person. The ending is ambiguous, as I shall argue, yet there is the suggestion of the 'I' becoming the 'Thou'.

Sasha's awareness is hard won. Her initial reaction to the Man in the Dressing Gown is one of fright and horror. Even when she leaves her hotel, the commis subliminally entreats her to remain:"Attends,ma fille, attends. . ." Sasha's response is to try to change hotels,but she eventually returns to her nemesis: "The commis is on the landing. . . . The room welcomes me back. . . 'Here I belong and here I'll stay." (34).

The presentation of the character of Sasha is informed by irony and detachment. Sasha is telling her own story. It can neither be wholly true or wholly false. Although she recounts the events and emotions, past and present, of her life in Paris, she is largely dismissive of her neighbour. The protagonist/narrator is reliving her experiences with others,and their impact on her life, she hardly notices the Man in the Dressing Gown. However, when he re-enters her story it becomes clear that he has not forgotten her and in the interim he has become antagonistic, abusive and enraged by her indifference:

> As I get up to the fourth floor landing the commis opens his door and puts his head out. 'Vache! Sale Vache,' he says when she sees him. His head disappears and the door is slammed but he goes on talking in a thin high voice.
>
> I take off my coat and hat. . . All the time I am listening, straining my ears to hear what he is saying.
>
> The voice stops. A loud knock. How, this is too much, now I'm going to say a few things. If you think I'm afraid of you, you're mistaken. Wait a bit. . .
>
> I march to the door and fling it open.
>
> The gigolo is outside, looking excited and pleased with himself. He takes my hand in both of his (125)

The narrative strategy exposes the connection between the 'gigolo' and the commis, and adumbrates ironically the end of the novel. Sasha is certain that it is the hostile neighbour who has knocked on her door, it turns out to be the smiling 'gigolo'. When the work ends Sasha needs and hopes it will be the 'gigolo' and the commis enters. This technique suggests that both men are distorted mirror images of each other; they are alter egos and shadows one of the other. The one is extremely handsome, the other is a broken down, decrepit person. Sasha herself recognises that it is through distorted images that the truth can be found:

> You imagine the carefully pruned, shaped thing that is presented to you is truth,. That is just what it isn't. The truth is improbable, the truth is fantastic; it's in what you think is a distorting mirror that you see the truth (63)

Although Sasha accepts this statement as a principle of life her safeguarding detachment which had shielded her against the decrepitude of the commis inhibits her from seeing the 'truth' which he holds. The sexual encounter between the two is the breakdown of this

detachment. Arnold Davidson ('The Dark is Light Enough) points to the moral resolution suggested by the sexual act:

> Here is one of the most gruesome renderings (the truth in a distorting mirror) of the war between the sexes in all literature. We see the frozen moment before an act of sex. . . the man is totally undesired and hates the woman for the very desire that she inspires in him. She looks with loathing on him and he looks no more kindly on her. Once more two characters stand as opposed glasses, each reflecting the other in the worst possible light. But now Rhys plays a most significant variation on that redoubled doubling.. Briefly put, she recognises in the figure in the mirror the commonality of all ostensible antagonists (361)

If Davidson provides useful insights into the use of mirror images, he overlooks the importance of the 'war between the sexes' which is of primary importance in the mirroring game. Judith Kegan Gardiner proposes the literary allusion to Ulysses as an important key to an understanding of the structure and meaning of Good Morning Midnight:

> Ulysses measures the shrunken meaning of modern life against a grid of great and timeless tradition.By building within the temple of Western artistic tradition, Ulysses can be the epic celebration of the mind of modern man. And, in its final 'Penelope' section, the novel purports to record the mind of modern woman as well. Sasha bitterly jokes that the book o'f the modern woman would have to be written by a man to carry conviction. Ulysses was, and for many people, it did. Good Morning Midnight imitated the Penelope section of Ulysses in its circular structure, but its ending refutes as well as completes its beginning 247 -48)

Ulysses as a referent for Sasha's life story works at several levels. Like Molly Bloom, Sasha comes from a warm climate and finds her current environment cold. Both Molly and Sasha bore

sons who died. Molly begins and ends Bloomsday in bed. At the end of the novel she muses there about her energetic lover Blazes Boylan while she welcomes another less satisfactory lover, her husband,the outsider and voyager, Leopold Bloom. Her ironic relation to her literary archetype, Penelope, pivots on the male-defined centre of female value, sexual fidelity. Sasha too begins and ends her life story in the bedroom. As she fantasizes about the return of the handsome Rene, she opens her arms to the decrepit commis voyageur.

In Molly, Joyce embodies popular polarized stereotypes about women. She is greedy, vain, amoral, inconstant, narcissistic and lying. Her sexuality is coextensive with her female identity. Molly dramatises a mass of male projections about female Nature and the natural female. Her final and repeated yeses signal both her creator's fantasy and his ironic use of a woman's voice to affirm the value of man's existence:

> and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and the he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breast all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes (Ulysses 768)

Given the intention of Good Morning Midnight, Sasha's 'Yesses' is an ironic comment on those of her literary archetype . Gardiner continues:

> When Rhys ends her novel 'yes-yes-yes. . . she says no to Joyce's ideas of women while closing the circle of her own fictional structure. Sasha is not at one with nature. She is not an archetype. She speaks in a schizophrenic two voices into which society splits her—

> the active voice of desire and the passive voice of her social role. The internalised reflexive voice of society within her punishes her with cynical self-hatred (248 -49)

The strength of Gardiner's argument rests on her lucid exposition of the Rhysian analogue of a modernist classic and the implicit polemical stance toward the distortion of womanhood and the woman writer within the Western male literary discourse. Despite the acuity of her insights , Gardiner's assertions about Sasha's 'schizophrenic two voices', which precedes her acceptance of the commis, privileges a reading of the work as a social and literary critique, while underestimating the symbolism and imagery with which Sasha's dilemma is worked.

Sasha's apparent schizophrenia is part of the pattern created by the use of mirroring techniques and is linked to the displacement motifs of the novel. In order to get rid of Rene whom she wants and does not want, Sasha practises an almost lethal schadenfraude which vies with her desperate need for him to remain with her; 'You and your wounds - don't you see how funny you are? You make me laugh. Other people's wounds how funny they are! I shall laugh every time I think of you. . ." Rene, benumbed by her attack, leaves quietly and Sasha splits into two people:

> When he has gone I turn over on my side and huddle up, making myself as small as possible, my knees almost touching my chin. I cry in the way that hurts right down, that hurts your heart and your stomach. Who is this crying? The same one who laughed on the landing, kissed him and was happy. This is me - this is myself who is crying. The other - how do I know who the other is? She isn't me (154 -55)

The 'other' is the cerebral,detached Sasha who urges her in a

sardonic voice to reflect on her ten days in Paris. The complex, reiterative use of mirror imagery is further enhanced by Sasha's observation that the most important incident of the ten days was the painting which she bought from Serge:

> Don't forget the picture, to remind you - what was it to remind you of? Oh, I know - of human misery. . . '
>
> He'll stare at me , gentle, humble, resigned,mocking, a little mad. Standing in the gutter playing his banjo. And I'll look back at him because I shan't be able to help it, remembering about being young, and about being made love to and making love, about pain and dancing and not being afraid of death,about all the music I've ever loved,and every time I've been happy I'll look back at him and I'll say: 'I know the words to every tune you've ever played on your bloody banjo. Well, I mustn't sing any more - there you are. Finie la chanson. The song is ended. Finished (155)

Sasha's response to the painting suggests the way in which art mirrors life and gives it shape and meaning. Sasha's experience recalls that which Julia had with the Modigliani painting of the woman. A work of art can provide a means of understanding life and centring experiences. The opposite argument is also true - the essence of the human being lies in aesthetic disputation.

Sasha's painting is based on one which Rhys actually saw and bought while she was working on <u>Good Morning Midnight</u>. When she visited Paris in NOvember 1937 she bought a similar painting from Simon Segal who wrote to her:

> J'espère que vous aimerez mon petit bonhomme jouant du banjo. Il est misérable, digne et résigné comme le sont les sages, les artistes et les fous. Peut-être vous donnera-t-il du courage. Ne désespérez pas. Je sais que la douleur 'est la noblesse unique' a dit Baudelaire. Et c'est du fond de notre détresse terrible que jaillit enfin l'étincelle et le torrent

> créateur. Moi aussi je souffre souvent - toujours, beaucoup - croyez-moi. Mais je l'aime, cette souffrance, car elle seule ne me trahit jamais, me donne courage et la belle colère. . ." (Letters 137 -38)

In the novel, the banjo-player is 'double-headed, double-faced. He is singing 'It has been' singing 'It will be'. Double headed with four arms" (91) The Janus faced figure embraces and collapses the duality of negative and affirmative,past and present, present and future. It is in Nietzschean terms both frightful and fertile, looking at the world with the two fold gaze that great insight possesses. Though the cerebral half-mocking Sasha recognises the value of the painting, she needs to transform her knowledge to heal the split within her - her two selves must be united. When she (the cerebral) looks to see if Rene had taken her money she finds that he has left most of it. This contradicts her perception of him as an exploiter and shows her to be judgemental. Davidson points to the insistence of the mirror technques:

> The exercise (leaving the money) essentially, modifying judgement and saving face (switching masks before the mirror) . . . gives Sasha the necessary clue. The distorting mirror sometimes lies, must be made to lie. Rene reaches the conclusion seeing himself in the mirror of Sasha; she reaches that conclusion seeing herself in the eyes of the commis (362)

Before her final acceptance of the commis, it is Rene's action which precipitates a collapse between the emotional and the cerebral Sasha. They merge in a surrealistic scene which recalls the world of steel which permeated Sasha's first dream and the Exhibition she had visited with Rene:

> A hum of voices talking, but all you can hear is Femmes, femmes, femmes, femmes. . . ' And the noise of the train saying; 'Paris, Paris, Paris,Paris. . .'

> Madame Venus is angry and Phoebus Apollo is walking away from me down the boulevard to hide himself in la crasse. Only address: Mons P. Apollo, La Crasse. . . But I know quite well that all this hallucination, imagination. Venus is dead; Apollo is dead; even Jesus is dead
>
> All that's left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable, flexible arms, made of steel. .. . (156 -57)

Rhys has noted of Good MOrning Midnight that it was aptly named given its appearance in the year of the Second World War. Through Sasha's 'vision' the novel suggests a world of prewar tension and mechanization in which women, religion and art have all become commodities. The suggestion that Apollo, patron of beauty, poetry thought and self-discipline is walking away to live in the rubbish heap (like the banjo-player in the gutter) suggests that the cerebral must merge with the 'sordid' reality of the sensual and the lived experience. Implicit in this suggestion is the view, espoused by medieval alchemists and by NIetzsche that the 'rubbish heap' of the sensual and the impure must be worked upon and worked through thus transmuted into the beautiful and pure. In Nietzschean parlance Apollo and Dionysius must merge. As Rhys often does, she presents the problems of humanity in specifically gendered terms, the hum of the voices repeat women and the Goddess of Love is angry. The musings on religion, art and women lead to an observation of the 'enormous machine, made of white steel', a world which emphasizes the technological and the mechanical.

After the cathartic awareness which manifests itself in a heightened state of consciousness, the cerebral Sasha, the

malign doppelgänger, is confronted, embraced,and thereby conquered: "I am walking up and down the room. She has gone. I am alone."

Sasha decides that she must go to plead with Rene but she is drained and exhausted and tries to will him to return.

> Come back. . .come back. . . This is the effort, the enormous effort, under which the human brain cracks. But not before the thing is done, not before the mountain moves.

The verbal echoes 'come back, come back' reverberate but Rene does not come back. The commis his distorted mirror image enters. They are essentially one and the same.

The reverberations and mirror images also function at the level of structure to connect Sasha to the artist from whom she bought her painting and to carry forward the sexual theme of the novel. When Sasha first meets Serge, he tells her that he has cried over Van Gogh:

> Le peintre, it seems cries about Van Gogh. He speechifies about 'the terrible effort, the sustained effort – something beyond the human brain, what he did .' Etcetera, etcetera. . . .

Sasha' is sardonic and sceptical of the painter's emotions . Yet in her moment of crisis she echoes with slight variation the same words she ridiculed in Serge. It is also his painting which provides her with some release from suffering, and with insights into her existence. Through an ironic redoubling Sasha's acceptance of the Mephistopheles figure will become a distorted mirror image of the artist's inability to sleep with the mulatto woman in London, who was also a despised outsider.

The story of the mulatto woman is the familiar leitmotif of the madwoman in the attic. The manipulation of character and dialogue shows parallels and foreshadowings of Sasha's relationship with the <u>commis</u>, who also lives on the top floor with her. Serge recalls his meeting with the mulatto:

> I was sitting by the fire, when I heard a noise as if someone had fallen down outside. I opened the door and there was a woman lying full-length in the passage crying. "Well," I thought,it's nothing to do with me." I shut the door firmly. But still I could hear her. I opened the door again and I asked her: "What is it? Can I do anything for you?" She said: "I want a drink."
>
> Exactly like me, 'I say. I cried and asked for a drink. He certainly likes speechifying, this peintre. Is he getting at me? (79)

Serge responds quickly that the woman was not like Sasha, since she was not white. Sasha's response links her with the anonymous mulatto woman. Serge recounts how he tried to reach out to her: "I put my arm round her, but it was like putting your arm round a stone . . . But it was difficult to speak to her reasonably, because I had all the time the feeling that I was talkin to something that was no longer quite human, no longer quite alive" (80).

The woman turned to stone by the brutal racism of the occupants of her house echoes the 'paper man' figure of the Man in the Dressing Gown. Serge's sense of recoil derives from his feeling of detachment; 'I knew all the time that what she wanted was that I should make love to her and that it was the only thing that would do her any good. But alas I couldn't.' (81). The artist who could cry for Van Gogh found himself unable to respond to the human need of another, who as woman and other was

'nothing to do with [him]'. Although he was unable to reach out, Serge's experience with the despised woman conditioned his response to London and made of it a place where he felt trapped: '(A)ll the time I was in London, I felt as if I were being suffocated, as if a large derriere was sitting on me' (81).

Serge's equivocal response to the woman is exposed and 'corrected' through the distorting mirror image of Sasha and the commis.

Rene is also a mirror image of Sasha. In their relationship Sasha plays the role of the apparently powerful. However, their liaison turns on ambiguous images. It is never clearly established that he is in fact a gigolo as Sasha insists. Her efforts to hurt and humiliate him for all the times she has been despised does not prove as easy as she had hoped. Rene is a parodic reflection of her past, symbolised by the fact that they had both lived in the house of the wealthy woman who thought herself a writer. Rene was deeply impressed by the ostentation of the lavatories in the house. Unwilling to face the connections between them, Sasha excuses her self to go the lavatory in the cafe and the mirror image confronts her even there:

> This is another lavatory that I know very well, another of the well-known mirrors
>
> 'Well, well,' it says, 'last time you looked in here you were a bit different, weren't you? Would you believe me that, of all the faces I see, I remember each one, that I keep a ghost to throw back at each one - lightly,like an echo - when it looks into me again?' (142)

The ending of the novel when Rene leaves and Sasha longs for his

return, and the arrival instead of the Man in the Dressing Gown confirms that Rene was a ghost of herself, a reminder of her past. The memories of her suffering and humiliations because she was thought to be a sexual object, the way she suspects Rene of being one, are expiated when Rene metamorphoses into the decrepit commis voyageur to whom Sasha opens her arms as a redemptive gift and a symbol of her and his full humanity.

In her early works The Left Bank to Good Morning Midnight, Rhys amply demonstrates her own dictum - writing is a huge lake, and you must feed the lake, but before you can think of feeding the lake you must dig your bucket in very deep. She immerses herself in the literary traditions: Anglo-Saxon, French and Russian, in particular. She reveals, inevitably, particular similarities and affinities with the practices of writing peculiar to her age. The use of some of the staple techniques of modernist aesthetics-

-., the use of time, the stream of consciousness technique to capture 'the atoms as they fall', the questioning of literary precursors and the limits of language itself, the manipulation of elements of .the musical and plastic arts place her among her European contemporaries as heirs of the Symbolist aesthetic, of Flaubert, Henry James, and Walter Pater.

Her manipulation of the styles and conventions of Europe also reveal a particular trait, her commitment to extreme simplicity of language. Rhys accepts that Ernest Hemingway's emphasis on simple language is similar to her own preoccupation,but she observes that

did not know at the time that he was writing like that, she chose to do so because she wanted to (Hall). Hemingway is , however, one of her favourite writers. Her concern with simple language as demonstrated in my study of her draft manuscripts shows that the result of her labour is easy to read because it was very hard to write. The careful composition is matched by discernment of typical reality and exact choice of detail. Through her working aesthetic Rhys demonstrates a resistance to the bourgeois and Imperialist accretions of language. To hone the language she uses is to confront the ideological presuppositions of the metropolitan culture and to expose its distortions and suppressions. The inherent questioning even with the texts themselves, in particular Mr. Mackenzie and Midnight,of the conventions of fiction itself shows her awareness of the limitations for her even as she accepts the inevitability of her choices given the raw material from which she draws. Her perception of herself as an insider/outsider, seen in her letters, interviews and writing dominates her oeuvre. The protagonist of V. S. Naipaul's The Enigma of Arrival poetically expresses a similar point of view:

> A stranger here, with the nerves of the stranger and yet with a knowledge of the language and the history of the language and the writing, I could find a special kind of past in what I saw (Qtd. Sunday Times, 15 March 1987).

Rhys's construction of a special kind of relationship with the metropolitan centre, its past and its present, is also shaped by her response to the centre of modernism, Paris. Most of the stories in The Left Bank and the first two novels are strongly

flavoured by the sights and the sounds of Paris. Paris of the nineteen twenties is part of the literary mythology of modernism,but for Rhys it had its own particular appeal: "Paris sort of lifted you up. It did, it did, it did! You know the light is quite pink, instead of being yellow or blue. I've never seen anything like it anywhere else" (Time, 6 February, 1978, 53). The ambience of Paris suffuses her early works. The description of the city is developed strategically within the narrative and psychological framework of the fiction. The atmosphere of Paris is evoked to reveal character and mood (Staley 21).

The Caribbean writer deliberately avoids the literary Paris which was created by the metropolitan expatriates. In old age, she re-read a work by her first husband, de Nève, which was largely autobiographical. The novel Barred, which Rhys translated into English, records aspects of her life and that of her husband's in Paris. She does not mention the name of the author or its title:

> I stuck a book yesterday written about the nineteen twenties in Montparnasse. Not an Englishman. Very good. Very. Especially as he stressed something that no one here realises at all. The "Paris" all these people write about, Henry Miller, even Hemingway etc. was not "Paris" at all - it was "America in Paris" or "England in Paris". The real Paris had nothing to do with that lot - As soon as the tourists came the real Montparnos packed up and left. Here is an extract, "They're nice aren't they? These so called artists with dollars and pounds sterling at the back of them all the time! As immoral as they dare. . . and when they return to their own countries it's always on the back of Paris they put everything they've have done. Considering that no Parisians will have anything to do with them . . . ."
>
> That is quite true. And if I saw something of the other Paris - it's only left me with a great longing

which I'll never satisfy again (Letters 280)

Paris, Jean Rhys says, was one of the places that made her want to write, the other was the West Indies:

> I can only write for love as it were. . .
> When I say write for love I Mean there are two places for me. Paris (or what it was to me) and Dominica, a most lovely and melancholy place where I was born. . . Both these places or the thought of them make me want to write. After 'Mackenzie'. . . the West Indies started knocking at my heart. So 'Voyage' in the Dark'. That (the knocking) has never stopped. 'MIdnight' was Paris revisited for the last time (171)

Although Rhys says that Good Morning Midnight is her artistic expression of her sentiments toward Paris, it is useful to note that a part of the novel was written while she was in the West Indies in 1936. Her only letter from Dominica in 1936 speaks with a passion of identification seemingly at odds with the creator of Sasha, the displaced person of London and Paris:

> This is the loveliest place you can imagine -everything about is OK and just as I'd hoped. . . . I'm awfully jealous of this place (as you gather no doubt) I can't imagine anybody writing about it, daring to , without loving it - or living here twenty years, or being born here. And anyway I don't want strangers to love it. . . However I've an idea that what with rain, cockroaches, and bad roads etc Dominica will protect itself from vulgar loves (Letters 29)

Rhys's insight into placelessness and loss, as Jean D'Costa asserts, derives from her Dominican origins: 'such is the paradox of belonging without owning, or of owning without belonging, that grants an understanding of exile and loss.'

The sense of exile and loss which pervades Sasha's consciousness in Midnight is reinforced by the imagery which suggests, often, a West Indian formation. As she speaks to the European artist,

Serge, she is transported from the present and is immersed into her own world, through the sound of music 'Martinique music'. The song is 'Maladie d'amour, maladie de la jeunesse'

> I am lying in a hammock looking up into the branches of a tree. The sound of the sea advances and retreats as if a door were being opened and shut. All day there has been a fierce wind blowing, but at sunset it drops. The hills look like clouds and the clouds like fantastic hills.
>
> Pain of love
> Pain of youth
> Walk away from me
> Keep away from me
> Don't want to see you
> No more, no more. . .
>
> Then we talk about negro music. . . . (77)

The conflation of memory and music, a technique refined by Proust, evokes a sense of youth and love doomed to end in pain and creates an associative link with Sasha's nostalgic longing for her past, her own world. The references to Martinique which introduce the song and the setting, and the reference to 'negro music' which closes the frame reveal Sasha's background. Her strong sense of place creates a barrier between herself and the world in which she now lives.

Sasha also suggests that her world is symbolized by a black dress, embroidered in vivid colours - red, green, blue, purple. 'It is my dress. If I had been wearing it I should never have stammered or been stupid' (25). Anna of Voyage associates her life in the West Indies with certain colours; red, purple, blue, gold and all shades of green.' These colours which form part of Rhys's stock of imagery will come to play a central role

in the destiny of Antoinette of Wide Sargasso Sea. When Rhys was composing the novel she thought about it in terms of colours: 'This book is black,with brillant flashes of red' (Letters 237). Howard Moss observes that: "It is as if behind the scenes in the first four books a world has been withheld which doesn't explain action or motivation, but which colors them in a new and revealing way" (163). In Part Three I shall analyse how Rhys's attitude to the West Indies evolves in her fiction to form the wholly West Indian voice of her most technically accomplished work, Wide Sargasso SEa

PART THREE

THE WEST INDIES - THE OTHER SIDE

(1)

THE WEST INDIES IN THE EARLY WORKS

Although Rhys's West Indian 'voice' is not explicit or sustained in her early novels, there are two useful exceptions in her first collection of short stories - 'Again the Antilles' and 'Trio'. The latter was suppressed by the author, but has since been reprinted as part of a collection of her West Indian works.[1] In 'Again the Antilles', the narrator/protagonist is a West Indian emigrant who recalls with wry humour and ironic detachment the complex and comic manifestations of the historical, racial and cultural admixture of her homeland. The tone of the story and the implicit criticism of the social context to which it refers bears striking resemblance to V. S. Naipaul's Miguel Street which sketches deftly and apparently in a light hearted manner types or caricatures of West Indian society. In Rhys's short story the drama centres on Papa Dom a 'coloured' West Indian who loathes the black and white people and an Englishman Mr. Musgrave who had lived in the Caribbean for twenty years and was known to be 'peppery'. The arena for the feud is the local newspapers. The quarrel intensifies when Papa Dom accuses Mr. Musgrave of tyranny for having put a fence where he ought not to have done so. For this action, Papa Dom suggests, Mr Musgrave is far removed from the ideas of gentility: "the beautiful description of a contemporary possibly, though not certainly, the Marquis of Montrose: left us by Shakespeare,

the divine poet and genius. He was a very gentle, perfect knight"

Mr. Musgrave's response to this affront precipitates the climax of the feud.

> 'Dear Sir,' he wrote., I never read your abominable paper. But my attention has been called to a scurrilous letter about myself which you published last week. The lines quoted were written, not by Shakespeare but by Chaucer, though you cannot of course be expected to know that,and run
>
> He never yet no vilonye had sayde
> In al his lyfe, unto no manner of wight
> He was a verray parfit,gentil knight.
>
> It is indeed a saddening and dismal thing that the names of great Englishmen could be thus taken in vain by the ignorant of another race and colour.
>
> Mr Musgrave had really written 'damn niggers'.
>
> Papa Dom was by no means crushed. Next week he replied with dignity as follows:
>
> My attention has been called to your characteristic letter. I accept your correction though I understand that in the minds of the best authorities there are grave doubts, very grave doubts indeed,as to the authorship of the lines, and indeed the other works of the immortal Swan of Avon. However, as I do not write with works of reference in front of me, as you most certainly do, I will not dispute the point.
>
> The conduct of an English gentleman who stoops to acts of tyranny and abuse cannot be described as gentle or perfect. I fail to see that it matters whether it is Shakespeare, Chaucer or the Marquis of Montrose who administers from down the ages the much-needed reminder and rebuke (Tigers 168)

The epistolary method serves to intensify the drama and to create a mental picture of the personalities and prejudicies of the participants. As Jacques Derrida observes; "[a] letter is always and a priori intercepted. . . . The subject[s] are neither the senders nor the receivers of the messages. . . . The letter is constituted . . .

by its interceptions ('Discussion' 106). One of the interceptions of the letter is the narrator whose pose suggests detachment and perhaps mockery. Yet the last sentence, the coup de canon, implicates and defines the narrator in terms of the world which she looks at from a distance: "I wonder if I shall ever again read the Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette". The questioning tone suggests longing and nostalgia for a known, if imperfect, world. The distance between the narrator and her story collapses.

The literary allusions in the short story suggest how European canonical works are 'used' and 'misused' in a West Indian context. The references to Chaucer, Shakespeare, the Marquis of Montrose arouse the ire of the Englishman who feels that the purity of English culture should not be sullied by 'damn niggers'. Papa Dom feels himself a rightful heir to the same tradition. His misquoting is a means of adapting and making his own the literary heritage of England.[2]

'Trio' more explicitly identifies the writer as someone of West Indian identity and background through the references to and descriptions of shades of skin colour and awareness of racial inter-mixing. Edward Brathwaite (The Development of Creole Society) points to the 'inter-cultural creolization' as a fundamental aspect of West Indian society:

> The visible and undeniable result of [sexual liaisons] . . . acted as a bridge, a kind of social cement. . . thus further helping to integrate the society. . . admissions of this interaction. . . must have have had not only physical, but metaphysical effects as well (305).

The narrator of the sketch watches a group of three in a cafe in Montparnasse:

> The man was very black - coal black. . . . The woman was coffee-coloured. . . From the Antilles. ...(sic) Between them was the girl. . . . There was evidently much white blood in her veins. . . From the Antilles, too. You cannot think what homesickness descended over me. . . . (sic)

The exact observation of visual detail, and the emphasis on the gradations of skin colour of the black people, suggest equally a West Indian sensibility and careful attention to crafting.

'Temps Perdi' written after Rhys had returned from the West Indies shows a development in her rendering of her home. The West Indian heritage and sensibility is conveyed not only in description, nostalgia and recall, but through a particular attitude to the history and culture. What begins to emerge is a distinct West Indian point of view. Nicholas, a black West Indian takes the narrator who is white, to visit the few remaining Caribs on the island. He recounts a recent incident involving the Caribs and the local police. When the narrator asks if anyone was hurt, Nicholas replies ingeniously; 'Oh no, only two or three Caribs. . . Two-three Caribs killed". The narrator observes; "It might have been an Englishman talking" (Tales of the Wide Caribbean 144) Her comments suggest an awareness ofthe brutality, violence and inhumanity which the English practised against the black West Indians, and the way in which these traits are being revealed towards the Caribs by the black people.

The narrator also shows disbelief and contempt toward a so-called historical account by an English man of the traditions

and beliefs of the indigenous people. She observes that from his account, he seems to have ' a lot of imagination'. The narrating consciousness observes that she has come to be very suspicious of books which inculcate the values of the dominant ideology which seeks to distort her reality and that of her cultural background:

> Now I am almost as wary of books as I am of people. They are also capable of hurting you - pushing you into the limbo of the forgotten. They can tell lies - and vulgar, trivial lies - and when they are so many all saying the same thing they can shout you down and make you doubt not only your memory but your senses (144)

The story concretises the 'they' to suggest specifically a response to England which is strongly antagonistic:

> However, I have discovered one or two of the opposition. Listen.'. . . to conduct the transposition of the souls of the dead to the White Island, in the manner just described. The White Island is occasionally, also called Brea, or Britannia. Does this refer to White Albion, to the chalky cliffs of the English coast? It would be a very humorous idea if England was designated as the land of the dead. . . as hell. In such a form in truth, as England appeared to many a stranger.' To many a stranger (145)

The attitude suggested is not that of a total stranger, but that of someone who is connected through language and culture to a society which seeks to disengage her from her own perceptions, memory and senses. The West Indies, as 'the other side' of English history, is misrepresented in the metropolitan canon. Rhys, as a West Indian writer, does not seek to disconnect herself from the English traditions, but to expose repeatedly and insistently,the ideological framework.

(2)

JEAN RHYS AND OTHER WEST INDIAN WRITERS

Jean Rhys's influence on West Indian literature can perhaps best be measured by the way in which the publication of Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) directs attention to, and proposes new readings of works by other white West Indian writers. Phyllis Shand Allfrey's The Orchid House (1953), Geoffrey Drayton's Christopher (1959) and J. B. Emtage's Brown Sugar (1966), suggests Kenneth Ramchand, reflect a significant but forgotten aspect of West Indian experience - the terrified consciousness of the region's white minority. Brown Sugar, Ramchand argues, is written by a West Indian of the old planter class, who expresses his bitterness of the new colonial politicians.

The Orchid House and Christopher relate to West Indian society in more interesting ways. They differ in technique and theme from each other and from Rhys's novel, but there are remarkable elements of continuity among them: attitudes of the white characters to landscape and to the other side represented by the black members of the society; the presence of long-serving black nurses, and of obeah women; the occurrence of dreams, nightmares and other heightened states of consciousness; and references to an outer socio-economic situation recognizable as the fall of the planter class. These elements of continuity, continues Ramchand, arise not from

the authors' knowledge of one another or one another's work, but involuntarily from the natural stance of the white West Indian. Information to which Ramchand did not have access discloses that Rhys and Allfrey knew each other and each other's work, well. Phyllis Allfrey says that she is happy to have "discovered Jean's greatness before she became famous. . . . I read Voyage in the Dark . . . and was instantly enchanted. After that I tried to get a copy of each book she wrote" (23). The two women met in England before the outbreak of the Second World War and continued to correspond until shortly before Rhys died some forty years later. At the time of her death Rhys had been planning a preface for the new edition of Allfrey's Orchid House . Of her fellow Dominican, Allfrey says; "she was intensely independent and championed womanhood when it was degraded or ill-used. . . [S]he maintained an absolute integrity, as an artist, always writing the truth. . . . What I admired most about her was her persistent courage. Through pain, starvation, heart-break, and ill health, she kept on writing to the very end" (23 -24)

Apart from the elements of continuity in the works of the white West Indians cited by Ramchand Rhys's use of characters' names - Christophine and Baptiste - from Allfrey's work reveals her own constant preoccupation, seen from Quartet, with the re-writing of other works of art.[3] Wide Sargasso Sea also bears affinities to Christopher with its emphasis on the consequences of estrangement

upon a particularly sensitive young boy. The substance of the novel is the consciousness of the child. Ramchand argues that Drayton's use of obeah and the black is more integral to the novel's process than the uses made by Rhys or Allfrey.

Another white West Indian whose circumstances of publication obscured her work also shows affinities with Rhys. Eliot Bliss published two novels: Saraband (1931) and Luminous Isl e (1934), the same year as Rhys's Voyage in the Dark to which it shows some affinities. In his review of LUminous Isle Harold Nicholson compared it to the novels of E. M. Foster. Bliss says that she was not directly influenced by him but that they share the same cast of mind. The only male writer who consciously influenced her was Proust. Her precursors are mainly May Sinclair, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and above all Dorothy Richardson. The poet Anna Wickham had a seminal influence on Bliss, so too did Edith Sitwell. It was Jean Rhys more than most in whom she found a lively and sympathetic friend who supported and encouraged her writing, and even tried to get her novel republished. Bliss's admiration for Rhys was personal as well as literary: "she sort of tore the veils apart, and was wicked because she couldn't stand hypocrisy". Rhys and Bliss lost touch during the war, but began corresponding again in the 1950s until Rhys's death. (Introduction to Luminous Isle vi - xix).

Luminous Isle like Voyage is set in the author's homeland which is unnamed. The story is told in flashbacks as Em, the protagonist, reflects on her life. Bliss like her fellow white

West Indians uses the landscape as an aspect of theme and focuses on the ever-present long-serving black nurse. Like Rhys in her last novel, Bliss suggests the wide sargasso sea of difference between the West Indian Creole and the English. The captain of the ship which takes Em back to the Caribbean mistakes her for an English girl and warns about the perils of marrying a Creole:

> If I may say something presumptuous - I hope you won't be tempted to get married while you're out here. So many English girls come out to these Islands and marry into families of planters. I think it's a great mistake myself. These people who have lived here for generations are a very different people to us (71)

For purposes of a closer literary analysis, the writer who yields the most interesting connections to Rhys's art is Elma Napier, the author of Nothing So Blue (?) . Napier was the daughter of Sir William Gordon Cumming and with her family she settled in Dominica in the 1930s and was later to become the first woman to be elected to Government. Rhys's literary criticism of her novel reveals not only her insistence on the Flaubertian dictum that 'the form of a thought is its very flesh' but also her increasingly sharp criticisms of the false perceptions of the West Indies. Through her thematic and stylistic 'troping' on Nothing So Blue, Rhys also renders some of her perannial athemes -woman's suffering and degradation in society, the evils of class distinction and imperialism, and her condemnation of works of art which accept as normative the prevailing social order.

Nothing So Blue under Rhys's literary analysis reveals

certain aesthetic and moral defects, which are exposed and commented upon in her short story 'The Insect World' written during the war years but completed while she was working on Wide Sargasso Sea.

The opening sentences announce the story's theme and intention: 'Audrey began to read. Her book was called Nothing So Blue. It was set in the tropics. She started at the paragraph which described the habits of an insect called the jigger' (125). The narrator observes that almost any book was better than life toAudrey who lived a hard monotonous existence even though she tried to acquiesce to the dictates of society. Audrey was particularly worried that the First World War had swallowed her youth and now at twenty nine, she was worried that it might last forever. As she reads the book, however, she is appalled at the comments about women written in by the first owner. Books, Audrey comes to observe, can help to obscure the 'essential pottiness of life. If the comments by the anonymous man which are derogatory to women make Audrey angry,she comes to realise that the book itself was not pleasant either:

> The book was not so cheering, either. It was about damp, moist heat, birds that did not sing, flowers that had no scent. Then there was this horrible girl whom the hero simply had to make love, though he didn't really want to, and when the lovely, cool English girl heard about it she turned him down.
>
> The natives were surly. They always seemed to be jeering behind your back. And they were stupid. They believed everything they were told, so that they could be easily worked against somebody. Then they became cruel - so horribly cruel, you wouldn't believe . . . .
>
> Finally,there were the minute crawling unseen things that got at at you as you walked along harmlessly. Most horrible of all these was the jigger (127 -28)

The précis of Nothing So Blue which highlights its one-dimensional portrayal of 'cardboard' characters and stereotypical depiction of the 'surly natives' parodies the formal structures and ideological assumptions which shape Napier's novel. The author's persistent criticism of 'the ant civilization' to which many writers conform is implicit in her structural development of her story around the motifs of Nothing So Blue. Rhys's criticism also implies her awareness of how the insurmountable barrier of point of view can create barriers among people. Audrey comes to realise that the perception of the tropics is shaped by the writer's own point of view. She observes: "It all depends on how people see things. If someone wanted to write a horrible book about London, couldn't he write a horrible book? I wish somebody would. I'd buy it.' (131)

If the structure of 'The Insect World' is a critique of NOthing So Blue, Rhys's short story also adapts and reworks the 'jiggers' motif to establish a sense of continuity between both works and to use Napier's perception of the tropics to define the protagonist's view of the metropolis. The description of the jiggers is what Audrey remembers most vividly. As she travels in the Underground the people not only look like insects but under her gaze they metamorphose into large insects:

> She pressed her arm against her side and felt the book. That started her thinking about jiggers again. Jiggers got in under your skin when you didn't know it and laid eggs inside you. Just walking along, as you might be walking along the street to

> a Tube station, you caught a jigger as easily as you bought a newspaper or turned on the radio. And there you were - infected - and not knowing a thing about it (132)

With a sharp and ironic twist, the Rhys short story turns the assumption of the metropolitan writer about the tropics on its head. Her technique suggests a mirror image returning the gaze. The jiggers, tropical insects, which made such an impression on the sensibility of a 'foreigner' are transformed to symbolise the way the values of her own society invisibly affect and infect her. The reference to the mass media reinforces the pervasive indoctrination of books, newspapers and radio which shape the attitudes of members of metropolitan society. Although Napier herself lived in the West Indies her attitude to the place was exclusively that of the metropolitan culture. Her work, Rhys's critique suggests, is an example of the 'penny in the slot' mentality:

> Oh God how I hate penny in the slot thoughts and actions, and . . . what terrible harm they cause.. . . . [T]here is _no_ penny for the slots. Not for writing or the black versus white question - the _lies_ that are told - or for anything at all that matters. Only for lies. Yet everybody believes in the non existent penny and the invisible slot (238 - 39)

The internal polemic of Mikhail Bakhtin's 'double-voiced discourse' suggests Rhys's creative and critical relationship to Napier's novel. In hidden or internal polemic the author's discourse is oriented toward its referential object, as is any other discourse but at the same time each assertion about that object is constructed in such a way that besides its referential meaning, the author's discourse brings a polemical attack to bear against another speech

act, another assertion, on the same topic. Here one utterance focused on its referential object clashes with another utterance on the grounds of the referent itself.[4]

Rhys's critical stance toward the ideological presuppositions about the West Indies in the European canon, as revealed in the foregoing analysis, and her increasingly sophisticated use of the formal properties of the canon to subvert these values, are demonstrated most forcibly in her last and most accomplished novel _Wide Sargasso Sea_.

(3)

JANE EYRE AND WIDE SARGASSO SEA

> I came to England between sixteen and seventeen, a very impressionable age, and Jane Eyre was one of the books I read then.
>
> Of course Charlotte Brontë makes her own world, of course she convinces you and that makes the poor Creole lunatic all the more dreadful. I remember being quite shocked, and when I re-read it rather annoyed. "That's - only one side - the English side' sort of thing.
>
> (I think too that Charlotte had a 'thing' about the West Indies being rather sinister places - because in another of her books Villette she drowns the hero, Professor Somebody [Paul Emmanuel] on the voyage to Guadeloupe,another very alien place according to her).
>
> Perhaps most people had this idea then and perhaps in a way they were right. Even now white West Indians can be a bit trying - a bit very (not only white ones) but not quite so often surely. They have a side and a point of view (Letters 297)

Wide Sargasso Sea, as Jean D'Costa asserts, predates conceptually all of Rhys's other works (12). Ever since she read Jane Eyre as a teenager, she had a desire to vindicate the 'madwoman in the attic' perception of the West Indian woman, and her own point of view. Rhys's development as a writer - her immersion in the available literary traditions, her manipulation of the practices, her increasing commitment and desire to write about the West Indies,combined with her mastery of the technical strategies -makes Wide Sargasso Sea an inevitable and brillant culmination of her artistic enterprise. In setting out to confront and expose

the presuppositions of a Victorian canonical text through a formal and ideological critique of the work, Rhys does not underestimate her responsibilites: "I've always known that this book must be done as I could - (no margin of error) or it would be unconvincing"(Letters 253); "I do feel that it must be done as well and truly as I can. Otherwise, it will be unconvincing, second rate" (224); "This book is complicated and a bit like a patchwork" (237).

Mark Schorer's influential essay on modernist writers ('Technique as Discovery') offers a way into Rhys's strategy towards Wide Sargasso Sea as a re-writing of Jane Eyre.:

> When we speak of technique,then, we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning,and,finally, of evaluating it. And surely it follows that certain techniques are sharper tools than others,and will discover more; that the writer capable of the most exacting technical scrutiny of his subject matter will produce works with the most satisfying content, works with thickness and resonance; works which reverberate works with maximum meaning (387)

The Caribbean writer's quarrel with Charlotte Brontë is over the moral imperative of technique. Rhys argues that Bertha is impossible because the Victorian novelist did not work hard enough to develop a character which was true even within the fictive reality of Jane Eyre:

> I've read and re-read Jane Eyre. . . The Creole in Charlotte Brontë's novel is a lay figure - repulsive, which does not matter,and not once alive,which does. She's necessary to the plot, but always she shrieks, howls, laughs horribly, attacks all and sundry - Off Stage. For me. . . she must be right On Stage. She must be plausible with a past, the reason why

> Mr. Rochester treats her so abominably and feels justified, the reason why he thinks she is mad and why, of course she goes mad, even the reason why she tries to set everything on fire and eventually succeeds. . . I do not see how Charlotte Brontë's madwoman could possibly convey all this (Letters 156 -57)

Bronte herself was unhappy with her own technical and moral portrait of Bertha, accepting that her character's humanity was not fully realised: "It is true that profound pity ought to be the only sentiment elicited by the view of such degradation (as Bertha's), and equally true that I have not sufficiently dwelt on that feeling: I have erred in making horror too predominant"[5] The Victorian writer's recognition of the too predominant horror resembles Rhys's rejection of what she terms 'Bronte's 'paper tiger lunatic'.

Rhys also records her own struggles to create a plausible character and work to counter Bronte's narrative:

> I will struggle on to make it as convincing as possible.
>
> I can see it all up to a point. I mean a man *might* come to England with a crazy wife. He *might* leave her in the charge of a housekeeper and a nurse and dash away to Europe. She *might* be treated far more harshly than he knows and so get madder and madder. He *might* funk seeing her when he returns. But really, to give a house party in the same house, I can't believe that. But I've never believed in Charlotte's lunatic that's why I wrote the book and really what a *devil* it's been (269)

In attempting to revise the Victorian text, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is necessarily bound by the reach of the European work. If she attacks the 'imperialist narrativization of history' in *Jane Eyre*, the structural motors of Rhys's work are to some extent constructed by the English novel, through the connection

of language, writing and history. Rhys wrestled with this challenge in technical and moral terms. One method of facing her problem was to try to cut loose from Jane Eyre in terms of time frame:

> I realise what I lose by cutting loose from Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester - only too well (Indeed can I?? Names? Dates?
>
> But I believe and firmly too that there was more than one Antoinette. The West Indies was rich in those days, for those days, and there was no "married woman's property act". The girls. . . would soon once in kind England, be Address Unknown. So. Gossip. So a legend. If Charlotte Brontë took her horrible Bertha from the legend I have the right to take lost Antoinette. And,how to reconcile the two and fix dates I do not know - yet. But, I will (237)

She did find a way to fix dates through literary allusions. Marmion newly published when Jane is given a copy toward the end of the Victorian novel appeared in 1808, whereas the date for the Emancipation Act is 1833. Bertha Mason was already confined to the attic of Thornfield Hall by the first decade of the nineteenth century, whereas Antoinette Cosway in Wide Sargasso Sea was still a child in the 1840s. In terms of Jane Eyre the literary references in Wide Sargasso Sea are equally anachronistic: "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair " was written by Stephen Foster who was born in 1826; Tennyson's Millers Daughter" was not well known until into the 1840s; most of Byron's poetry and all of Scott's novels (noticed by Antoinette's husband on the bookshelf at Granbois) appeared after 1800 (McWatt 12-19) . Rhys also insisted that her characters were not those of Brontë's:

> I think there were several Antoinettes and Mr. Rochesters. Indeed I am sure. Mine is not Miss Brontë's

> though much suggested by Jane Eyre. She is to start with young old. She is still a girl when she fires the house and jumps to her death (235)

Her determination to cut loose from Jane Eyre anchors her even more firmly to the older text. By using the Victorian novel as a referent both within her novel and as a point of departure for multiple substitutions, she creates her most accomplished work based on pastiche. As Wilson Harris asserts, Rhys's work disrupts the homogeneous cultural model of realism. The author was to question herself on the morality of her approach to Brontë's book:

> I have a very great and deep admiration for the Brontë sisters. (Though Charlotte did preachify sometimes.. . .) How then can I of all people say she is wrong? Or that her Bertha is impossible? Which she is. Or get cheap publicity from her (often) splendid book? (Letters 234)

Yet, she continues, as a writer she was the instrument of the Word, the literary tradition, and the language, and cannot move outside of these without ceasing to practise her profession.

Wide Sargasso Sea was published in 1966 but its techniques show affinities to modernist writing. Apart from the writer's intention to create a particular kind of novel, the history of its production may help explain, in part, its anachronistic features. What was to become Wide Sargasso Sea was initially conceived in the period of World War II. By 1945, it was half-finished. The sudden death of her second husband and other personal problems prevented her from writing again until the late nineteen fifties. Rhys recognises that her writing style is connected to the heyday of Modernism, but insists that it goes beyond that too: To her impatient editors she wrote: "Sometimes I can write. In my twenties fashion. And after too.' (Letters 272)

(4)

WIDE SARGASSO SEA AS A DISTILLATION OF FORM IN THE RHYS OEUVRE

In Wide Sargasso Sea , Rhys like Ford in The Good Soldier, seems to have put everything she knew about the crafting of a work of art. She repeatedly insisted that it was her best work and was worth the excruciating labour which she had put into it. I shall seek to collate aspects of her literary technique in an attempt to produce a complex reading of the artistic skills involved in the creation of narrative viewpoint, dialogue and speech patterns, symbolic imagery, and repetition-with-variation, seen in the use of dreams, mirror images and duplications. These aspects of her early work (examined in Part Two) are refined and extended in Wide Sargasso Sea.

T. S. Eliot suggests that an artistic creation is more the result of the author's critial labour than anything else:

> [The] larger part of the labour of an author in composing his (sic) work is critical labour; the labour of sifting, combining, expunging, correcting, testing; this frightful toil is as much critical as creative. I maintain even that the criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer on his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism. . . . There is a tendency to decry the critical toil of th artist to propound the thesis that the great artist is the unconscious artist ('The Function of Criticism')

Rhys agrees with Eliot's viewpoint but she insists that the effort and the labour should be rendered invisible in the final production

of the work: "I have it badly about this book. . . [but] I think that one's struggles to get the thing right ought to be private - not seen and if possible not known or even guessed. Certainly not.' (255) If the finished product disguises the rigours which brought it into being, Rhys's letters during its composition, provide a use full record of the labour, 'its genesis,conditions and setting', to use Eliot's phrase, especially with respect to the character of the husband. This information is valuable as it provides a framework within which to understand how she intended to create and portray the instrument through which she presents two thirds of the novel. The creation of the character and the narrative viewpoint he embodies, Rhys tells us, gave her tremendous difficulties. She describes it as 'moving a mountain', being 'impossibly difficult', and says the character was making her thin. She also views her portrayal of him as an experiment. Her attitude to the personality suggested by the character is unequivocal: "I did stick at Mr Rochester or whatever his name will be. Dreadful man, but I tried to be fair and all that,and give me some <u>reason</u> for his acting like he did, so <u>that</u> led me into byways (233).

(i)

Narrative viewpoint - the husband

<u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u> proceeds by patterning of imagery and

by point of view. There is the aesthetic and the perceptual point of view, the former being the more fundamentally ideological. The angle from which the object of representation - Antoinette's life- is to be seen is presented through the husband and his viewpoint; but his consciousness is analysed by the techniques used to develop it.

In depicting the events leading to Antoinette's suicide leap, Wide Sargasso Sea tells the story from two main narrative viewpoints, two apparently autonomous viewpoints: that of her husband and of Antoinette's. However, the apparent symmetry and simplicity soon reveal themselves to be provocative and misleading. Authorial attitude to the two characters is markedly different. In her bid to 'write a life' for the mad West Indian Creole in Jane Eyre, Rhys is necessarily and radically questioning and overturning Rochester's story. (Please see in particular Chapters 26 and 27 of Brontë's novel). Reading Brontë's novel, Rhys says she was "vexed at her portrait of the 'paper tiger' lunatic, the all wrong creole scenes , and above all the real cruelty of Mr. Rochester (Emphasis added)

The Englishman in Wide Sargasso SEa enters as a nameless person and his last words before disappearing from the action of the novel state that he is nothing. He says that a little boy is sobbing in a heartbreaking manner because the child loves him and he has spurned him:

> That stupid boy followed us, the basket balanced on his head. He used the back of his hand to wipe away his tears. Who would have thought that any

> boy would cry like that. For nothing. Nothing.
> . . . (sic 142)

The husband had just said before that the little boy had been crying for him. Hence when he says 'for nothing' he is asserting that he is a nothing. The repetition of the word further reinforces the sense of nothingness. The elliptical dots at the end suggest his drifting away into an existential void.[6] His namelessness operates throughout the work as a technical device and a statment of meaning. The husband's 'character' connotes not only a person in fiction but a cipher. His end as a nothing echoes the beginning of his narrative where he appeared out of nowhere, apparently, and with no introduction. Names and labels, the text suggests, can be used to conceal or distort. Rhys has taken on to herself the task of unnaming and revealing Charlotte Brontë's Rochester. She is writing her way to the 'truth' by writing away the false images which she perceives in Bronte's writing. The anonymous man in the West Indian novel is divested of the literary conventions which the character in Jane Eyre wears so heavily. Edward Rochester is a Romantic, figure - dark, brooding, Byronic. In fact, since he is largely seen from the outside, it is his overwhelming physical characteristics which most impress themselves on the reader. Even his punishment and penance are externalised (his eye is blinded, his leg amputated). From Rhys's portrayal of the husband it would be impossible to conjure up any physical picture of him. He has no name, no word, no cover. The writing of the West Indian novelist deromantizes, demythifies and dissects him. The author herself

is not unaware of the revisionary nature of her task. That she recognises and avoids such danger is revealed in the ambiguity which suffuses the narrative portrayal of the character. The rendering of the character is shaped by the formal strategies which I shall analyse later.

Rhys's integrity as an artist combined with her subtly manipulated crafting elevates her character and her work far above a mere amendment or correction of Brontë's character. Essentially, Wide Sargasso Sea is suggesting that Edward Rochester of Jane Eyre, and by extension of Victorian England, its social and aesthetic conventions, is an invention of that ethos. The novel's radical exposure of the Englishman is a critique of the nineteenth century British novel as a domestic, cultural enterprise whose ability to portray, characterise and depict was rigidly circumscribed and socially regulated by the historical fact of the British Empire. The West Indian novel further suggests that the tradition out of which Brontë's fiction was created accepted as a law of nature imperial control of other lands,other people. Such a tradition depended for its existence on the reduction and reconstitution of others (like Bertha) as creatures of European will. An incomplete and distorted view of others means a distorted view of themselves. In her work, Rhys discards the false and incomplete character of Rochester in a bid to understand and reveal the truth. To call Rhys's character Rochester, then, is to misread or even distort the novel's meaning and to fail to respect the intention of the work, to find the truth. Her character is left unnamed on purpose and nameless he should remain.

My argument is supported by Rhys's letters. When she first started to compose the work she called the character Rochester, but progressively became more uncertain that it was in fact his name. By the time the work ahd been finished almost to her satisfaction, she observes, 'I carefully haven't named the man at all' (297). I wish to show through an examination of the various styles and strategies employed in the creation and development of the husband how Rhys uses 'technique as discovery'. The technical material of the work defines the value and the quality of the character not by appended moral epithet or comment but by the texture of its style. The aspects of style used in the first section of Part II include irony, suppression, ellipses and the epistolary method. In the last section, the stream of consciousness more comprehensively evaluates the character. His utterances are a polyphonic soliloquy which heralds his final retreat from the world and the word and his dissolution into the void.[6]

I shall begin with the use of letters in the husband's narrative. Shortly after arriving at Granbois, the husband reveals his state of mind:

> The woman is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me. I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks. I looked down at the coarse mane of the horse. . . (sic) Dear Father, The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to). I have a modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it, and after all is such a bad bargain? The girl is thought to be beautiful, she is beautiful. And yet. . .

Meanwhile, the horses jogged along a bad road (59)

The husband is constructing a mental letter as he travels along the road which leads to the honeymoon house. The horse, symbol of the instrument which carries him into Antoinette's life, provides the point of departure for his interior monologue. When his letter ends he is still travelling along the road. This scene foreshadows his arrival at Granbois and the letter he actually writes:

> There was a crude bookshelf made of three shingles strung together over the desk and I looked at the books Byron's poems, novels by Sir Walter Scott Confessions of an Opium Eater. Some shabby brown volumes, and on the last shelf, Life and Letters of. . . . The rest was eaten away.
>
> Dear Father, we have arrived from Jamaica after an uncomfortable few days. This estate in the Windward Islands is part of the family property and Antoinette is much attached to it. She wished to get here as soon as possible. All is well and has gone according to your plans and wishes. I dealt of course with Richard Mason. His father died soon after I left for the West Indies as you probably know. He is a good fellow, hospitable and friendly; he seemed to become attached to me and trusted me completely. This place is very beautiful but my illness has left me too exhausted to appreciate it fully. I will write again in a few days' time. . . .
>
> A cool and remote place . . . (sic) And I wondered how they got their letters posted. I folded mine and put it into a drawer of the desk.
>
> As for my confused impressions they will never be written. There are blanks in my mind that cannot be filled up (62 -63)

In this piece of writing Rhys demonstrates one of the basic tenets of literary impressionism learned decades before in Paris: Always consider the impressions that you are making upon the mind of the

reader,and always consider that the first impression with which you present her/him will be so strong that it will be all you can ever do to efface it to alter it or even quite slightly to modify it. The narrative selection makes explicit the connection between letter and mind of husband. The connections are pressed upon the reader in several ways: The allusion to the moth-eaten text, "LIfe and Letters of. . . ' suggests the husband's own blank spaces which will never be filled up. The husband suppresses not only the mental letter constructed while on horseback, he writes a more business like one which is never sent but placed in the drawer to meet the fate of the moth-eaten texts. No mention is ever made of the letter again and he gets no reply from his father.

Gayatri Spivak argues that this episode, combined with the husband's namelessness, represents Rhys's ironic version of the Oedipal exchange:

> Rhys denies to Brontë's Rochester the one thing that is supposed to be secured in the Oedipal relay: the Name of the Father, or the patronymic. . . . [T]he character corresponding to Rochester has no name. His writing of the final version of the letter to his father is supervised by the loss of the patronymic (suggested by the missing name in <u>Life and Letters of</u>. . .)(252)

The early impressions of the character of the husband convey his lack of a name and hence a meaningful identity; his inward state of consciousness which he suppresses even to himself; and his more deliberate suppressions through the placing of the letter in the drawer. His confused impressions and the blanks in his mind suggest that he has been set adrift in the wide sargasso sea.

The letters and the literary allusions as aspects of technique work together with the use of ellipses. Rhys says that she uses this device to render or to hide feelings: "Sometimes dots are useful instead of saying "What crap" Or what a lie! or even "Poor me" (Letters 280). The epistolary method, as I suggested in Voyage, are used often to expose and undermine character. When both are used simultaneously in the rendering of one incident in a character's experience,the text reveals that what he seeks to deny or conceal exposes him, and reveals him to be a fallible narrator of limited understanding. The husband's point of view (perceptual) is revealed not only in what he says, but in what he does not say, or does not know he has said or revealed.

The creation of character in Wide Sargasso Sea is a process rather than a fixity. The viewpoint of all the other living characters, and to some extent the dead ones, are placed within the narrative frame of the husband's mind. (He does not appear in Antoinette's section except in memory and dream). The blanks in his mind which he says cannot be filled up include these very characters,whose viewpoints he dismisses or does not understand. The novel's arrangement demands that the reader fills in these blanks through a complex reading of the characters and situations which fall within his perspective. We must look through his suppressions and distortions to what he is being shown but refuses to see. In other words, through this device, the text ensures that the reader has access to the character precisely at those points where he most crucially lacks access to himself. Central to an understanding of the husband and his point of view are

the characters of Christophine and Daniel. The use of these two characters, in particular, poses interesting challenges relating to technique, viewpoint and ideology. In Good Morning Midnight, the concerns of the novel were structured around a modified stream of consciousness technique which demanded a reading of all the characters (major and minor) as mirror images or masks of each other. (Please see Part Two). Although Sasha's was the narrating consciousness, the points of view of the others and their experiences, helped to define, modulate or expose her voice. It is this same narrative strategy which the writer thickens and extends to present Daniel and Christophine, in particular, as 'the other side' of the Englishman. Mark McWatt, a Caribbean critic, argues that the treatment of Daniel (and Amélie) in Wide Sargasso Sea is similar to that of Bertha in Jane Eyre:

> Nielsen and Brahms's (The Enigma of Values) . . . claim that Charlotte Bronte has "reduced this character to a mechanical device, employed to keep the gothic machinery of her novel functioning" cannot really be accepted. . . It is claimed that Bertha Mason is a typical example of. . . the ruthless exploitation of a minor character in a novel of persuasion but if there is any validity to this kind of charge surely it can be made about some of the minor characters in Wide Sargasso Sea - Daniel Cosway, for instance, can perhaps be seen as a mechanical device for stoking the fears and doubts of Rochester (sic) concerning his wife; and Amélie a mechanical device for emphasizing the breakdown of the marriage (12)

Although Daniel (and Amélie) are used for the purposes suggested by McWatt it is the technical properties which shape their development which render them more than mechanical devices. I shall later examine Daniel and the way his language, or the language assigned

to him by the text not only shows him to be connected to the husband, but also brings him to 'life'.

The character of Christophine,however, presents a more complex and interesting problem and I shall start by focusing on her.

> Christophine is the first interpreter and named speaking subject of the text. . . . [She] is of course a commodified person. . . . Yet Rhys assigns her crucial functions. . . Most important it is Christophine whom Rhys allows to offer a hard analysis of Rochester's actions, to challenge him in a face-to-face encounter (Spivak 253)

The text supports Spivak's assertions. I shall examine through close scrutiny of narrative detail some of the key episodes which culminate in her confrontation with the husband. Shortly after Antoinette and the husband settle down at Granbois, Christophine leaves. She gives as her reason the obvious incompatibility between herself and her husband; and a weariness resulting from her constant struggles against the world he represents:

> I see enough trouble. . . I have right to my rest . ., . Too besides the young master don't like me,and perhaps I don't like him so much. If I stay here I bring trouble and bone of contention in your house (84)

Christophine re-enters the house when Antoinette is reduced to a 'red-eyed, wild-haired stranger' by the husband's cruelty in sleeping with Amélie. The husband reports; "It was at this nightmare moment that I heard Christophine's calm voice." Christophine calmly asks him his reasons for behaving the way he did and then moves to comfort Antoinette. Her endearments suggest a lullaby. The power of her love and the soporific effect

of her songs penetrate to affect the husband who is eavesdropping: "Listening I began to feel sleepy and cold".

After she gentles Antoinette to sleep, Christophine emerges from care-giver into inexorable judge, to confront the husband in his sterility and brutality. The narrative pace quickens and the scene is cast like the enactment of an intense and powerful drama. Christophine completely dominates the stage and penetrates the man's consciousness, beoming his voice within, her words reverberating within "the blanks in [his] mind that will never be filled". As Christophine talks of his cruelty to Antoinette, the husband observes; "Now every word she said was echoed, echoed loudly in my head" (126). Christophine points with acuity and precision to the destructive forces within him which brought about Antoinette's agony. She makes it clear that Antoinette, though intensely vulnerable, possesses a kind of strength which frightens - she does not give in to the husband's malevolence and allow herself to be changed by it. She remains innocent and proud:

> Nobody is to have any pride but you. She have more pride that you. . . .
>
> '<u>Your wife</u>!' she said. 'You make me laugh. . . Everybody know that you marry her for her money and you take it all. And then you want to break her up because you jealous of her. She is more better than you, she have better blood in her and don't care for money - it's nothing for her. Oh I see that the first time I look at you. . . . (125)

When the nurse outlines to the husband the measures she had taken to help Antoinette after she came to her distraught and broken, he asks 'Why did you do all this?' He cannot fathom the nature

of Christophine's love for Antoinette. After his question; 'there was a long silence'. The language of silence articulates more vividly than words the unbridgeable gap separating two different and opposed ways of ordering experience. Since to speak of her love for Antoinette would be a waste of time she remains silent It is Christophine too who reinforces the sense of the husband's Nothingness: ". . . to me you are not the best, not the worst. You are - " she shrugged "-you will not help her. I tell her so." (129) The use of the dash, a grammatical item, suggests Christophine's silence, which implies that he is not anything, nothing - empty and hollow.

Christophine, however, begs the husband to love Antoinette "a little, like you can love" as she insists that the young woman's redemption lies in his actions and feelings. She tries hard to communicate with him,to make him understand the other negative forces surrounding Antoinette's life - the warped hatred of Daniel Cosway, the tragedy of her mother's life. As Christophine fights for Antoinette's very life, the setting mirrors the inevitable tragedy which will come about: "Nearly all candles were out. She didn't light fresh ones - nor did I. We sat in the dim light. I should stop this useless conversation,I thought, but could only listen, hypnotised,to her dark voice from the darkness". Her biting condemnation of the husband is privately accepted by him as he acknowledges privately, never to her, that her observations are correct. Yet he persists in his refusal to fill up his blank spaces. He threatens Christophine with the forces of law and

order. This is not what dissuades her, however,but the recognition that he will not change. When she leaves, the husband says:" When I looked at her there was a mask on her face and her eyes were undaunted. She was a fighter, I had to admit" Christophine tells him that Antoinette is sleeping and she will not wake her to face the misery of her life. That she will leave to the husband She walks away without looking back.

As a narrative construct which complicates the viewpoint of the husband Christophine re-directs us to Rhys's insistence, which I have tried to highlight throughout the study, that form is ideological. Spivak argues that Christophine, in Rhys's text, reveals certain 'silences' in the author's historical and ideological formation:

> Christophine is tangential to the narrative. She cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole than the native. No perspective critical of imperialism turn the other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other which consolidates the Imperialist self. . . . Of course we cannot know Jean Rhys's feelings in the matter. . . . We can, however, look at the scene of Christophine's inscription in the text. Immediately after the exhange between her and the Man, well before the conclusion, she is simply driven out of the story, with neither narrative nor characterological explanation or justice (253)

As it happens we do know Rhys's feeling on the matter. Christophine, she says, is created primarily to perform a role as the obeah woman:

> The poor girl [Antoinette]. . . doesn't know why he [the husband] so suddenly left her in a lurch, so she flies off to her nurse (presence explained) for a love drink. From the start it must be made clear that Christophine is an obeah woman (Letters 26

Despite the author's stated intention, as Spivak and many other critics have observed, Christophine performs crucial functions and emerges as a positive and powerful voice in the work.[7] I shall cite examples of her function through close analysis. As Spivak points out she is the first named interpreter in the novel. Rhys insists, influenced by the teachings of her mentor Ford, that the beginning of a work is crucial and the first impression of a character even more so. It is Christophine who interprets and analyses the material and spiritual dilemma of Annette and her family. It is Christophine who recounts with anguish and passion the brutalities heaped upon Annette and the tragedy of her life which caused her ignominious end: "That man who is in charge of her take her whenever he want and his woman talk. That man and others. Then they have her. Ah there is no God" (130). Christophine explicates and puts in context the reasons for Annette's assumed madness and puts them in correct perspective. She is talking to Antoinette's husband and full of selfpity and suspicion as he is , he cannot help observing that as she remembers, Christophine's voice is 'not so calm':

> They drive her to it. When she lose her son she lose herself for a while, and they shut her away. They tell her she is mad, and act like she is mad. Question question But no kind word, no friends, and her husban' he go off, he leave her. I try, but no. They won't let Antoinette see her. In the end - mad I don't know - she give up ,she care for nothing (129 -30)

The character carefully delineates the circumstances of Annette's life and the treatment meted out to her, her isolation and abandonment. It is Christophine too, who saves Annette's family from death in the

chaotic and difficult years of Post-Emancipation: "We would have died, my mother always said, if she had not stayed with us. Many died in those days. . . " (108)

Christophine, the obeah woman, strongly advises Antoinette not to resort to the 'love potion' which will not work and will only exacerbate her problems and to seek instead to win her husband through the power of the word. Communication, suggests Christophine, has a redemptive value:

> Have spunks and do battle for yourself. Speak to your husband calm and cool, tell him about your mother and all what happened at Coulibri and why she get sick and what they do to her. Don't bawl at the man and don't make crazy faces. Don't cry either. Crying no good with him. Speak nice and make him understand (96)

Christophine's simple but effective words recall Marya in Quartet who observes the black marks on the white paper. 'Words. To make somebody understand'. At Antoinette's desperate pleas, Christophine gives her something only after the young woman promises to talk to the husband. The obeah scene, then is ambiguously rendered with the obeah woman herself insisting on the uselessness of the potion,and advising Antoinette to use words, language.

The husband confirms that Christophine is correct. When he recounts the episode in which Antoinette slipped the potion in his drink, he says "She need not have done what she did to me. I will always swear that, she need not have done it" (112). The next morning he wakes up and thinks that he has been poisoned: "I thought, I have been poisoned. But it was a dull thought, like a child spelling out the letters of a word

which he cannot read, and which if he could would have no meaning or context" (113). The connection made by Christophine between the obeah potion and the communication medium of language is reinforced by the husband's description of his response. Christophine and her cultural practices belong to another cultural paradigm. She understands and uses the master's language but she is rooted in a different world. "Read and write.I don't know. Other things I know." (133). However, when she insists that Antoinette should communicate with the husband instead of giving him the love potion, she is aware of the cultural connections between the two. Antoinette gives him the potion to win his love, to get him to open up to her, the effect is like words he cannot understand. It lacks meaning and context.

His words have another ~~another~~ significance. His dull thought that he had been poisoned suggests that he does not really believe that he was. And he was not. Of this section of the novel, Rhys says:

> I've. . . made it that the 'love' drink on Obeah NIght merely releases all the misery, jealousy and ferocity that has been piling up in Mr. R for so long. He pretends to think he's been poisoned - that's only to pile up (again) everything he can against her and so excuse his cruelty. He *justifies* it that way. (It's often done) I do not think that it *justifies* him at all. I *do* think it *explains* him a bit (269 -70)

The husband's response to the feelings he experiences foreshadows Antoinette's death:"As I watched, hating, her face grew smooth. . . She may wake at any moment, I told myself. I must be quick. Her torn shift was on the floor, I drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl". He then takes his revenge by sleeping

with Amélie. Antoinette rushes to Christophine for help and sustenance and the nurse returns to the house and uses the power of his language to communicate to the husband her sense of outrage at his cruelty, and his (admitted) hollowness.

If Christophine attacks the inherent brutality of imperialism and oppression which shapes the husband's personality, she also attacks Daniel and Amélie for the hatred and jealousy which they feel toward Antoinette for the privilege her race endows. She describes Amélie as a centipede and threatens to damage her if she hurts Antoinette. Of Daniel, she begs the husband to dismiss his twisted lies and insists that he has become warped by venom and hatred: "The hate in that man Daniel - he can't rest with it". In short, it is Christophine who carries the moral weight of the novel's subject matter. In criticising her own work, Rhys sees her rendering of the character of Christophine as a major technical flaw:

> The most seriously wrong thing with Part II is that I've made the obeah woman, the nurse too articulate. I thought of cutting it a bit. I will if you like, but after all no one will notice. Besides there is no reason why one particular negro woman shouldn't be articulate enough, especially if she's spent most of her life in a white household (Letters 297)

Spivak's insights, which lead her to conclude, without knowledge of Rhys's own critique, that the author used Christophine in a manner which correlates with the historical imperatives of Imperialism vis à vis the native and the Creole, will centre my own discussion of Rhys's comments as they relate to form and ideology.

There seems to be a striking parallel between what Rhys sees as Charlotte Brontë's dehumanization of the West Indian Creole and her own comments that black people can only be as articulate as their exposure to whites would allow. This ideological position, as Spivak observes, posits the notion of the black West Indian as the domesticated Other of the white Creole. The access of the native to language and its articulation is a function of the intimacy and connections to the white world. The question which we need to ask is whether Rhys, like Brontë and the West Indies had a 'thing' about the limitations of black West Indians. Rhys's criticism of her own work is in fact that unlike Brontë she paid too much attention to the Other, making her too articulate. Her criticism of Bertha is that she is not articulate enough, and hence not alive. For the writer, with words as her raw material, being articulate is synonymous with being alive and human. To make a black person from the West INdies too articulate is a technical failure based on Rhys's own ideological assumptions and her own interpretation of the social and historical reality. It also suggests her own compromises with the ideology which assigns role and functions based on race. It is a mark of her own highly developed critical faculty that she perceives that her own "text implicitly criticises its own ideology; it contains within itself (through the character of Christophine) the critique of its own values." This contradiction between the novel's intention and that of the author's makes it available for a new process of production of meaning by the reader.

The real question, given the presuppositions of technique as discovery, is whether Christophine as a narrative construct is persuasively drawn and whether she is 'possible' within the fictive reality of Wide Sargasso Sea. The response to this must depend in large measure on the reader's/critic's own ideological assumptions about black people within West Indian history. Taking as a point of departure , structuralist theories, Wilson Harris argues that "however self-conscious the artist (as Rhys undoubtedly was). . . unconscious variables secrete themselves in the live tapestry of words and image whose manifestations lie in the future." The literary artefact and its many component parts can be re-written by the passage of time and its readers located in a different historical and ideological setting. Spivak, a non-European critic, accepts Christophine as a successful narrative construct. The technical failure which she perceives is Rhys's dismissal of Christophine 'with neither characterological nor narrative explanation or justice.' Despite Spivak's impressive insights, I wish to argue that the character is not driven out without justice or explanation by returning to my initial observation that she must be read as being inscribed within the narrative viewpoint of the husband. If we follow the narrative trajectory of Christophine we see that she leaves when she has to leave. Her mission, failed, is ended. Before she leaves the husband,she comments repeatedly on his 'hardness' by which she means his intransigence. Shaken by his insights he retaliates:

> I said loudly and wildly, "And do you think that I wanted all this? I would give my life to undo it. I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place."
>
> She laughed. "And that is the first damn word of truth you speak. You choose what you give eh? Then you choose. You meddle in something and perhaps you don't know what it is ." She began to mutter to herself. Not in patois. I knew the sound of patois now.
>
> She is as mad as the other, I thought and turned to the window (132)

Christophine is pointing to the fatedness of the husband's treatment toward Antoinette and the inevitability of his responses to the West Indian reality. She suggests that his behaviour was pre-ordained and the choice to be an agent of destruction was never his. It was meant to be that way. Her brave efforts to try to change the course of history are doomed to failure. When she mutters to herself, her language is arcane and incomprehensible. Her passionate belief in the power of words, as a means of redemption are unequal to the task, There is nothing left but for her to remove herself physically. She remains, however, in every other sense to haunt the husband, and to remind him of what he has lost.

If Christophine, as the other side of the Englishman, disturbs his psyche, it is the stream of consciousness technique, which exposes and analyses him. The husband's experiences and his experience of himself are evaluated throught the outpourings of his feelings. It is in this section that the aesthetic as opposed to the perceptual point of view of the text fully reveals itself.

Rhys says that she wants to:

> lift the whole thing out of real life. . . on to a different plane. . . Then I got the idea of making the last chapter partly "poetry" partly prose songs. . . I wonder. . . if I am terribly excited about something that has been done ages ago - James Joyce tried to make sound I know like Anna Livia Plurabelle - but this is of course lighter, different - a musical comedy compared to grand opera (Letters 278)

The analogy with music demonstrates that Rhys continues to use the techniques learned from the modernist practitioners even in her West Indian work . Her intention and the material of her fiction are differently directed, however, as she aims to produce a work which renders a Caribbean sensibility. The husband's words reveal how his reference to the English landscape and to Shakespeare merge with his recollection of Christophine's words and the songs from her own cultural experiences:

> It's an English summer now, so cool, so grey. Yet I think of my revenge and hurricanes. Words rush through my head (deeds too). Words. Pity is one of them. It gives me no rest.
>
> Pity like a naked new-born babe striding the blast.
>
> I read that long ago when I was young - I hate poets and poetry. As I hate music which I loved once. Sing your songs, Rupert the Rine, but I'll not listen, though they tell me you have a sweet voice. . . . (sic) . . .
>
> 'She love you so much, so much. She thirsty for you. Love her a little like she say. It's all you can love - a little (Italicised in text)

The subconscious recall of Christophine's songs, sung by Antoinette and the nurse's words about his limited capacity to love merge with his memory of his home and transforms this into something he hates. His hatred is a protest against some infringemnt on

his power to believe that the values and certainties of his world were the only worthwhile ones. His contact with Christophine, Antoinette and the West Indies alters him forever. His impassioned outcry against their power is expressed in his repeated outcry of hatred:

> I hated the mountains and the hills, and the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and its cruelty which was part of the magic and loveliness. Above all I hated her [Antoinette]. 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 had found it (141)

EVen as the husband expresses his hatred another character is introduced without structural or narrative preparation. This communicates to the reader that the little black boy is another mirror image of the husband; ". . .at this moment the nameless boy leaned his head against the clove tree and sobbed. Loud heartbreaking sobs. I could have strangled him with pleasure" (101). The tears of the little boy who loves him are the husband's tears which he refuses to shed, the blanks in his mind which he is not prepared to fill. The husband's last words where he confirms his own nothingness close his own narrative and characterological function in the novel. Rhys's re-working of Bronte's Rochester reveals that he existed only as a fictive reality, as fiction within a fiction , reworked from another fiction. Under the pressure of the formal structures, irony, suppression, split characterization, stream of consciousness, distilled to evoke a West Indian point of view, the conventional character of a Victorian realist novel dissolves into "Nothing".

(ii)

Narrative viewpoint - Antoinette

Toward the end of her life in the upper room of the her husband's house in England, Antoinette says, "This cardboard house where I walk is not England" The cardboard house which encloses Rhys's Antoinette is not England, but the covers of Brontë's Jane Eyre. During the process of the construction of her work, the author veered between several ways of intersecting her novel with that of Brontë's. The one thing which remained constant was her determination to make the character of the West Indian Creole credible - to write her a life. Her creation and development of the character of Antoinette, the practice of writing, is itself the criticism of the technical and moral failure of Bronte's Bertha.

ONe of the fundamental tools of crafting of character for Rhys, as we have seen, is 'to anchor [her] and her background firmly at first' and to construct ' a smooth firm foundation underneath the sound and fury' (Letters 60). From the beginning, Rhys insists that Antoinette is the central character:

> I decided on a possible way showing the start and the Creole speaking. Lastly: her end - I want that in a way triumphant! The Creole is of course the important one, the others explain her. . . Take a look at Jane Eyre. That unfortunate death of a Creole! I'm fighting made to write her story. But it's a good book - and one must be wary and careful. Sober and plausible. At first (157)

Responding to pressures to work more quickly, Rhys says:"Please

try to believe that unless it is quite right - as good as I can make it and as smooth and plausible it will be useless - just another adaptation of Jane Eyre. There have been umpteen thousand and sixty already' (159).

The most influential factor in the reader's understanding of the protagonist rests on the author's manipulation of the time sense. Whether past,present or future, Antoinettė's dilemma carries urgency. All of her story has the effect of immediacy. Specific future events are not only foreshadowed, the text obliquely and selectively suggests premonitions of hell. Rhys provides clues of what she set out to do and how this effect is achieved:

> I started. . . with a different idea, another kind of idea. The book began with a dream and ended with a dream. . . All the rest was to be a long monologue. Antoinette in her prison room remembers, loves, hates. raves, talks to imaginary people, hears imaginary voices answering and overhears meaningless conversations outside. The story, if any, to be implied,never told straight (231)

Rhys abandoned the idea because of the reception which Voyage in the Dark and its predominantly stream of consciousness technique had received decades previously. The technical strategy which would shape Antoinette's consciousness taxed Rhys until she decided on a more conventional approach:

> I know that explaining the book makes it conventional . . . In the end I had to t ell the story straight - more or less- and keep the madness for the last act.
>
> I've never read a long novel about a mad mind or an unusual mind or anybody's mind atall. Yet it is the only thing that matters and so difficult to get over without being dull (254)

Although Rhys changes from the stream of consciousness idea,it still

shapes from the beginning the portrayal of Antoinette.

The text simultaneously contracts and expands the time sense by showing Antoinette looking back and reliving her experiences up to the point before the husband enters. She is both protagonist and narrator. The reader not only looks on Antoinette's life, but at the way she orders that life, through memory and imagination. There is in her account a covert narrator who hovers around and sometimes intrudes on Antoinette's narration. The strategy of the 'removed' narrator is designed to protect and vindicate Antoinette's viewpoint, by creating an aesthetic distance which gives authority to her experiences, and protects her from being a fallible narrator. The covert narrator appears shortly after the story opens.

"Godrey said. . . 'Rest yourself in peace for the righteous are not forsaken.' But she couldn't. She was young. How could she not try for all the things that had gone so suddenly, so without warning." (16) The person who is being discussed is Annette. The narrator is Antoinette. The observations made point to a consciousness far more removed from the event than Antoinette as a young girl or young adult. This leads the reader to wonder when she is actually telling her story. Is it during the time she is considered mad and incarcerated in her husband's house. The interweaving of the 'removed' narrator and the apparently unmediated voice recurs in the convent episode. The convent suggests a contra-puntal image to the upper room of the husband's house. Although She has to accept the pain of her mother's death and her own sense of uncertainty while she is in the convent, it represents a seclusion

from the outside world, a hiatus of the action of her life.

The room in the house in England is 'the other side' of the experience of seclusion and enclosure in the convent. As she recounts her life there, the narrator says; "Quickly, while I can, I must remember the hot classroom" (44). The urgency suggests even more strongly than the first episode that she is now in England and that she is aware that she has limited time or perhaps that her moments of lucid recall are rare. Is she mad? The text insists that the question be asked even as it provides no single, unambiguous answer. Soon after (in the convent episode) the narrator reflects on the meaning of chastity; "that flawless crystal that, once broken, can never be mended"(45). The tone and the texture of the observation differ strikingly from the sense of immediacy that most of the section reveals. The speaking voice is ironically contemplating the nature of chastity from a position of experience, of knowing.

Still another section reveals the covert narrator:

> Ah but Louise! Her small waist, her thin brown hands, her black curls which smelled of vetiver, her high, sweet voice, singing so carelessly in the Chapel about death. Like a bird would sing. Anything might have happened to you, Louise, anything at all, and I wouldn't be surprised (46)

The nostalgic tone, the sensuous evocation of the memory of a beautiful and unpredictable young girl, mediated by the knowledge and experience of what life holds for such a person, once again indicate a consciousness other than young Antoinette's. This covert narrator's voice is transmuted into Antoinette's when she addresses the reader directly in her upper room in England.

The technique used by Rhys in one her first short stories 'Hunger' in which the reader is drawn into the narrative is repeated here. The technique is used in Wide Sargasso Sea to preserve the authority and ambiguity of a character who has been declared mad. Antoinette observes: "I remember now that he did not recognise me. I saw him look a t me and his eyes went first to one corner and then another, not finding what he expected. He looked at me and spoke as though I were a stranger. What do you do when something happens to you like that? Why are you laughing at me?" (151) Antoinette is recalling the feelings she endured when her step-brother failed to recognise her because of the changes wrought by her imprisonment. There are no quotation marks in the text. She is not talking to Grace Poole, the only other character present. She is directly addressing the reader, thereby implicating her and challenging assumptions about normality and insanity. The text suggests that before one assumes one's own normality even while distancing oneself from another perceived as mad, one should try to imagine what it means to be locked away, cruelly treated and distorted beyond recognition. It is the moral imperative of technique which undermines Brontë's presentation of the madwoman in the attic and forces the reader to confront the full horror of Antoinette's fate, and her humanity.

Antoinette is not locked away because she is mad. She becomes mad because she is locked away. Prior to leaving the West Indies, the husband concedes that he has taken a calculated

decision to destroy her identity and treat her as if she is mad: Christophine says: "You think you fool me? You want her money but you don't want her. It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. I know it." The husband's only response is to mutter that Christophine is mad. The lucidity and clearsightedness of the character of Christophine is unchallenged by the text. The novel suggests that the husband describes as 'mad' those who are different.

Antoinette's point of view also reveals her anger toward her husband's unwillingness to respect and comprehend her world. The clearest and most dramatic manifestation is directed at him after he sleeps with Amélie. She tells him that he has hurt her because his action violated the sacrament of her home. "I hate it now like I hate you and before I die I will show you how much I hate you". (121). This is a clear and unambiguous statement of her intention to gain revenge for his action. Her passionate response shows the germ of the character which will reveal itself in the firing of her husband's house.

BEfore she carries through her threat, she also attacks Richard Mason. Again her outrage is unleashed by the sophistry and evasions which her step-brother practises. Grace Poole says "I didn't hear all he said except, I cannot interfere legally between yourself and your husband.' It was when said legally that you flew at him and when he twisted the knife out of your hand, you bit him' (150-51) Richard Mason and the husband embody the sexual double standards

of the rich and powerful who use morality,law and respectability to keep the powerless in their place. It is the dissimulation that Antoinette discerns in the word 'legally' not her insanity which prompts her violent reaction. The novel's insistence on this point is seen in observations by Christophine and Aunt Cora. Antoinette tells Christophine that all her money was handed over to her husband under English law. "Law," responds Christophine scornfully, "the Mason boy fix it , that boy worse than Satan and he burn in Hell one of these fine nights." (91) Aunt Cora spells out Mason's duplicity even more clearly:

> It's shameful. You are handing over everything the child owns to a perfect stranger. . . She should be protected legally. A settlement can be arranged and should be arranged.
>
> 'You are talking about an honourable gentleman, not a rascal,' Richard said. 'I am not in a position to make conditions, as you know very well. She is damn lucky to get him, all things considered. Why should I insist on a lawyer's settlement when I trust him? I would trust him with my life,' he went on in an affected voice.
>
> 'You are trusting him with her life, not yours.' She said (95)

It is against this background that the *mot juste* 'legally' produces its meaning and its resonance. When Aunt Cora suggests that the law be invoked to protect Antoinette, Richard affirms the husband's honour and rejects any need for the law. When Antoinette pleads with him to rescue her from the nightmare of imprisonment, an experience which had reduced her to someone even he could not recognise, he calls upon the law as the barrier which inhibits him from assisting her.

Although the writer says that she disconnects her work from Jane Eyre only returning to it in Part Three, there are, as Michael Thorpe points out, parallels and points of contact between the novels in the early sections of Wide Sargasso Sea:

> The development of Rhys's narrative, where it centres upon Antoinette, bears striking resemblance to Bronte's portrayal of the younger Jane. Both heroines grow up fatherless. . . . Life is the nightmare. . . Jane's experience in the red room. . . corresponds to Bertha's incarceration. . . Both heroines know horror beyond the common,endure the encroachment of menace that threatens the very soul and reach out for a seemingly impossible happiness (103 -4)

Thorpe's observation about the lack of fathers points to a concern on the part of both women writers to underscore how the absence of a protective and powerful male figure is a source of suffering for the female protagonists. Jane, while locked up in the Red Room, says, "I doubted not - never doubted - that if Mr Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly. . . I began to recall what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed" (11) When the young protagonist attacks the hypocrisy and cruelty of Mrs. Reed,she warns her that her Uncle Reed is in heaven with her parents and they know how she suffers at the hands of the cruel aunt. In Wide Sargasso Sea, Antoinette, with tears streaming from her eyes rails at the husband; "If my father, my real father, was alive you wouldn't come back here in a hurry after he'd finished with you. If he was alive." (121). The red room too connects the two as despite its opulence it arouses terrors in Jane and Antoinette.

Most critics of Jane Eyre immediately observe that Bertha is Jane's monitory image. In Wide Sargasso Sea Rhys is more interested in pointing towards specific parallels between Jane and the madwoman. In the work of the West Indian writer Jane mirrors Antoinette to highlight how the latter has been distorted by cruelty. A young woman, who at least in an allusive sense suggests Jane Eyre, briefly enters the action of Rhys's work:

> Turning a corner I saw a girl coming out of her bedroom. She wore a white dress and she was humming to herself. I flattened myself against the wall for I did not wish for her to see me, but she stopped and looked around. She saw nothing but shadows, I took care of that, but she didn't walk to the head of the stairs. She ran. She met another girl and the second girl said, 'Have you seen a ghost?' - 'I didn't see anything but I thought I felt something.' 'That is the ghost,' the second one said (148)

The white dress of the Jane figure symbolises her youth and purity but also in the context of the Caribbean novel, death. (Please see section on symbolic imagery). It echoes Antoinette's dream of marriage to the Englishman, the man who later becomes her gaoler, and who we understand is the same man that Jane will marry. Antoinette is deliberately depicted as Jane's ghost. Jane does not see her , but apprehends her as part of her being in a manner reminiscent of the Mephistopheles figure in Good Morning Midnight.

The juxtaposition of both women through the use of imagery challenges Brontë's uncritical attitude toward her character of Rochester and his role in creating the "paper tiger lunatic" Bertha Mason . Rhys's aim is not degrade the Victorian novel, but to "bring forth consciousness of two sides where they had been

repose in one". The culmination of Antoinette's point of view is seen in the dream sequence, which I shall discuss in the section of mirroring techniques.

(iii)

Speech patterns and diction

If the creation of the two major characters is designed to render form as truth, the use of speech patterns, diction and dialogue is carefully crafted to reflect not only their differing viewpoints, but to provide the social and historical framework of the novel. To render her artistic truth, Wide Sargasso Sea reveals a large array of languages used. Rhys demonstrates her dictum: "Everyone talks differently". The use of speech patterns and dialogue is another means of portraying not only the West Indian reality but the West Indian sensibility. The Caribbean writer extends her range of language and linguistic uses in this her last work to convey the texture and the values of the world she recreates.

One of the most interesting characters in terms of language used to convey artistic vision and meaning is Daniel Cosway. He remains more than a mechanical device' (McWatt) because his letters and his dialogues with the husband, the only other character with which he interacts signficantly, reveal his history, his values, his greed, and his place in the society described in the novel. He is 'coloured' and claims to have the same father as Antoinette, a claim discounted by Christophine, Antoinette and

Amélie. As a 'coloured' man he would have been exposed to social and educational advancement, from which Christophine (Read and write I don't know) would have been barred. Amélie, too, as a 'coloured' woman would not have access to the same level of education.

Daniel's first letter to the husband is written with an almost messianic zeal, apparently to perform the unpleasant but imperative task of warning him about Antoinette's badness and madness:

> Dear Sir: I take up my pen after long thought and meditation but in the end truth is better than lie. I have this to say. You have been shamefully deceived by the Mason family. They tell you perhaps that your wife's name is Cosway, the English gentleman Mr. Mason being her stepfather only, but they don't tell you what sort of people were these Cosways. Wicked and detestable slave-owners since generations - yes everybody hate them in Jamaica and also in this beautiful island where I hope your stay will be long and pleasant in spite of all, for some not worth sorrow. Wickedness is not the worst. There is madness in that family. Old Cosway die raving like his father before him (80)

Although the words he uses belong to Standard English, the construction and rhythm of the sentences suggest the writer's efforts to create an artifice which will render the language register in which Daniel articulates his thoughts, his feelings and his lies. The grammatical shortcomings or errors suggest that Daniel's access to correct English is limited: "But no, she marry again to the rich Englishman and there is much I could say about that but you won't believe me so I shut my mouth" (80 -81). Despite his protestations Daniel does not shut his mouth but goes on to give a detailed account of his own personal suffering and of Antoinette's wealth and

privilege against which he feels himself unjustifiably wronged.

Through the epistolary method the text reveals important social and historical values. Daniel's writing not only demonstrates that he had some access to formal learning, but it tells us how the kind of education he had shapes his language uses:

> Sir ask yourself how I can make up this story and for what reason. When I leave Jamaica I read and write and cypher a little. The good man in Barbados teach me more, he give me books, he tell me read the Bible everyday and I pick up knowledge without effort. He is surprise how quick I am. Still I remain an ignorant man and I do not make up story. I cannot. It is true.

Daniel's 'good man' in Barbados suggests the missionaries who taught ex-slaves to read, mainly from the Bible. Daniel's words contradict themselves. In presenting himself as an ignorant and naive man he ingratiates himself with the Englishman. His words that he is ignorant are contradicted by the calculated dissimulation.

Despite Daniel's transparent protestations of naivete and ignorance to disarm the Englishman and satisfy his greed and malice, it is his language which most effectively undermines and exposes him, and it is this which we use mainly to assess his credibility as a person. After the first lengthy, ingratiating, Biblically inspired letter, the second missive dispenses with the embellishment and becomes more elliptical, precise and menacing. The long flowery sentences and the explanatory and sympathetic tone are discarded and his venom exposes itself:

> Why you don't answer. You don't believe me?. . . Why you think they bring you to this place? You want me to come to your house and bawl out your business before everybody? You come to me or I come (98)

The impressionistic representation of an almost exclusively creole speech pattern reveals that Daniel has decided to dispense with the efforts to ingratiate himself with the Englishman by trying to speak his language, the language of the master. He reverts to the language which carries the weight of his most deeply held emotions and feelings. When the husband finally meets Daniel his spoken language is closer to the written one in the last letter, although he still maintains the Biblical tone of the first:

> "Why don't you give me an answer when I write to you the first time?" He went on talking, his eyes fixed on a framed text hanging on a dirty white wall, 'Vengeance is Mine'
>
> "You take too long, Lord," he told it, *I hurry you up" (100 -1)

Daniel's letters and his conversation with the husband reveal him as a person whose account of Antoinette's life helps to shape her fate. Rhys observes that the husband detests Daniel but believes his lies about Antoinette: "(Why) I could guess that. . . I think -because he wants to - that's why." (269) Daniel's letters also provide an interesting contrast to those that the husband writes but never sends. In essence both men are obsessed with money and with possession of Antoinette. The reticence of the one and the explicitness of the other mirror one another in their half -truths, distortions and suppression.

In the conscious mosaic of languages which shape Wide Sargasso Sea, Christophine who is illiterate speaks in a different register to Daniel's although there are similarities. Most of her speech comprises aphorisms, proverbial expressions or mnemonic utterances. Her "Ah! there is no God!" points to the pervasive

nature of evil; "pretty like pretty self" suggests Annette's extraordinary beauty. Christophine's folk wisdom suggests her cultural formation which is essentially non-Anglo-Saxon. Perhaps Rhys's criticism of her work which holds that Christophine is too articulate in Part Two derives from her desire to render the character as predominantly outside the language frame of the husband's world.

Tia, who is seen only in her ambivalent relationship with Antoinette, also reveals another speech pattern. When the two girls quarrel over pennies which Tia tries to cheat Antoinette out of, she insults the white girl for her poverty, and her assumed racial superiority:

> That's not what she hear, she said. She hear all we poor like beggar. We ate saltfish - no money for fresh fish. That old house so leaky, you run with calabash to catch water when it rain. Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They don't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger (21)

The intentionality of Tia's idiolect is the source of the meaning. The use of indirect attribution gives rise to an infiltration of meaning, and opens up for the reader the wider social and historical context in which Antoinette, the protagonist, is placed. The careful rendering of Tia's speech pattern also conveys the 'curse' - the verbal abuse and denigration of another person.

The curse is also rendered in song as Amélie makes up a song about Antoinette's social status as a 'white cockroach':

> The white cockroach she marry
> The white cockroach she marry
> The white cockroach she buy young man
> The white cockroach she marry

Although Amélie sings this song in the presence of the husband, he is unable to understand it because he does not understand not merely the words, but the cultural assumptions that underlie them.

Antoinette herself practises a form of 'cursing' against the huband which he is unable to report in his narrative because the conventions she uses are not wholly accessible to him, although he cannot fail to understand her intention: "She cursed me comprehensively, my eyes, my mouth, every member of my body,and it was like a dream in the unfurnished room with the candles flickering and this red-eyes wild-haired stranger shouting obscenities at me "(122) In the intensity of her anger and her pain, Antoinette reveals a structure of behaviour and verbal expression completely alien and antagonistic to the husband. It is Christophine who tries to explain the reasons for Antoinette's behaviour. He refers to the vile names she called him and the filthy language. Christophine tells him that he had made her so unhappy that she did not know what she was saying:

> I tell you it's nothing. . . Her father old Mister Cosway swear like half past midnight - she pick up from him. And once, when she was little she run away to be with the fishermen and the sailors on the bayside. Those men. She raised her eyes to the ceiling. 'Never would you think they was once innocent babies. She come back copying them. She don't understand what she say (128)

When the husband replies that she understood every word and meant them too the reader is forced to agree with his as the narrative

shape proves him to be correct. Antoinette and Christophine also share a different language frame by virtue of their connections to Martinique. The husband reports Antoinette's anger at his failure to comprehend her world: Adieu foulard, madres, or Ma belle ka di maman li. My beautiful girl said to her mother. (No it is not like that . Now listen. It is this way). She'd be silent or angry for no reason, and chatter to Christophine in patois" (76). When the husband says no reason he means for reasons he cannot understand. Antoinette is frustrated because she fails to communicate through the language most intimately connected with her emotional life. The husband fails to grasp the implication that Christophine and Antoinette, through shared language, are in important ways, closer than he is to her.

What the characters say in Wide Sargasso Sea, is organic to how they say it. The how reveals the what. The graphological rendering of Daniel's life through his letters and his dialogue with the husband; the impressionistic convention which renders the living flavour of Tia's idiolect; Amélie's greed, malice and envy transmuted into song; Christophine's aphorisms and proverbs; Antoinette's multi-lingual capabilities are also used to convey an explicitly and identifiably West Indian point of view. The aesthetic viewpoint of the text is enhanced and elaborated by the speech patterns, diction and dialogue.

(iv)

Patterns of symbolic imagery

Yet another aspect of technique as discovery is the use of colour symbolism and nature imagery. These are cross-referenced to form a patchwork of incremental patterning and symbolic correspondences which finally coalesce in Antoinette's final dream. I shall examine, in order of their appearance, the various images used as a means of helping to tell a story and to create a text:

> Our parrot was called Coco, a green parrot. He didn't talk very well, he could say _Qui est là? Qui est là?_ and answer himself _Ché Coco Ché Coco._ After Mr. Mason clipped his wings he grew very bad tempered, and though he would sit quietly on my mother's shoulder, he dared darted at everyone who came near her and pecked their feet (35)

Coco suggests a metonym for Annette. Mr Mason's clipping of his wings suggests his domination of the household. When Annette tried to warn him of the incipient anger and resentment among the black people he dismisses her idea as being extreme. When her predictions and fears culuminate in the burning down of Coulibri, Coco is again used not only to reiterate Annette's fears, but to foreshadow her and Antoinette's destruction.

> I opened my eyes, everybody was looking up and pointing at Coco on the _glacis_ railings with feather alight. He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire (36)

The image of the parrot's fall prefigures Antoinette's end when she fires the house in England in which her wings are also metaphorically clipped. The connection between Antoinette and Coco also links

the burning down of Coulibri to the burning down of the husband's house. The act of rebellion and hatred which caused the people oppressed by Coulibri to burn it down mirrors the rebellion and hatred which causes Antoinette to fire her husband's house. The arrangement of the imagery directs the reader to the plausibility, the inevitability even, of such an action.

Flower imagery is used to reinforce the wide Sargasso Sea of hatred and rejection experienced by the two major characters. While in convent school, Antoinette says: "We can colour the roses as we choose and mine are green, blue and purple. Underneath I shall write my name in fire red" (44). On his way to the honeymoon house, the husband moans that everything is too intense: "Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red"(59). By establishing these colours as an integral part of Antoinette (she colours the roses according to emotional not natural colouring) and then showing the husband's powerfully negative reaction to exactly the same colours, the colours are used to point to the fundamental incompatibility which exists between them. Antoinette's colours also echo those of Sasha in Good Morning Midnight and Anna in Voyage.

In the Caribbean novel, the flower imagery recurs the first night of the honeymoon at Granbois:

> I . . . took the wreath off. It fell on the floor and as I went toward the window I stepped on it. The room was full of the scent of crushed flowers. I saw her reflection in the glass fanning herself with a small palm leaf coloured blue and red at the edges. I felt sweat on my forehead and sat down, she knelt near me and wiped my face with her handkerchief (62)

The husband's crushing of the wreath, though not deliberate, suggests the way in which he will later crush Antoinette. The looking glass showing him her reflection reinforces the meaning.

The flower imagery is extended when Christophine warns him against the dangers of damaging the flowers: "I send the girl to clear up the mess you make with the frangipani. . . Take care not to slip on the flowers young master " (61) The reverberations within the text are largely achieved throught the cross-referencing of imagery. The sense of the husband's crushing of the flowers, a metonym for Antoinette, links with the stone image to construct a definition of the husband's character and the meaning of his interaction with Antoinette. When we read the scene in which the nurse tells him "You young but already you hard" we are meant to recall these her first words to him. The image of the husband as being hard and like a stone is reinforced by Antoinette's description of him as a stone and Aunt Cora's observation that he is hard. The juxtaposition of stone and flower imagery suggests the way his intransigence will destroy Antoinette's beauty and fragility.

Antoinette's destruction and the roles of both Daniel and the husband are also suggested by another flower imagery:

> I passed an orchid with long sprays of golden-brown flowers. One of them touched my cheek and I remember picking some for her one day. ('They are like you') I told her, NOw I stopped,broke a spray off and trampled it into the mud.

The scene follows the husband's reading of Daniel's first letter, and its effect on him is not narrated but rendered through the imagery.

The patterns of imagery are carefully and systematically cross-fertilized to plot Antoinette's end:

> I put my arms around her, rocked her like a child and sang to her. An old song I thought I had forgotten.
>
> Hail to the queen of the silent night
> Shine bright, shine bright Robin as you
> die

The robin shining brightly as she dies prefigures Antoinette's suicide and her triumphant jump into the flames when she sets his house on fire. The allusion to fire and death echoes and deepens the allusions to Coco and Coulibri and adumbrates the novel's end where Antoinette sees her life in the flames. Other images are also woven into the pattern, mainly drawn from nature, and religious symbolism. The religious overtones are introduced through the allusions to the Garden of Eden: "Our Garden was large and beautiful as that Garden in the Bible - the tree of life grew there. . . The scent was very sweet. I never went near it." (17). The garden in Rhys's novel ironically alludes to the Biblical garden. In the apocalyptic Post-Emancipation days, the images suggest Paradise,gone wild.

The Biblical allusions also draw on the New Testament and the theme of Christ's betrayal. The husband buys Antoinette for thirty thousand pounds. The thirty evokes Christ's betrayal, and this is sustained by the use of the cock crowing which recurs at sensitive points throughout the text. The agent of Antoinette's destruction hears the cock crowing shortly after he marries her: "A cock crowed loudly and I remembered the night before which wh had spent in the town. Antoinette ahd a room to herself,she was exhausted. I lay awake listening to the cock crowing all night" (58). This echoes the pre-crucifixion scene when Christ withdraws

from his disciples and Peter is about to destroy him. When Antoinette goes to Christophine to seek a love potion to win her husband's affection, the cock crows as she leaves; "Nearby a cock crowed and I thought, 'That is for betrayal, but who is the traitor? I forced her with my ugly money. She did not want to do this. And what does anyone know about traitors or why Judas did what he did? (97). When Antoinette poses the rhetorical question, the text suggests that she is at once traitor and victim. She betrays Christophine's cultural practices in seeking to use obeah as a means of winning back the love of the Englishman - a useless endeavour. But she will be victimised also when he tries to change. her identity by calling her Bertha and taking her away to England.

After the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage precipitated by the use of the obeah which went wrong, the image of the cock is introduced, side by side with a sleeping Antoinette:

> 'All the time a cock crowed persistently outside. I took the first book I could lay hands on and threw it at him, but he stalked a few yards away and started again.
>
> Baptiste appeared, looking towards Antoinette's silent room. . .
>
> 'What's the damn cock crowing about?'
>
> 'Crowing of change of weather.'
>
> Because his eyes were fixed on the bedroom I shouted at him, "Asleep, dormi, dormi." (134)

Baptiste's eyes are fixed on the door of the room in Which Antoinette is supposed to be because he understands that the cock crowing symbolises the husband's ultimate act of betrayal. When the cock crows for a

change of weather it suggests that weather will change for Anatoinette who will be removed to another climate - England.

The manipulation of Old Testament and Christian myths and archetypes is also suggested in the ironic use of the colour white, which in the text is always linked to destruction, betrayal and death. Myra, the housemaid at Coulibri, is rendered as a creature of doom. The story of her role in the fire is told through the use of the colour 'white'. Aunt Cora specifically warns Mr. Mason against discussing his plans to import cheap labour, instead of paying better wages, in the presence of Myra. He dismisses her warning as ignorance of the laziness of black people. Myra then appears at the dinner table to serve them:

> Myra came in again looking mournful as she always did though she smiled when she talked about hell . . . [T]he handkerchief she wore round her head was always white. Never striped or a gay colour (30)

Myra's mournful looks, her preoccupation with hell, and her perpetual white head dress presage tragedy. The carefully selected description of Myra suggests that she is listening to the conversation and she will tell the other black people of the Masons' plans. The deliberate manner in which she betrays the family is suggested, not stated. When the household becomes aware that the ex-slaves had surrounded the house, Myra was still present. However,when the fire starts and Annette goes to Pierre's room she realises to her horror that Myra had abandoned the sick child: "His crib was on fire. . . The little room was on fire and Myra was not there . She has gone. She was not there." (33) When Aunt Cora responds aphoristically, 'That does

not surprise me at all', the reader is meant to recall her insistent warning to Mr. Mason and the images which surrounded Myra's portrayal.

The colour white recurs in Antoinette's dream (to be examined later) and as a foreshadowing of her death when she bids goodbye to her cousin Sandi: "Now there was no time left so we kissed each other. . . We had often kissed before but not like that. . .That was the life and death kiss. . . The white ship whistled three times" (152) The use of the white ship and the Biblical number three also suggest betrayal.

'White' in the work as a symbol of death and betrayal is dramatically contrasted with 'red' as a symbol of passion, liberation and life. The last section of the novel opens with the fire motif:

> The paper shrivels, the sticks crackle and spit, the coal smoulders and glowers. In the end the flames shoot up and they are beautiful. I get out of bed and go close to watch them and to wonder why I have been brought here. There must be a reason. What is it that I must do? (153)

The juxtaposition of her questioning of her fate and the fire images signal her ultimate purpose. When Grace Poole observes pityingly that Antoinette has no idea of the length of time she has been in the attic. she responds that her reality and her fate cannot be measured in terms of sequential time. She apprehends her suffering through memory and experience:

> On the contrary. . . only I know how long I have been here. Nights and days and days and nights hundreds of them slipping through my fingers. But that does not matter. Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress has a meaning (151)

The substance of Antoinette's reality is not elusive time over which she has no control. What has meaning is her fate and the reason she was brought to the house. It is her red dress which symbolizes that fate: "I saw it hanging, the colour of sunset and fire. The colour of flamboyant flowers" The red of the dress also suggests,passion, anger and the spilling of blood. It is through the motif of the red dress that the text builds a sense of Antoinette's reality in the attic and dramatises her destiny: "I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now." (153) That was the third time I had my dream, and it ended" (153)

All aspects of Antoinette's life come together in her dream and the images coalesce: the images of Coco the parrot, the flowers, the colour red, the garden at Coulibri:

> I sat quietly. . . . Then I turned and saw the sky It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork , all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw my doll's house and the books and the pictures of the Miller's Daughter I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, Qui est là? Qui est là? and the man who hate me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man's voice Berhta! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red (155)

The juxtaposition of the sequential time with the psychological demonstrates how Antoinette's history and existence dissolves into a mere fraction of a second, yet achieves timeless symbolic proportions through the emphasis on the fire. The persistent fire motif anchors all the other images and patterns, which are used as variations. At the end of her life the motif of the burning house recurs with slight variation to close off the theme suggested by the burning down of Coulibri. The motifs and the symbolism are carefully selected to render the social, historical and personal reality of the Post Emancipation era.

The use of imagery to suggest the circular movement of the text is also seen in the way Antoinette 'dies'. The novel opens with a suicide and ends with an apparent suicide. Mr. Luttrell, Annette's neighbour in the grim days following the Emancipation, shot his dog one calm evening and swam out to sea and was gone for always. Paula Grace Anderson points to the repetition- with slight variation of specific images which helps to produce the novel's meaning:

> Mr. Luttrell's suicide is a statement on the horror of dispossession of the former owning class of the islands. . . who after Emancipation were now rendered a collapsed class, neither acceptable to the European world, nor the evolving world of the blacks, the former slaves. Deprived of a once cheap source of labour (and waiting in vain for compensation from Britain) they now faced an economic vacuum and cultural disinheritance. . . Mr. Luttrell abdicates from life, meticulously, and almost by apparent accident.
>
> On the other hand, the 'suicide' with which the novel ends, is an aggressive act of self-assertion and will; the affirmation of the claims of the self in the face of the life-in-death solitary confinement in Thornfield Hall (224)

(v)

Repetition-with-variation, mirroring and dreams

The rendering of point of view, speech patterns, symbolic imagery and colour symbolism is complicated by the use of a complex and reiterative use of mirroring techniques. The central image of mirroring in the text,as many critics have noted, is the relationship between Antoinette and Tia. As Coulibri burns, Antoinette thinks that she will seek comfort in her friendship with Tia:

> I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her,for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand, but did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as I saw myself. Like in a looking-glas (38)

The blow from Tia spoils Antoinette for her wedding day, 'and all the other days and nights" (110) The full significance of Tia as a mirror image is revealed only in the last section of the novel. But the text constructs important connections between the two to demonstrate that Tia is enemy and friend, saviour and destroyer. It is out of acknowledgement of her mother's rejection and Antoinette's

acute loneliness that Christophine brings the two girls together. For a brief period, their relationship was intense and satisfying and went some way toward relieving Antoinette's isolation. It is the quarrel over money which severs the connection,at least at a literal level. Another more implicit connection is symbolized by the switching of dresses:

> I looked round Tia was gone. I searched for a long time and before I could believe that she had taken my dress. . . . starched ironed, cleaned that morning. She had left me hers and I put it on at last and walked home in the blazing sun feeling sick, hating her (21)

When Antoinette arrives home, she embarrasses her mother, who . after a long period of being a social outcast, now has guests. She comments that Antoinette seems dirtier than usual and is horrified that Antoinette is wearing Tia's dress. She demands that Christophine burn the dress.

As Christophine forces an old muslin dress on the child she observes that the coming of the new neighbours meant danger. Antoinette too feels that her old life is changing and she is frightened. This is when she has the first instalment of her dream. (It is one dream, repeated with variation and extended three times throughout the text, in progressive sequence). The dream in its first instalment only hints at the dangers which await Antoinette:

> 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 I struggled and screamed and could not move (23)

The motifs of the second instalment are explicitly linked to the last where Tia's pivotal role is explored fully. This sequence

is placed immediately before the husband's voice takes over the narrative. The motifs are of sex, death, terror and fascination which are all features of the nightmare reality of Antoinette's life. The dream is set partly in the forest and partly in *hortus conclusus*. The text deliberately uses the term 'enclosed garden' which alludes to Narcissus and reinforces the mirroring motif which runs through dream and reality within the work:

> Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking toward the forest. I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. 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. This must happen. Now we have reached the forest. We are under tall dark trees and there is no wind. 'Here?' He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. He smiles slyly. 'Not here n ot yet he says,and I follow him , weeping. No I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dirt, my beauatiful dress. We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees. I do not know them. There are steps leading upwards. It is too dark to see the wall of the steps, but I know they are there and I think I will not go any further . The tree jerks and sways as if it is trying to throw me off. Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years. 'Here, in here, a strange voice said, and the trees stopped swaying and jerking (50)

In the enclosed garden, asserts Spivak, Antoinette finds not love, but a strange, threatening voice, inviting her into a prison which masquerades as love. The sexual imagery is conveyed through the white dress, symbol of virginity and purity about to be deflowered. It also in the meaning of the novel suggests death. The forest is a symbolic geography of sex. The connection with death is related

to her sexuality. It is through her sexual love for her husband that she will be destroyed. The swaying tree suggests the phallocentric sadism embodied in the husband. The voice which tells her 'Not here, not yet' in a phrase reminiscent of <u>A Passage to India</u> suggests the husband's who recognizes that he cannot destroy her in her own land he has to imprison her in his.. When she wakes, Antoinette says that she dreamed she was in hell. Hell describes precisely the life she will share with her husband in England.

The connection between sex and death is far more than the preoccupation with sex as a kind of symbolic death. The novel's technique points to the destruction and the terror which manifest themselves when sexual contact is based on exploitation and the gross a buse of power . The text reinforces this concern by using Antoinette's dream experience as a point of recall for her mother's tragic life and tragic death.

> The dream is evil. Put it from your mind - never think of it again.. . . Drink your chocolate.
>
> While I am drinking it I remember that after my mother's funeral, very early in the morning, almost as early as this, we went home to drink chocolates and eat cakes. She died last year, no one told me how, and I didn't ask. Mr. Mason was there and Christophine, no one else. Christophine cried bitterly but I could not. I prayed, but the words fell to the ground meaning nothing.
>
> Now the thought of her is mixed up with my dream.
>
> I saw her in the mended habit riding a borrowed horse, trying to wave at the head of the cobblestoned road at Coulibri, and tears came to my eyes again. 'Such terrible things happen, ' I said. 'Why? Why?' (51)

The explicit connection made between the dream and Annette in her

old riding habit directs the reader back to the incident of Tia's dress. The key word which triggers the recall is the horse. After Annette sees Antoinette in the shabby dress belonging to Tia, she works desperately to change their clothing, symbol of social status and sexuality:

> I don't know how she got the money to buy the white muslim and pink. Yards of muslin. She mayé have sold her last ring , for there was one left. . . They were mending and sewing first thing in the morning and still sewing when I went to bed. In a week she had a new dress and so had I.
>
> The Luttrels lent her a horse, and she would ride off very early and not come back till late next day. . . (23)

Before the Luttrels came Annette had a horse which was poisoned. She used to ride about in shabby riding clothes until his death. With the new clothes her status in society changes and she now has a healthy and impressive horse. The narrative arrangment connects the contents of Antoinette's dream with Annette's life, showing how the one's experience mirrors the other. Each woman's life is a mirror image, a redoubling of the other.

Antoinette, the narrator, insists that 'there always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about' (106) She says her mother died the first time she was left poor and abandoned at Coulibri; and dies again at her physical death. Antoinette also dies twice. She is metaphorically killed when her husband tries to distort her identity by calling her Bertha and she dies when in her dream she jumps to Tia. Both women are West Indians married to Englishmen who assume that their reality is the only one. Annette

says to her husband: "You won't believe in the other side". Antoinette repeats the words with slight variation: "There is always the other side,always" . Both women possess great physical beauty which is largely responsible for the attraction their husbands feel toward them. The importance of their bodies for the husbands is depicted in their ability to dance: "Annette is such a pretty woman, and what a dancer. . . Yes,what a dancer". When Mr. Mason decides to marry off Antoinette he wants to know whether she has been taught to dance. when she says no, he says that there won't be any difficulty. There was none at all. The husband says of Antoinette later: "When at last I met her I bowed, smiled kissed her hand, danced with her" The sameness of the women is also expressed in physical expressions

> A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep - it might have been cut with a knife (Annette)

> [T]he frown between her thick eyebrows, deep as it had been cut with a knife (Antoinette)

Another striking area of mirroring in the two women's live is their reaction to cruelty and suffering. When Annette is abused by her captors, one of the men tries to force her to drink alcohol as a means of forgetting her pain:"He said, 'Drink it and you will forget.' She drank it without stopping. He poured her some more and she took the glass and laughed, threw it over her shoulder. It smashed to pieces". When Antoinette realises that she is on the ship being taken to England,she longs for escape: "I smashed the glasses and plates against the porthole. I hoped it would break and the sea would come in". Both women whose marriages are based on concerns of economics die outside the action of the novel

without the security that money should bring.

Another character who mirrors Antoinette is Amélie. The text insists on their connection by virtue of their gender. It also suggests that the oppression of women is continuous with imperialism. Antoinette attacks her husband for sleeping with Amélie:

> I thought you liked black people so much. . . but that's just a lie like everything else. You like the light brown girls better, don't you? You abused the planters and made up stories about them, but you do the same thing. You send the girl away quicker, with no money or less money, and that's all the difference.
>
> Slavery was not a matter of liking or disliking,' I said tring to speak calmly. 'It was a question of justice.
>
> 'Justice,'she said. 'I've heard that word. It's a cold word. I tried it out. I wrote it down. I wrote it down several times and always it looked like a damn cold lie to me. There is no justice. . . . My mother whom you all talk about, what justice did she have? My mother sitting in rocking chair speaking about dead horses and dead grooms and a black devil kissing her sad mouth like you kissed mine (157)

The referencing and cross-referencing of each woman's experience with men; each life repeated with variation, suggests a sense of a splintered mirror each life ,with slight distortions, representinng a part of the mosaic.

The mirroring technique is most effectively dramatised when Antoinette meets Bertha in the house of the husband. She sees reflected there the Othered self that the husband had created. In her dream before she actually confronts the Other,she flees from it. "It seemed to me that someone was following me,someone was chasing me laughing. Sometimes I looked to the right or to the left but I never looked behind me for I did not want to see that ghost of a

woman whom they say haunts the place" (153) The ghost of a woman is Bertha, the imposed identity. Antoinette apprehends her as being external to her own experienced reality. After she enters the red room and observes the wealth the husband accrued through trading in her life, she comes back into the hall to confront her doppelgänger:

> It was then that I saw her - the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of a tablecloth and I saw flames shoot up. As I ran or perhaps floated or flew I called Christophine help me and looking behind me I saw that I had been helped. There was a wall of fire protecting me (154)

The fire as an instrument of liberation is what frees her from the distorted mirror image of Bertha, the Other, the madwoman in the attic. When she cauterizes by fire the imposed identity,she thereby creates her own. After she has fired the place to her satisfaction, Antoinette sits down on the cool battlements and sees the sky with her life in it (as previously examined). When she comes to the end of her dream reality, Antoinette is beckoned by both her husband who is calling her by the name she has burned, and by Tia, who challenges her. She screams, jumps and calls 'Tia'. Antoinette's dream ends and she says: 'Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do'. The mirror image is sustained (in the dream) through the reference to the pool at Coulibri which suggests again Narcissus seeing himself in the pool. It is Tia that Antoinette sees. When she jumps back to Tia in her dream, she reconnects with her essential identity, her self. The fracture is healed.

Antoinette's dream and her jump liberate her from the imprisonment in her husband's house and from the cardboard world of Bronte's misrepresentation:

> I open the door and walk into their world. It is, as I always knew, made of cardboard. . . . As I walk along the passages I wish to see what is behind this cardboard. They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. I don't remember, but we lost it. . . (148)

Antoinette's sense that she had lost her way to England echoes her husband's feelings about the enigma of the West Indies: "What I see is nothing. I want what it hides. That is not nothing". The wide sargasso sea separates Antoinette and the husband in fundamental ways,one's reality is the other's dream. Again this suggests the mirroring technique:

> Is it true. . . that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.
>
> WEll,' I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.'
>
> 'But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?'
>
> 'And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?'
>
> 'More easily,' she said, 'much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.'
>
> 'No, this is unreal and like a dream,' I thought (67)

Their mutual dislocation points to the unity of their conflicts. 'No longer,' asserts Jean D'Costa, 'can we see the northern landscape

as separate and apart from the tropical. The crisis of identity which shatters Antoinette Rochester's sanity recoils upon the master of Thornfield Hall" (21).

Like Antoinette in the upper room of his house,the husband too has a visionary experience in Antoinette's world. When he receives Daniel's letter suggesting the decadence of his wife's family and her incipient madness, he is confused and lost. In a bid to escape his confused impressions he falls asleep after a drunken stupor. When he wakes up, he observes:

> The silence was disturbing, absolute. I would .have welcomed the sound of a dog barking, a man sawing wood. Nothing. Silence. Heat. It was five minutes to three (86)

The husband decides to walk along a path he has seen from his window:

> I began to walk very quickly, then stopped because the light was different. A green light. I had reached the forest and you cannot mistake the forest. It is hostile. Tha path was overgrown but it was possible to follow it. I went on without looking at the tall trees on either side. HOw can one discover truth I thought and that thought led me nowhere. No one would tell me the truth.

Although he does not find truth ,he is becalmed by the green light.

> I don't know how long it was before I began to feel chilly. The light had changed and the shadows were long. I had better get back before deark, I thought. Then I saw a little girl carrying a large basket on her head. I met her eyes and to my astonishment she screamed loudly, threw up her arms and ran. The basket fell off . I called after her but she screamed and ran faster. She sobbed as she ran, a small frightened sound. Then she disappeared

When the husband tries to get out of the forest he realises that he is trapped. The undergrowth and creepers caught at his legs

and the trees close over his head. When he feels that danger looms Baptiste appears to lead him to safety. He asks Baptiste repeatedly about the road on which he walked into the forest and the other replies firmly and brusquely that there is no road. He tries to tell the West Indian man about the little girl suggesting that she was a ghost or zombi, and Baptiste replies that he knows nothing about 'all that foolishness'. Once out of the woods, Baptiste smiles at him: "It was as if he'd put his service mask on the savage reproachful face I had seen" (85 -88)

There are implicit parallels between the husband's experience in the green forest and Antoinette's dream. The sense of horror which Antoinette feels is displaced in the man's experience on to the forest. In the woman's dream she follows hypnotised a man who she knows hates her. In the husband's dream, the little girl flees from him although he does not mean to harm her, and he is the one who is trapped. The husband is rescued by Baptiste who as the overseer knows the land intimately. Yet he cast serious doubts on the husband's story by stating that there is no road. The tone of the passage is not ironic. The husband's reality is not being undermined. The text suggests that his experience is apprehended in an intensely personal and honest way which contradicts the external reality and the knowledge of the native West Indians.

The husband's experience conveys a heightened state of consciousness, an attempt at a deeper penetration of reality, as he tries to make sense of the strange land and people. His suspicions aroused by the malicious Daniel force him to attempt to

discover truth. His sense of being trapped in the forest symbolises his attitude not only to the place but to the woman he has married. The little girl who runs away from him is an ironic reversal of Antoinette's commitment to him despite his cruelty and an inversion of the little boy who loves him and whom he spurns. In order to make sense of his experience he goes to an English novel The Glittering Coronet which reveals a contradictory and confused account of a zombi,the dupliciituous negroes, the credulity of the whites. He ceases reading at the sentence which begins' It is further complicated by. . . ' His book distorts the reality he is himself experiencing and causes greater confusion. He misses the meanings and possibilities which inhere in his vision in the forest.

The text frames the husband's experience of timelessness and irreality by a precise pinpointing of the chronological units of time in which it occurred. "It was five minutes to three" when he started walking toward the forest. It was almost dark when he was rescued by Baptiste. There is one essential difference in the experiences of both the husband and Antoinette. In the dream truth of the West Indian woman all facets of her reality are apprehended and accepted. She 'dies' triumphantly. The husband's fate is frightening. He is swallowed up into a meaningless void after he leaves the West Indies Wide Sargasso Sea, concludes D'Costa, "asserts the necessity of accepting many worlds in one or of enduring the tragic consequences of denial" (14 -15)

CONCLUSION

The Rhys oeuvre demonstrates the writer's own dictum to dig her bucket deep into the lake of writing and then to add to that lake. She immerses herself in the received literary traditions and styles of Europe, and manipulates these to render her own voice. Increasingly from the production of Voyage in the Dark her concern is to create a particular West Indian voice; to write of the only home she has known, 'I've never had another anyway.' (Letters 105) The aesthetics and practices of Modernism and the teachings of Ford Madox Ford are the ones to which she held most firmly throughout her long career. However, in criticising and questioning these, and distancing herself from the ideological presuppositions, she creates for herself a particular style and a particular voice. She brings to her last novel, Wide Sargasso Sea, a commitment to craft, equalled only by her commitment to giving her 'West Indian side and point of view'. In many important respects this work is the culmination of her artistic endeavour. Published when she was seventy six years old, she repeatedly insisted that she had said what she wanted to say in her fiction and was more concerned with an autobiography to correct the many lies told about her. Her last volume Sleep it Off. Lady contained many short stories written during the thirties and forties. Of this book she said she considered the stories were not

of her usual standard. She referrred to them as 'magazine' stories.

Rhys's contribution to Caribbean and art and culture is perhaps best manifest in her truculence and her resistance to the imposed identity and the distorted perceptions of the region which culminates in the distillation of forms of European writing in Wide Sargasso Sea. In manipulation of theme and technique, she cuts through the weight of metropolitan cultural assumptions to render a fundamentally different structure of experience. In terms of her relation to other West Indian wrtters, the themes of exile, class and colour, and the mutilations imposed on the psyche by these divisions, form part of the stock of motifs in the region's literary output. West Indian practitioners seem to value Jean Rhys, above all, for her life which was lived as a commitment to her art and which helped to prepare the ground for later artistic expressions. Writers as various as Mexican Carlos Fuentes, Wilson Harris, V. S. Naipaul praise her artistic brillance and her rendering of the Caribbean spirit.

It is above all the women writers of the Caribbean who reveal themselves to be the heirs of Jean Rhys. Sue Greene's analysis of six contemporary West Indian novels by women uses as a point of departure the works of Rhys. She suggests important parallels or affinities especially in Heremakhonon by Maryse Condé whose protagonist shows similarities with Anna of Voyage in the Dark (Six Caribbean NOvels by Women). Other less well known writers like Lorna Goodison and Olive Senior honour Rhys as the spiritual godmother

for West Indian women writers acknowledging her oeuvre as the most influential precursory texts, which by their existence created a path for them to follow. Derek Walcott's poem 'Jean Rhys' captures the legacy which Jean Rhys bequeathed to the other side of the wide sargasso sea:[3]

> her right hand married to Jane Eyre
> foreseeing that her own white wedding dress
> will be white paper
>
> — Derek Walcott

PART ONE

1 I shall argue later in the study that Rhy's autobiographical writing reveals such important similarities with her fiction that the harnessing of facts is not straightforward. I have selected pieces of these writings as part of her literary biography because her impressions and rendering of her life, particularly where they relate to her writing, provide a useful index to her artistic concerns.

2 An analysis of the literary connections of the two writers will be undertaken in the following section.

3 Jean Rhys's last novel of the inter-bellum period was first published in England in 1939 as Good Morning Midnight. When Rhys was 'rediscoverd' and her early works republished, her American editors inserted a comma. In this study I shall use the title as it originally appeared.

4 The study takes account of the bulk of critical perspectives on the Jean Rhys canon, as indicated by the extensive bibliography at the end of the text.

5 The overwhelming majority of critical works use specific aspects of the author's life - predominantly her emotional relationships - to analyse her fictional development. My aim in this study is to concentrate on aspects of her fiction which reveal her complex connections to Europe and the West Indies. I try as far as possible to avoid the use of her art to explain her life, or more perilously, to use the life to explain the art. I understand that knowledge of previous critical comment is a prerequisite of the study but since 'showing the inaccuracies of critics is better separated from the demonstration of Jean Rhys as a writer'. I shall focus mainly on 'those whose critiques offer a way into' the fiction. I shall depart from these guidelines only when it is unavoidable.

6 Please see for example, James McFarlane, 'The Mindi of Modernism' Modernism 71 - 94

7 My study takes account of the major literary/historical analyses of the women's movement and women's literature which have appeared especially in the last decade. My intention in this section is to use the internal evidence of the Rhys fiction in an attempt to discover how and where her artistic and philosophical pereptions intersect or relate to the women's movement and the women's fiction of the period.

8 For a full discussion on the owmne's response please see Elaine Showalter, A Literatue of Their Own and Patricia Stubbs, Women and Fiction, Feminism and the Novel.

[9] I shall examine the West Indian connection in Part Three.

[10] Peter Green's article appeared in _The Observer_ on January 25, 1953.

[11] This analysis draws heavily on Henry Gates, _Black Literature and Literary Theory._

PART TWO

1 Rhy's use of this same technique in her last novel, Wide Sargasso Sea will be analysed in Part Three.

2 Gloria Fromm argues that the use of chapter headings is uncharacteristic of Rhys and she describes them as an "all-too-obvious symbolism imported from the nineties" (49)

3 The political and philosophical concepts which can be extrapolated from this episode anticipate later feminist thinkers. Helene Cixous, for example, argues that:

> [A]s soon as we exist, we are born into language and language speaks [to] us, dictates its law, a law of death; . . . and even at the moment of uttering a sentence, admiting a notion of 'being', a question of being, an ontology, we are already seized by a certain kind of masculine desire, the desire that mobilizes philosophical discourse. ('Castration and Decapitation: trans. Annette Kuhn, Sighs 7, 1 (Autumn).

PART THREE

1 'Trio' has been reprinted in Tales of the Wide Caribbean (1986).

2 The concerns touched on the short story suggest the Prospero/Caliban dialectic which is discussed by George Lamming in PLeasures of EXile and Roberto Fernández Retamar in "Caliban: Notes towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America." Massachusetts Review 15 (Spring Review) 1974: 7 -72.

3 For a full discussion on the relationship between the two women please see Elaine Campbell, "From Dominica to Devonshire," cited in Bibliography.

4 Taken from Henry Gates, Literary Theory.

5 Quoted by MIchael Thorpe, p. 102.

6 The final words spoken by the husband are crucial to the novel's meaning, as the author indicates:

> Last night I sat up very late. . . and got what I thought four or five lines right, fixed inevitable and not to be changed and as they were the last lines of Part II I was pleased - because four lines right can mean

> a lot. Well - this morning I woke up to the song 'Everything's been done before' and the words "Madame Bovary" and realised at once that these lines were not the words but the situation at the end of "Madame Bovary", her death. Well. . . as I have not read that novel for years I find it odd - and have thought and thought about it and finally decided. No it was not Mme Bovary it was me - I wonder though. Thoughts are strange and books too. Very. (Letters 276)

The author's words seem to support my arguments, amplified later, that the husband's departure suggests a dissolution of his selfhood, his being.

7 Please see for example the works of John Thieme and MIchael Thorpe cited in the Bibliography.

8 Derek Walcott, The Fortunate Traveller.

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