'Back & *Down*':
Narrative, Psychoanalysis, and Progress in the Novels of Jean Rhys

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DECLARATION

I, J. Kathryn Cook, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

J. Kathryn Cook, 23 June 2016

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to examine Jean Rhys's novels from a psychoanalytic perspective. While Rhys's fiction is undeniably autobiographically informed, the intent of this study is to explore the life of the fiction rather than that of its author. Each of Rhys's five novels – *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) – chronicles the suffering, trauma, and loss experienced by its respective protagonist. As such, Rhys's oeuvre is imbued with a sense of fragmentation that renders her work particularly rich literary material for psychoanalytic criticism, though to date little has been applied to her works.

Looking at each of the author's five individual novels as connected in terms of the issues they explore, this thesis tracks the development of Rhys's works as she systematically explores issues of trauma, maternity, desire, and loss through her characters. My argument is that Rhys's novels represent a literary and psychological progressions inwards, in which her heroines increasingly tolerate psychological spaces infused with strife, demonstrate self-awareness, and develop empathy; my thesis will explore how and by what means this process occurs. Drawing on existing criticism on Rhys's work, which consists predominantly of feminist and postcolonial studies, I will look at the issues and themes of Rhys's oeuvre in conjunction with the psychoanalytic works and theories of Freud and Lacan. This study aims to be an interdisciplinary examination of Rhys's texts and hopes to offer a potentially valuable and largely unexplored way of reading and appreciating her work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

> At the end one is forced back – away from other people away from books away from trees flowers & grass back & *down*. They say madness that way to madness no the ness is to resist the most powerful. With this eye I see & no other. I cannot see with other people's eyes. With my own eyes I must see. I cannot help what I see.
> –Jean Rhys[1]

This quote, taken from one of Jean Rhys's personal notebooks, highlights the importance of interior space that characterises Rhys's approach to her highly personal oeuvre. The author's five novels, *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) each explore the realms not only of physical and geographical spaces but also, and more importantly, internal, mental, and emotional spaces these novels' characters occupy. In Rhys's fiction, place is never simply geographical, nor is trajectory solely a matter of direction; both are complicated, often deeply layered concepts. It is therefore imperative not only to map the literal territories of Rhys's narratives, but the deeper, internal, and psychological places her works explore: places that are 'back & *down'*; places of 'madness'; places, in other words, of the psyche. The premise of this thesis is that Rhys's five novels are autobiographically informed narratives that track the progression of a capacity to tolerate these internal spaces, while developing self-awareness and an increased capacity for empathy.

In order to explore this premise and illustrate the interiority of Rhys's texts, this study will address the author's five major works from a psychoanalytic perspective, with

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[1] Rhys, Jean, 'Green Exercise Book, The Jean Rhys Collection' (McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa).

particular attention to Freud's primary texts and Lacan's seminars. More specific methodological intentions regarding this approach, as well as existing psychoanalytic criticism on Rhys, will be outlined in the following chapter. The rationale for this approach, however, is best explicated by the aesthetics of the texts themselves. Linett suggests that the internally focused novels Rhys produced embody 'a literary means by which to represent particular mental processes […]. In order to portray her protagonists' fragmented minds'.[2] The result is a series of novels that 'lay bare in brilliantly sketched […] detail their characters' mental lives'.[3] Because Rhys's narratives tend to focus on the interiority of her characters' lives rather than their external worlds, her work – which Laura Frost notes repeatedly 'stages vignettes with a staccato rhythm, non sequiturs, tonal disjunctions, inappropriate affect, a lack of narrative explanation or continuity'[4] – has undergone harsh criticism by those who prefer more traditional, cohesive, and plot-driven narratives. What critics such as these find problematic, however – such as Rhys's affinity for textual gaps, confused stream-of-consciousness narration, uncomfortable emotions, sordid realities, and ambiguous endings – are the same elements that make her work particularly appropriate for psychoanalytic literary criticism.

Due to the autobiographical nature of Rhys's narratives, it is necessary to address the question of who or what is being analysed within her oeuvre and useful to set explicit boundaries therein. Because it is often difficult to know where Rhys ends and her characters begin, critical studies have often conflated the two. This dynamic is further complicated by the fact that in her later life Rhys herself 'constantly invoked her

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[2] Linett, Maren, '"New Words, New Everything": Fragmentation and Trauma in Jean Rhys', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 51 (2005), 437–66 (p. 438).
[3] Ibid.
[4] Frost, Laura, 'The Impasse of Pleasure: Patrick Hamilton and Jean Rhys', in *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and Its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 162–208 (p. 191).

characters to describe her own life, blending the latter with her fictions'.[5] Rhys often said,

both in her writing and in interviews, that she could not create without drawing from her

life: 'I can't make things up, I can't invent […] I just write about what happened. Not that

my books are entirely my life – but almost'.[6] Because Rhys only felt comfortable writing

what she knew – and the only thing she truly felt she knew was herself[7] – her fiction

embodies aspects of her turbulent life, difficult relationships, and personal struggles.

Despite the obvious and myriad similarities between Rhys and her characters, however,

Elaine Savory warns against a pure conflation of author and fiction, which she argues can

lead to an oversimplification of the texts.

> [W]hen the source is Rhys herself it is wise to remember that she created the
> narrative of her life […] as an ongoing fictional text. It was true in the sense of
> being honest in its interpretation, its reading, of her experience: it did not attempt
> to be literally faithful to small detail and to the shapelessness of actual life. It is
> mostly a mistake to *simply* conflate Rhys's life and her texts.[8]

Though Rhys's fiction should not be read as autobiography or confession, elements of her

personal experiences, traumas, and challenges plainly inform the construction of her

narratives and the themes that they evoke. Conflation being ill-advised, however, the

challenge becomes one of using the knowledge of Rhys's life and this dynamic in a

responsible and appropriate way.

Despite the singularly strong presence of many psychoanalytic themes within

Rhys's oeuvre, particularly the author's concern with portraying what Simpson deems

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[5] Parsons, Deborah L., *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 135.

[6] Owen, Karen, 'Introduction', in *Quartet* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. v-vi.

[7] Rhys, Jean, *The Paris Review Interviews*, ed. by Philip Gourevitch (Edinburgh: Canon Gate, 2008), III, p. 214.

[8] Savory, Elaine, *Jean Rhys*, Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. xii.

'the emotional core of her characters, [and their] inner lives',[9] the author's relationship

and attitude toward psychoanalysis is worth pausing to address. Rhys's reaction to Freud

is marked by what Moran describes as a strong sense of outrage at the founder of

psychoanalysis who Rhys refers to as 'the psychoanalytic gent'[10] in one of her exercise

books.[11] Moran summarises Rhys's criticism of Freud's theory (which is most likely

based on his early and subsequently renounced seduction theory), in which Rhys

'articulates her resentment at Freud's reduction of his women patients to nameless,

numbered case histories whose individual stories he lumps together and dismisses as

generic tales disguising the women's own sexual fantasies'.[12] In terms of Rhys's attitude

toward analysis and psychotherapy more generally, Diana Athill recalls that Rhys 'didn't

like the idea of [psychoanalysis]. She didn't want people poking about her mind.

Absolutely against it. She was very secretive […]. She would have run a mile from

anyone who would have tried to persuade her to be analyzed'.[13] Athill's recollections

about Rhys's distrust of the psychoanalytic process echo Moran's research regarding

Rhys's distrust of its founder. However, Athill also suggests that in her experience of

Rhys, the author's writing itself was fundamental to her own psychological development:

'I think if she had been analysed she probably wouldn't have written her books […]. I

think she did [self-analyse]; I think she saved herself. I'm sure that she did'.[14] Athill's

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[9] Simpson, Anne. B, *Territories of the Psyche: The Fiction of Jean Rhys* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 7.

[10] Quoted in Moran, Patricia, *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys and the Aesthetics of Trauma* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 93.

[11] While Simpson argues that 'there is no evidence that [Rhys] read Freud himself and certainly no sign that she had any strong grounding in his work or that of his successors' (7), Sue Thomas convincingly argues that Rhys had likely picked up Freud's *The Introductory Lectures* in Paris at Shakespeare & Company (Thomas, Sue, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999).

[12] Moran, *Aesthetics*, pp. 89-94.

[13] Athill, Diana, Interview with Diana Athill, October 18, 2012.

[14] Ibid.

suggestion that Rhys's work in some way replicates the tasks of analysis corroborates many critical readings of the author's work, which places the theory of 'scriptotherapy'[15] – the working through of trauma that substitutes the analyst with the writing process[16] – squarely at the centre of Rhys's literary intent.

Despite our knowledge of the highly personal elements present in Rhys's oeuvre, in order to avoid a problematic juxtaposition of the author's life and her work, the present study's primary interest will focus on her novels rather than her personal history. This is not to say that Rhys's background is irrelevant – the background of any author, as well as the context in which his or her work is produced often yields significantly richer readings of the texts – merely that the aforementioned danger of conflating the author with her characters must be safeguarded against. Recognising that such an overlap exists in Rhys's work is the first step necessary to reconciling a series of narratives that exist amorphously between autobiography and fiction; the second and more difficult task is the question of what to do with this information. In her study of the urban spaces explored in Rhys's oeuvre, Deborah Parsons confronts the personal elements of the author's fiction by allowing for an aesthetic ambiguity in which seemingly mutually exclusive positions coexist. Parsons argues that

> Anna Morgan, Marya Zelli, Julia Martin, and Sasha Jensen both are and are not Jean Rhys […][which] implies an attempt to transform not so much life into literature but literature into life […]. It is thus important to recognize the poetic construction as well as the biographical details that lie behind Rhys's fictions, to consider her artistic perception and the distancing of fact and fiction through a developing aesthetic.[17]

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[15] The term scriptotherapy was originally coined by Suzette Henke in her book *Shattered Subjects*. Henke, Suzette, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing.* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999).

[16] Moran, *Aesthetics*, pp. 4-5.

[17] Parsons, p. 135.

The idea that Rhys's texts are contemporaneously fictional constructions and deeply personal accounts mirrors Karen Owen's suggestion that Rhys constructs her characters as 'fictional reinventions'[18] of herself in order not necessarily to write an account of her life, but to *rewrite* her experience. Veronica Gregg's approach to Rhys's oeuvre also highlights the importance of rewriting and repetition in Rhys's novels.

> Rewriting is the major technical and textual strategy in Rhys's work. […] She writes and rewrites the same 'facts', using them in different contexts. By doing so, it seems to me, she quite literally writes life out of them, turning the biographical facts into fictions and the fictions into her own provisional and partial 'truths'. Second, through quotations, allusions, and other forms of intertextuality, Rhys rewrites many of the topoi and texts of European discourse on the West Indies. Why? In order to write her self, she has to write through the constructions of selfhood assigned to her within prior and dominant discourses, to read her way through them […]. In rewriting, she is simultaneously critiquing existing readings and producing new ones.[19]

By incorporating her experiences into fiction, Rhys is able to create and then simultaneously destroy each narrative and the characters therein. The process of creation and destruction that underlies Gregg's argument can be usefully compared to Freud's 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', which posits that certain aspects of the individual's narrative may need to be reimagined repeatedly in order for the material to be accepted and integrated.[20] Freud argues that a patient must first remember and then address and readdress the source of the resistances: '[o]ne must allow the patient time to become more conversant with this resistance with which he has now become acquainted, to work "through" it, to overcome it, by continuing, in defiance of it, the analytic work'.[21]

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[18] Owen, p. vi.

[19] Gregg, Veronica Marie, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 51.

[20] Freud, Sigmund, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II)', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913)*, ed. by James Strachey, XXIV vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), 145–56.

[21] Ibid., p. 155.

I suggest Rhys's texts, taken as a whole, epitomise this effort and that each resulting

novel is more conversant with the resistances Freud describes than the preceding text.

The repetition that characterises Rhys's oeuvre can perhaps be partially attributable to

this process, for as Freud suggests, 'in addition to the conservative instincts which impel

towards repetition, there may be others which push forward towards progress and the

production of new forms',[22] suggesting that such repetitive retelling can propel

movement and inform psychological progress. This process of rewriting and recreation in

Rhys's fiction resembles what Louis James deems a 'form of self analysis'[23] that points

toward the construction of a more integrated identity.

Though many similar themes run through Rhys's oeuvre, I will aim to

demonstrate that each novel is built upon the psychological foundations laid by those that

precede it. Exploring Rhys's novels in succession can yield a deeper appreciation of this

process, which maps a progression inwards or, to use Rhys's phrase, 'back & *down*'.

Progression, in the sense that it is employed here, will hinge on the idea of psychological

movement or development as evinced by the narrative strategies and themes within the

texts. Such progression can be seen in elements of Rhys's writing such as narratorial

perspective, the breakdown of structuring binary themes and, most significantly, the

inclusion of repressed memories and traumatic events. The progression of each novels

will be established by comparing Rhys's early work and her later novels; in order to track

the movement from the wide, abstract and fragmented mental spaces in her early works,

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[22] Freud, Sigmund, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920- 1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, XXIV vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), 1–64 (p. 37).
[23] James, Louis, 'Sun Fire – Painted Fire: Jean Rhys as Caribbean Novelist', in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990), p. 121.

to the more intimate and deeply personal interiorities of her later novels,[24] this study will suggest that the novels subtly yet appreciably build on each other, each edging its heroine slightly closer to a more unified sense of self and greater capacity to tolerate difficult internal spaces. It should be noted here that the examples of progression that this thesis aims to demonstrate are present only in the author's novels, rather than in her own psychic life. While there certainly may be correlations between the two, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that Rhys's psychological life mirrored the profound sense of growth that attends her characters' development throughout her oeuvre.

Perhaps because this progression is quite subtle, many critics interpret Rhys's oeuvre as repetitive or cyclical, which could be why the five distinct protagonists are often treated as an amalgam of the same woman.[25] Reading Rhys's heroines as different versions of the same woman, rather than identical repetitions of the same woman, will yield a more meaningful understanding of both how and why this shift between the texts occurs. Indeed, Heather Ingman argues that the 'quality of interchangeability between Rhys's heroines […] invites us to deal with her novels as a continuum rather than treating them as separate works' and that such a reading suggests 'that Rhys's heroines represent different stages in the life of the same woman'.[26]

Reading Rhys's novels and heroines in the context of a continuum, as Ingman suggests, will illustrate the important differences between the novels. Mapping this progression will demonstrate that Rhys's early novels are markedly distinct from her later work and that each narrative functions to advance this subtle but significant

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[24] Simpson, p. 12.

[25] Johnson, Erica, *Home, Maison, Casa: The Politics of Location in Works by Jean Rhys, Marguerite Duras, and Erminia Dell'Oro* (London: Rosemont Publishing, 2003), p. 34.

[26] Ingman, Heather, *Women's Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters and Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 108.

psychological movement forward. Each chapter of this thesis will thus aim to examine a variety of themes – such as language, familial trauma and the experience of fragmentation – in a way that clearly demonstrates the intertextual progression of these issues. Rhys's early work – which displays a distrust of and resistance to Symbolic structures (such as language and figures of authority); a preoccupation with and reliance on binarisms; and falsely constructed and idealised notions of home – will be contrasted to her later novels, which give way to a dismantling of these concepts. As such, a comparative analysis of these concepts will outline both the sources of conflict in Rhys's fiction and their deconstruction as well as, in some cases, corresponding points of resolution. These intertextual differences will be located both in Rhys's portrayal of her characters, as well as in the stylistic differences that attend each work. The fragmented third-person narration found in *Quartet*, for example, is later replaced by a unified first-person narrator in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, and finally by multiple first-person narration in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, illustrating a narrative move from the exterior to the interiority of the protagonists and finally to a multi-vocal position inclusive of the perspectives of others.

In addition to the questions of placelessness in the texts themselves, the question of Rhys's place within literature has been variously disputed and continues to invite confusion and incite debate. The majority of critical studies approach Rhys's work primarily from feminist and postcolonial perspectives and increasingly by scholars of Caribbean literature, owing to the recurring focus throughout her oeuvre on the displaced Caribbean heroine. A smaller number of critics consider Rhys primarily a modernist author and contextualise her fiction and the issues it raises in the confines of a historical

literary movement, specifically with the Parisian avant-garde writers of the 1920s and 30s. As such, Rhys is sometimes classified as an English author, where she spent the majority of her life; while other scholars describe her writing as quintessentially French, the place where she felt most at home[27]; and still others categorise her as Caribbean, where she was born and spent her formative years in Dominica. Fewer scholars, however, read Rhys's novels psychoanalytically; despite the almost exclusive focus on the inner lives and psychological states of her characters, very little psychoanalytic criticism exists regarding Rhys's texts, and this is where the present study will aim to make a contribution.

Due to the dearth of existing psychoanalytic scholarship devoted to Rhys's fiction, much of the work of this thesis will be a process of connecting existing feminist, postcolonial, and modern criticism on Rhys's work with related psychoanalytic concepts. For example, the impulse toward subjugation portrayed in Rhys's texts is read in a variety of ways; feminist readings tend to interpret the desire to control as a gendered and patriarchal issue, while postcolonial studies locate this instinct in the colonising impulse to assert dominance over other races, cultures, or ethnicities. The present study will aim to decontextualise the theme of subjugation from these parameters in order to consider the nature of the subjugating drive itself. Thus, while many studies aim to place and confine Rhys's work within a particular category or genre, my aim is to let the novels dictate the material that is necessary to explicate them, rather than apply a series of predetermined psychoanalytic theories to Rhys's texts. For this reason, this study will be very much an interdisciplinary endeavour, which I hope will add to the richness and complexity of the issues explored herein.

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[27] Angier, Carole, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), p. 107.

The aforementioned desire to situate Rhys within a particular framework, place, or genre speaks both to the collective impulse to contain her works and to the fact that Rhys's oeuvre does not fit comfortably or obviously into any one particular category. Keeping these varied readings and sometimes incongruous properties of Rhys's writing in mind, the aim of this study will not be to discount past interpretations but to build upon them in order to produce a more comprehensive understanding of Rhys's novels. To accomplish this, I will utilise a variety of psychoanalytic concepts – including theories on self and Other/other, Subject and Ego, language, the Mirror Stage, desire, repetition compulsion, masochism and the mechanisms of repression – as and when they are appropriate to illustrate recurring thematic or stylistic patterns. I propose that by marrying these concepts to existing feminist, postcolonial, and modern readings of Rhys's work, the intersection of these genres will highlight the psychological complexity of the writing and more fully demonstrate the complex issues and themes of Rhys's work.

One reason Rhys's fiction fails to fall comfortably into any single genre or category is that both the author and her work are, in many ways, firmly situated outside the collective. Despite being a part of the 1920s Parisian literary avant-garde, surrounded by writers and artists such as James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, Ernest Hemingway, H.D., Pablo Picasso, Ezra Pound, and countless other illustrious and progressive creators, Rhys forever remained on and wrote from the periphery.[28] Both historically and psychologically, she was set apart, or perhaps set herself apart, from other authors of the period, until she was, as Gregg observes, 'radically on the outside'.[29] Feminist

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[28] Radford, Jean, 'Race and Ethnicity in White Women's Modernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, Cambridge Companions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 116.

[29] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 167.

interpretations of Rhys's work propose that the patriarchal structure that still dominated even liberal, bohemian Paris was at the heart of her predicament – that she was a female author in a transitional period of history, ill-equipped to manage the rapidly changing world around her – a New Woman lost in the shuffle of emerging feminism. Postcolonial scholars attribute the sense of isolation and disorientation that permeates Rhys's fiction to her confused Caribbean past, questions of racial identity, and ambiguous social place. Modernists generally cite the post- and pre-war moments in which Rhys's fiction found its first hold as the basis for the fragmentary style that dominated the literature of the time.

What such readings fail to consider, however, is the possibility that the fundamental sense of loneliness and isolation that is so central to Rhys's texts issues not from external sources, but from her own deeply rooted experience of exclusion. In an interview conducted shortly before her death, Rhys describes the isolation of the periphery that largely defined her life, in the context of her first experience of England as cold and unwelcoming:

> I hated the cold. England was so terribly cold when I first came there. There was no central heating. There were fires, but they were always blocked by people trying to get warm. And I'd never get into the sacred circle. I was always outside, shivering.[30]

As a result of this real or perceived dynamic of exclusion, each of Rhys's novels is imbued with a profound sense of alienation, resulting in multiple narratives that take the personal detachment and cultural isolation of their protagonists as primary themes and exhibit all the 'salient features of a life marked by exile and homelessness' and 'deferred

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[30] Rhys, *Paris Interviews*, p. 198.

and thwarted longings'.[31] The theme of the homelessness of the exile, rather than that of the expatriate, dominates Rhys's fiction, the latter of which Parsons explains is not an appropriate reading of the author's experience or her fiction.

> Rhys has been too frequently thrust under the label of Parisian 'expat' and it does not suit her. 'Expatriate' connotes definite national origins; it is not that the expatriate has no country but rather that he has left it to explore other freedoms, safely retaining links to his homeland. Rhys is a truly placeless outsider, however; described as an expatriate, she countered, 'Expatriate? Expatriate from where?' For Rhys is an expatriate with the already marginal cultural identity of the colonial.[32]

This confused sense of place is one of the primary themes of Rhys's fiction; each of her characters are in some way displaced, lost, isolated, lonely, exiled, or abandoned, '[t]heir positions [forever located] on the extreme edge of multiple axes of exclusion'.[33] Questions of exile and homelessness will thus be paramount to this study and will be approached from both a cultural and a psychoanalytic perspective.

The concept of home is initially complicated for those, such as Rhys, who were 'born or living in the West Indies, [but] educated to conceive of England as "home"'.[34] In the act of expatriating to England from Dominica the concept becomes further problematized, confused, and endlessly entwined with multiple axes of locations that may or may not be experienced as homely.

> Where was Rhys when she was 'home': Great Britain, the home of her ancestors, and her own home for the second half of her life; Dominica, the place of her birth, to which she returned only once after leaving for England; or continental Europe, especially Paris, where she claimed to be most comfortable, but in whose language she never wrote?[35]

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[31] Jacobs, Richard, 'The Novel in the 1930s and 1940s', in *The Twentieth Century*, Penguin History of Literature (London: Penguin, 1994), VII, 225–66 (p. 263.)

[32] Parsons, p. 135.

[33] Linett, 'New Words,' p. 437.

[34] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 43.

[35] Graham, Jean E., '"Trying to Give the Girl a Chance": Gaps and Silences in the Novels of Jean Rhys', *Jean Rhys Review*, 10 (1999), 1–12 (p. 3).

Because Rhys's origin, or starting point, is unclear, the novels are imbued with both a confused sense of her heroines' starting point and an unclear sense of their direction. Johnson explains the problem of repatriation more fully, focusing on the importance of belonging to a home country or culture and the confused concepts of expatriating and repatriating.

> [T]he concept of repatriation hinges on the notion of *return*. Technically, repatriation refers to the return of a person or an object to her/its place of origin, yet for Rhys, Duras, and Dell'Oro, the 'return' journey of repatriation took them to European 'homelands' where they had never before set foot. In the context of the empire, the meaning of 'repatriation' is problematized by the logic through which colonialism poses a metropolitan 'motherland'/'fatherland' as an overarching point of reference for people living in what were, by extension and implication, peripheral and inferior colonial locations. The idea that all colonial residents are potentially subject to 'repatriation' undermines the ability of people living in colonies to think of their countries as homes, whatever their ethic and cultural backgrounds may be. For those who were repatriated, then, and subsumed into what felt to many to be an arbitrary nation and national identity, the problem of where one belongs becomes paramount.[36]

In a very important way for both Rhys and her characters, there is no way to locate the original home. As a result of Rhys's homelessness, her oeuvre is imbued from the start with a bereaved sense of placelessness and alienation, owing to what Emery describes as 'an absence rather than loss of identity and the homelessness of one who never had a home.'[37]

While postcolonial scholars locate the fragmentary aesthetic of Rhys's texts in the absence of a stable home or homeland, psychoanalytic critics propose these themes are primarily the result of the absence of the maternal. While only two of Rhys's five novels deal directly with the mother-daughter relationship, the textual preoccupation with the broken maternal bond is ubiquitous, if subtle, throughout her oeuvre. Simpson suggests

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[36] Johnson, E., *Home*, pp. 20-21.
[37] Emery, Mary Lou, *Jean Rhys at 'World's End': Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 14.

that Rhys was 'born into an atmosphere of mourning',[38] to a mother who had lost a baby

prior to Rhys's birth and was thus unable to be emotionally present for her daughter. The

lack of maternal influence and the troubled dynamic that would later develop between

Rhys and her mother leads Simpson to conclude that the author 'was adrift in the world

from the start'[39] and that Rhys's oeuvre maps and 'demonstrates [the] ways in which the

mother-daughter pair characteristically serves as the source of subsequent misadjustments

in adult life'.[40] Ingman similarly suggests that as a result of this traumatic rift, Rhys'

novels are imbued with unhealthy and complicated maternal relationships, which must be

navigated in the similarly unfamiliar land of the paternal, or Symbolic.

> The healthy relationship with the mother […] so necessary for the daughter's
> liberation is missing. Studying Jean Rhys's novels we will encounter daughters
> who, lacking a positive sense of identity and a positive relationship with their
> mothers, nevertheless have to negotiate a place in the patriarchal society in which
> they find themselves.[41]

A psychoanalytic reading of Rhys's novels thus locates the homelessness her heroines

experience not in literal representations of home, but in the absence of formative

relationships. Members of the heroines' families are variously included throughout the

texts and increasingly exposed to reveal the loss and trauma associated with these

relationships.[42] At times these complex dynamics – particularly in regard to the maternal

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[38] Simpson, p. 2.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., p. 16.
[41] Ingman, p. 108.
[42] In *Quartet*, for instance, Marya's family is never mentioned, but Rhys's heroine displays a need for mothering in her romantic relationships. Rhys's second novel, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie,* details familial trauma and abandonment in a rich portrayal of the heroine's mother, uncle, and sister (and also makes reference to the protagonist's dead father). *Voyage in the Dark* explores the implications of maternal absence in a representation of the heroine's disappointing stepmother and dead parents, as well as in the trauma of abortion. Rhys's fourth novel, *Good Morning, Midnight,* makes reference to the heroine's complete familial abandonment as well as details maternal loss in regard to the death of the heroine's own child, while Rhys's final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea,* offers the most complete meditation on the psychological ramifications of the emotionally absent mother. This succession of family will be revisited in the final chapter of this study.

– are felt as a present absence: in fleeting references, dreams, and substitutive

relationships, particularly in *Quartet*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Good Morning, Midnight*,

each of which repeatedly demonstrates that what is ostensibly absent from Rhys's fiction

is often also that which is the most present and important.

The extreme isolation that permeates Rhys's works is balanced, I will argue, by a

relationship with the reading audience, who functions as a silent but ever-present

observer. The need for a witness, as well as a place to contain her narratives, renders

Rhys's oeuvre simultaneously engrossing and, at times, overwhelming for the reader,

who is thrown into the dark, amorphous, and painful narrative worlds that Rhys creates.

The theme of suffering, particularly repressed or unresolved suffering and trauma in

Rhys's work will also be considered in conjunction with the discomfort (and even

suffering) this causes the reader and the ways in which this complicates and affects the

reader's relationship to the text. Simpson repeatedly notes the role Rhys's audience plays

in the dyadic process of witnessing her texts and suggests that '[t]he reader is entreated

[…] to uncover the mysterious sources of [the heroine's] sadness'.[43] Simpson argues that

the relationship that is borne of this dynamic resembles 'a kind of interaction that

replicates the complex tasks in [psychoanalysis]',[44] with the reader fulfilling the role of

the attuned and receptive analyst.[45] The need not only to communicate the experience of

such a 'shifting, uncertain, dangerous world'[46] world, but also to *recreate* it repeatedly, in

the context of a listening other, necessitates that the reader too must descend to the

uncomfortable psychic spaces that Rhys's narratives create. I will argue that Rhys's

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[43] Simpson, p. 24.
[44] Ibid., p. 18.
[45] Ibid., pp. 89, 91.
[46] Angier, Carole, *Jean Rhys*, Lives of Modern Women (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 15.

tendency to address dark, difficult, and insoluble problems, alongside her 'persistent complicity with and tropism toward misery and pain',[47] can be alienating to readers and critics alike and that much harsh and ungrounded criticism results from this dynamic.

The most fundamental tenet of my thesis rests on the idea that Rhys's novels track a progression. Simpson interprets Rhys's artistic journey 'back & *down'* as a process concerned with the 'inner states of experience',[48] while Parsons defines the author's narrative progression and purpose as the 'creation of the self'.[49] By examining each of Rhys's five novels in order of publication, I will argue that the process of going 'back & *down'* can be textually mapped in the psychological rendering of each version of Rhys's heroine, where 'back' refers to the past and '*down'* refers to the deeper parts of the psyche. Exploring the trajectory of the novels will elucidate the process of working through certain identifiable issues Rhys's narratives raise, such as desire (particularly the desire for the maternal); the ordering and working through of traumatic experiences; the fragmentary and divided nature of the self; and the experience of meaninglessness. Despite the variety of locations in which the novels take place, these issues stalk Rhys's characters from the Caribbean to England, through memories of European cities (such as Vienna), in Paris and through France, and in the end back to the Caribbean, where Rhys's own story began, illustrating the importance of internal rather than external spaces. Using psychoanalytic concepts and theories that address issues of desire, fragmentation, trauma, and self and Other/other (such as the lost object, the Phallus, and the Thing), I will aim to work my way from the outside in: from the vast landscape of blame and exteriorities in *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*; to a deeply personal, responsible, and self-

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[47] Frost, p. 164.
[48] Simpson, p. 5.
[49] Parsons, p. 135.

aware account of the individual in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*; to the truly multi-voiced and psychologically mature *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is considered Rhys's masterpiece.

Taking the psychological evolution of Rhys's work as my aim, several primary themes will be tracked throughout the novels, with the intention of examining the changing dynamics of the texts. By looking at how each individual work treats the same themes and issues differently as the novels progress, I will demonstrate the progress of Rhys's oeuvre in terms of the self-awareness evidenced therein. These could be thought of as the 'symptoms' of the texts, which are progressively worked through and which demonstrate the maturity of the author's later work and an increased capacity to address a multitude of issues, including maternal absence, exclusion, fragmentation, exile, language, and naming. Due to the progressive and serialised nature of Rhys's novels, these recurring themes are especially poignant in their repetition and highly discernible in their prevalence. Amongst the aforementioned themes that Rhys's writing collectively considers, each are unified by the themes of language and the corresponding relationship between self and Other/other; anchoring these in the context of psychoanalytic theory will enable each to be examined in relation to the barriers that are borne of this primordial split.

The majority of these issues are best examined in the context of the individual novels, however, some attention should be devoted at this point to the broader relationship between words, labels, names, and meaning. The act of naming, the question of what names and words represent, and the efficacy of that representation and language in general are central questions in Rhys's work, which collectively address both language

as a whole and the individual signifiers of which it is comprised. The ubiquitous desire to name, label, and place recalls the previously discussed impulse of scholars and critics who attempt to situate Rhys's work within a single framework or genre. The desire is a universal one rooted in cognitive principles of ordering and the need to create larger, cohesive narratives for the purposes of ordering complex and often disjointed experiences.[50] Naming, then, is a highly symbolic, psychologically rich act that says as much about the individual who is naming and the name itself than the person or thing that is named. The most obvious examples of this deeply complicated relationship can be found in the variations and history of Rhys's own name, the names of her characters, and the titles of her novels.

Within such a complex network of names, words, and signifiers as those housed within Rhys's novels, it is perhaps useful to begin by first considering the most fundamental name that will recur throughout this study: that of the author herself. Jean Rhys was born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams in Dominica in 1890. It was not until her thirties when she began to write, that the author adopted her penname, Jean Rhys. Like her fiction, Rhys's name is drawn from elements of her life and is comprised of a combination of her first husband's first name and a respelling of her father's middle name.[51] In addition to the patronymic elements of which her new identity was comprised, the origins of Rhys's name are further complicated by the involvement of Ford Madox Ford, who urged her to change her name and helped her construct a new one.[52] Owen notes in her Introduction to Rhys's first novel that '[t]he key to *Quartet*'s subject, and

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[50] For more a thorough discussion on cognitive ordering principles and the appeal of binarisms in the construction of narratives, see Newberg, Andrew, Eugene D'Aqili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Random House, 2001).
[51] Owen, p. vi.
[52] Ibid., p. xv.

indeed to the start of Jean Rhys's career as a writer – even to the extent of her name, which he invented for her – is Ford Madox Ford'.[53] In the process of discovering Rhys and naming her, Rhys is, in essence, an object of Ford's creation, a construction that Rhys would spend a good deal of her life dismantling. Thus, before the pages of *Quartet* were even conceived, the problems of naming and possession were already at work in Rhys's own narrative. The relationship between authority, possession, and naming holds a central place within Rhys's fiction for, as Dennis Porter points out, '[t]o name […] is magically to possess'.[54] Ford would indeed possess Rhys, as well as her work; his presence is felt not only within the economy of Rhys's style, but the subject matter of her first two novels, which detail fictionalised accounts of the dynamics and history of their relationship. The first of these is *Quartet*, a semi-autobiographical account of their affair; the second, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, recounts the aftermath of the same affair that *Quartet* details, in which the eponymous character is a fictionalised version of Ford.

The problem of titling her works is another recurring theme that epitomises Rhys's complicated relationship to naming. As her personal letters and correspondence demonstrate, titling her novels was a long, laborious, and often emotional process.[55] While in the process of writing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the author remained indecisive about the novel's title for months, writing to Francis Wyndham that she had 'no title yet. "The First Mrs Rochester" is not right. Nor, of course is "Creole". That has a different meaning now. I hope I'll get one soon, for titles mean a lot to me'.[56] The title of Rhys's first novel similarly went through several iterations and was even published under two different

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[53] Ibid., p. vi.
[54] Porter, Dennis, 'Of Heroines and Victims: Jean Rhys and *Jane Eyre*', *The Massachusetts Review*, 17 (1976), 540–52 (p. 540).
[55] Rhys, Jean, *Letters: 1931-1966*, ed. by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (London: Penguin, 1995).
[56] Ibid., p. 154.

names: *Postures*, which Rhys intensely disliked, was released in England in 1928; when the same novel was released in America the following year, it was retitled *Quartet* at Rhys's insistence.[57] Even the name of her unfinished autobiography was a matter of contention between Rhys and her publishers. Before her death, Rhys had settled on the title *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*,[58] however, Rhys's publishers disregarded her direction and when the book was released shortly after her death in 1979, it was titled *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*. Tellingly, Rhys's last and only explicitly autobiographical narrative is not only unfinished, but named by someone else.

This troubled inventory of inaccurate names, incongruous labels, and competing titles extends to Rhys's characters as well, whose forenames, surnames, and nicknames are especially useful in mapping the progression of Rhys's oeuvre, specifically regarding the development and ownership of identity. The protagonists of Rhys's five novels are each subjected to a torrent of distorted labels and false names, which portray the act of naming not only as inaccurate but dangerous, particularly the desire to label or appropriate an individual's identity or experience. Rhys's first protagonist, for example, Marya Zelli in *Quartet*, is affectionately nicknamed 'Mado' by her husband Stephan, whose last name she has also taken in place of her own. Marya is thus twice renamed by a man, in both her forename and surname, reinforcing the patrimonial culture that repeatedly claims her identity. In Rhys's following two novels, however, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark*, the protagonists, Julia Martin and Anna Morgan, respectively, are both unmarried female characters who retain their own (presumably paternal) surnames. In Rhys's fourth novel, *Good Morning, Midnight*, published several

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[57] Owen, p. xviii.
[58] Rhys, *Paris Interviews*, p. 210.

years later, Gregg notes that the protagonist, Sasha Jensen, 'refuses her given name, Sophia, and [instead] names herself Sasha'[59]; in so doing, Gregg suggests, 'Sasha constructs herself'[60] and her identity in a manner that Rhys's first three protagonists do not. Finally, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the protagonist, Antoinette Cosway, 'takes her first name from her mother, while 'her surname is her deceased father's'.[61] When the heroine's new husband, who does not possess either a first or last name, experiences the disruption of his own identity and worldview, he responds by renaming his wife, taking her to England, and locking her in an attic. Driven mad, Antoinette – now renamed Bertha Mason – burns his house down. Castro suggests that Rochester robs Antoinette not only of her name but of her hereditary identity, rendering her 'isolated and vulnerable' in a strange and foreign place and that such an 'erasure of her identity is […] a psychological violation'.[62] However, for the first time, Rhys's protagonist responds, in the single most dramatic and aggressive act in all of Rhys's fiction, by destroying the 'cardboard house' (*Sargasso*118) in which she is imprisoned. The finality of this act significantly parallels the end of Rhys's series of five novels; with Antoinette/Bertha's death, there is a sense of closure that is absent in the author's previous novels, as if something that once required much reworking, attention, and care has, in some way, been resolved.

Rhys's tendency to defy labels and elude categorisation poses difficulties when reading and interpreting her work. The lack of context, as well as the absence of a clearly defined plot and intelligible structure often precludes a sense of orienting oneself within

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[59] Gregg, *Historical,* p. 154.
[60] *Ibid*.
[61] Castro, Joy, 'Jean Rhys', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 20 (2000), 8–45 (p. 39).
[62] Ibid.

her narratives. I suggest that this disorientation, in addition to being one of Rhys's

greatest strengths as a writer, is also the reason for much of the harsh criticism levelled

against her writing. The difficulty of reading Rhys's fiction, which is simply unrelenting

in its desolation, is evidenced by early reviews of her novels, which illustrate the

discomfort, disgust, and moralising that her work so often evokes.

> The truth is that the world – not merely the mood – presented in Rhys's novels is frightening, designed to induce in readers the fear and distrust Rhys found unpleasant but inevitable in her own life, and much of the extant criticism of her work has a remarkably defensive quality.[63]

The difficult subject matter of Rhys's work is further exacerbated by a lack of reliable

context and structure, ill-defined heroes and villains, and an absence of resolution, each

of which renders her novels demanding of readers in a variety of ways. The challenge of

accepting such an ambiguous and somewhat chaotic state is difficult for readers and

critics alike, whose impulse is to impose order and context. Linett suggests that critical

studies tend to be divided into 'two prominent contemporary readings of Rhys's

fragmented text and characters – celebration and social contextualization', which are

predicated on 'early Rhys critics who established the terms of the debate when they

viewed her characters' consistent passivity as evidence of innate weakness and lax

morals'.[64] Kloepfer similarly argues that in the latter group, such '[c]ritical evaluation in

Rhys is often clouded by a refusal to accept her psychological and moral terrain',[65] which

often delves into territories of the psyche[66] that most authors leave untouched.

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[63] Moore, Judith, 'Sanity and Strength in Jean Rhys's West Indian Heroines', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 41 (1987), 21–31 (p. 30).
[64] Linett, 'New Words', p. 439.
[65] Kloepfer, Deborah Kelly, '*Voyage in the Dark*: Jean Rhys's Masquerade for the Mother', *Contemporary Literature*, 26 (1985), 443–59 (p. 458).
[66] *Territories of the Psyche* is, incidentally, the title of Simpson's Kleinian study on Rhys which bears important parallels to the present dissertation; Simpson's work will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter and her readings utilised throughout this study.

Rhys has historically been treated as one of 'the greatest novelists of alienation',[67] attesting both to the singular capacity of her fiction to convey and evoke suffering and its concomitant propensity to alienate its audience. Her novels invariably seem to have a 'tendency to be drawn to themes of drawn to obliteration, repetition, debasement, and self-destruction',[68] while her characters 'make choices that steer them away from pleasure and happiness'.[69] Unfortunately, Gardiner argues, such themes tend to engender both decontextualised readings and critical reproach.

> [Rhys] has been treated out of historical context as an individual and pathological voice, the voice of a female victim. The alienation of her characters has alienated some of her critics who wish to exclude themselves from the experiences about which she writes.[70]

The circularity of this process of alienation again banishes Rhys to the periphery, where her desire to get at the truth of such inner experiences is categorised as errant – either in its lack of propriety, context, or familiarity – a theme both Margaret Soltan and Colleen Lamos suggest is common throughout modern literature.[71] In the archaic sense, Lamos notes the term *errancy* is synonymous 'as a wandering from the true path',[72] while the more modern definition of *error* derives from the Old French *errer*, meaning 'to rove or wander, especially in search of adventure', or 'to stray from what is right'.[73] While her fiction is often designated the latter by many critics, I propose that Rhys's work is very much a purposeful endeavour – 'back & *down'* – errant in the most aesthetically

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[67] Gardiner, Judith Kegan, 'Good Morning, Midnight; Good Night, Modernism', *Boundary 2*, 11 (1982), 233–51 (p. 233).
[68] Frost, pp. 164-65.
[69] Ibid. p. 206.
[70] Ibid., p. 233.
[71] Soltan notes that 'the cultural values attached to the general metaphor of errancy have always been dramatically gender-linked. […] The errant man errs in search of truth and goodness, while the errant woman errs into evil' (Soltan, Margaret. 'Night Errancy: The Epistemology of the Wandering Woman.' *New Formation* 5 (1988): p. 110.).
[72] Lamos, Colleen, *Deviant Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 16.
[73] Ibid., p. 20.

meaningful way, which in the process of its conception necessitates a degree of

disorientation, a tolerance for questions that have no answers, and an interest in the

fundamental difficulties of what it means to be human.

METHOD

> This disarray, this fragmentedness, this fundamental discordance,
> this essential lack of adaptation, this anarchy, which opens up
> every possibility of displacement, that is of error, is characteristic
> of the instinctual life of man – the very experience of analysis
> shows us that.
>
> –Lacan[74]

This space within a doctoral thesis would conventionally be reserved exclusively for a literature review, however, given the dearth of psychoanalytic criticism devoted to Rhys's work, such a traditional structure will have to be somewhat supplemented and modified. I will use this section to explain in greater detail the scope of this study; to introduce the available psychoanalytic criticism on Rhys, as well as a sample of modernist, feminist, and postcolonial studies; to expound upon my rationale in utilising psychoanalytic criticism in conjunction with Rhys's work; and, finally, to briefly mention what is beyond the scope of the present study, as well as future research directions for critical study on Rhys's body of work.

The present study will explore each of Rhys's five novels in order of their publication, in order to explicate the theory that these embody a progression. Given the parameters of this study in terms of its length, my focus will be on Rhys's five novels and not her short stories, unpublished works, or autobiography. While Rhys's other writings would undoubtedly add an additional dimension to my dissertation, her novels remain my interest and priority. In addition to my own personal predilection for her longer works of

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[74] Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II The Ego in Freud's Theory and the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Sylvana Tomaselli (London: Norton, 1991) p. 169.

fiction, the heroines of Rhys's short stories are not nearly as developed as the protagonists who populate her five novels. Their inclusion, therefore, would potentially disrupt the hypothesis on which this thesis is based, as there is far less evidence available with which to track the development and progression of these shorter narratives. Rhys's unfinished autobiography is also excluded, both on the basis that the work is non-fiction and therefore beyond the boundaries of this study and also in order to avoid a more psychobiographical reading of Rhys.[75] A final acknowledgement should be made in regard to the discrepancy in the length of the final chapter of my thesis, which discusses *Wide Sargasso Sea.* In addition to the marked differences of Rhys's final work in comparison to her pre-war novels (in terms of its setting, historical context, and relationship to Brontë's work), as well as the influx of critical attention devoted to her final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* illustrates many of the more fully-formed elements of progress that I suggest attend the culmination of Rhys's oeuvre. For these reasons, the final chapter of the present study is significantly and purposefully longer than those that precede it.

The history of Rhys's written material renders the ordering of her oeuvre a somewhat complicated task, particularly due to the background and conception of her middle novel, *Voyage in the Dark.* In addition to relating the tale of her youngest pre-war heroine, based on Rhys's early years in England, earlier versions of Rhys's third book were written years and even decades prior to its actual publication in 1934; these include Rhys's personal diary notes, the short story 'Suzy Tells', and her unpublished novel

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[75] The distinction between Rhys's autobiographically informed fiction and the linear account of her life she offers in *Smile Please* has led some critics, such as Atherton, to deem her final work, 'a performance in that it is a carefully fashioned public construction of the self'. (Atherton, Karen, 'Staging the Self: Gender, Difference, and Performance in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, 9 (2003), 147–60 (p. 156.).

Triple Sec. Though each of these provide an iteration of the final published version of *Voyage in the Dark*, the novel will be considered in order of its publication due to the maturing trajectory of Rhys's work; I hope to prove that Rhys's third novel sits squarely between her second and fourth novels, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, respectively, in terms of its heroine's capacity to tolerate her interiority and Rhys's continued textual progression 'back & *down*'. In other words, though earlier 'versions' of the content of *Voyage in the Dark* can be found prior to the novel's publication, it is not the story itself so much as the manner in which Rhys communicates it that will be of interest in the examination of the hypothesis herein.

I believe Rhys's work, which so meaningfully evades definition and resists placement in any single genre, consequently demonstrates its need to be read from multiple angles of critical theory. To this end – and due to the limited number of psychoanalytic studies on Rhys's work – I will at times draw on and employ feminist, post-colonial and modernist critical approaches to Rhys's work, particularly when they offer additional or richer readings of the texts. Due to the complexity of Rhys's work, especially in terms of its genre, it seems appropriate to approach a theoretical reading of her oeuvre not from a unilateral position, but from the critical stance necessary to effectively explore the work or the theme therein. The theme of home, for instance, may be variously interpreted as the cultural home, the home of the dominant gendered discourse, the home of modern literature or the emotional attachment to the maternal, depending on one's critical orientation. The way in which each of these interpretations are reflected in Rhys's portrayal of her heroines' internal experiences will inform and influence the psychoanalytic reading of the texts that this study takes as its aim. While

there is limited space to outline the entirety of the critical literature from the aforementioned perspectives, a brief overview of each will be summarised below.

The majority of critical scholarship on Rhys's oeuvre focuses on either the author's or her heroines' displacement. In postcolonial literature, this dynamic is typically contextualised as the absence of or disturbance between Rhys's heroine and her place of origin. The complicated relationship between geographical place and emotional displacement is often attributed to Rhys's own experience as an exile from her home country, her complicated West Indian heritage, and the stigma of the outsider she later experienced in Europe. Gregg, for example, suggests that the reason Rhys 'does not seem to fit in anywhere'[76] lies in in her culturally complicated Creole background. Utilising Dominica's colonial history to inform her research, Gregg argues that a historical approach to Rhys's work is the most practical way to 'decipher' her texts.[77] Gregg focuses her study, as most postcolonial critics do, on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is set in the Caribbean, shortly after the emancipation of slavery in 1833. By directing her critical attention to *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*, which deal directly with issues of race and colonisation, Gregg's reading offers an important perspective on the cultural portrayal of self and Other, as well as a grounding in the historical context from which Rhys's final novel is informed. While this theoretical method is well suited for *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*, both of which take the Caribbean as a central theme, employing it to examine Rhys's other pre-war novels – *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight* – proves significantly more difficult. As themes of race and colonialism are not as pronounced in Rhys's early novels, *Quartet* and *After*

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[76] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 3.
[77] Ibid, p. 8.

Leaving Mr Mackenzie are more effectively considered from a modernist or feminist perspective. Likewise, feminist or modern critics will similarly find their theoretical approaches less suitable and their application more complex in Rhys's later novels, where modernist and feminist concerns are often eclipsed by colonial and postcolonial themes, again illustrating the difficulty of approaching the entirety of Rhys's work from a single theoretical perspective. The benefit of including postcolonial criticism in relation to *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is obvious, however, the primary weakness of a postcolonial approach such as Gregg's lies in its inconsistent suitability across Rhys's oeuvre.

The role of feminist criticism in contextualising Rhys's oeuvre is also of considerable importance, as these studies will inform and complement the psychoanalytic consideration of such issues as marginalisation, otherness and the mother-daughter relationship in Rhys's work. Feminist readings have generally focused on the patriarchal objectification, maltreatment and silencing of the women portrayed in Rhys's novels, though some critical work on Rhys, particularly in 1970s and 1980s, was both feminist and psychoanalytic in nature.[78] Such readings tend to suggest that Rhys's depictions of suffering are intimately tied to the repression and subjugation her heroine's experience in the patriarchal systems in which they exist. Castro suggests that the Rhys woman is the product of a society defined by limitations and the novels, by extension, portray the 'tragedy of severely limited choices, predatory individuals, and misplaced trust, of a protagonist disadvantaged in both class and gendered terms, struggling to survive in a

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[78] Some of the scholars who bridged the gap between feminist and psychoanalytic criticism in Rhys studies include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak , Judith Kegan Gardiner, Ronnie Scharfman, Rachel Bowlby and Deborah Kelly Kloepfer.

hostile environment'.[79] The trauma identified in exclusively feminist readings of Rhys's work, therefore, is largely defined by gendered inequalities and injustices, rather than internal psychological distress. Indeed, the influence of patriarchy is illustrated by a number of themes, devices and characters throughout Rhys's oeuvre, which tend to portray male figures of the novels as regarding the female body as 'unguarded by capitalist and masculine privilege, and as such absolutely vulnerable'.[80]

However, while feminist criticism effectively illustrates the role of societal oppression and exploitation in Rhys's work and the struggle exemplified by her heroines to define and locate themselves in world governed by such gendered inequalities, it often overlooks the more innate and inexpressible traumas of the psyche, such as one's relationship to oneself, relationships unencumbered by gender issues and trauma borne outside the patriarchal sphere of oppression. Paul Ardoin, for example, invokes affect theory to highlight the importance of reading Rhys's texts with an awareness of the agency her characters exhibit, prior to invoking a theoretical angle that purports to contextualise their experience in a single perspective.

> A reading of the Rhys protagonist as either feminist or anti-feminist depends on our understanding of the character's degree of agency. Is she insisting upon the right to be unhappy when it would be easier for her to do otherwise? Is she simply allowing her own victimization to occur? When she welcomes the man in the white dressing gown to her bed at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight*, or crawls back to a doomed relationship in *Quartet*, is she making the choice to challenge expectation or sink to them? *Sleep It Off, Lady* suggests the answer may be neither. If a person cannot go back to *before* an event, if she cannot be unshaped once shaped, then there is no simple matter of conforming to, lazily accepting, or refusing societal norms. The early event changes the rules of both dominant and feminist understandings of happiness through a sort of recalibration of individual

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[79] Castro, p. 27.
[80] Maslen, Cathleen, *Ferocious Things: Jean Rhys and the Politics of Women's Melancholia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), p. 92.

identity and psychological borders, as well as, inevitably, a resulting recalibration of an individual's relationship to society and its expectations.[81]

Ardoin's position, and that of affect theorists more generally, takes into account the discrepancies that often exist in Rhys's work, in terms of her characters attitudes and responses to situations in which they appear to behave oddly or unexpectedly. This approach aligns well with trauma theory, as well as psychoanalytic criticism, both of which position the emotional response of characters as a central focal point. A discussion of affect theory will be included at length in Chapters Two and Four, with particular focus on the work of John Su, Laura Frost, Erica Johnson, Patricia Moran and Paul Ardoin.

An additional critical angle that addresses the thematics of Rhys's oeuvre lies in modernist interpretations of her work. This designation sits comfortably both with the Rhys's style and the content of her novels, which are collectively marked by modernist themes of absence and fragmentation. What Linett describes as 'the chaos of life in modern urban spaces […] [and] the difficulties of the modern city',[82] results in what Emery calls Rhys's modernist 'strategies and style [which] resemble those of experimental writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, or Dorothy Richardson in their portrayal of individual consciousness and perception'.[83] Frost suggests that Rhys's 'characters' affects – including boredom, frustration, disorientation, and paralysis – reflect a time of uncertainty, dread, and helplessness', which 'register the deepening fear of the years leading up to World War Two, but in a different way than more explicitly

[81] Ardoin, Paul, 'The Un-Happy Short Story Cycle: Jean Rhys's *Sleep It Off, Lady'*, in *Rhys Matters: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Mary Wilson and Kerry L. Johnson (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. 233–48 (pp. 244-45).
[82] Linett, 'New Words,' p. 439.
[83] Emery, Mary Lou, 'The Politics of Form: Jean Rhys's Social Vision in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea'*, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 28 (1982), 418–30 (p. 418).

political writers' that 'capture[s] the dysphoria of [the pre-WWII] moment by registering

a protest against pleasure' and 'embrace[s] difficulty and discernment'.[84]

Modernist readings such as Linett's, Emery's, and Frost's are predicated on the

belief that the textual aesthetics of Rhys's time (1920s and 30s Paris and England) were

based on the transformations taking place throughout early Twentieth-Century Western

society. This omnipresent modernist anxiety, according to modernist critics, is thus

captured in literature such as Rhys's.

> Rhys's formal techniques outline the dimensions of a social world in often brutal transformation. Her novels expose the specific crisis – felt from the period of the First World War through the present – of the dissolution of moral values and traditions delineating the foreign from the 'civilized' and those separating private from public lives. Techniques of narrative intersubjectivity and shifting point of view decenter the traditional 'character' as a unified self. This displacement challenges the status of the stable and unified ego that, in Victorian novels and experience, depends upon the organization of sex and gender in distinct separation of public and private worlds. Rhys's heroines live in between those dichotomies, sexually ambivalent figures acting in a collage of outer and inner experience […]. The formal devices that structure these apparently subjective events allow the heroines to create and re-create their displaced selves, defiantly refusing a one-dimensional reduction of identity.[85]

The strength of critical accounts such as Emery's lie in their contexualisation, in

identifying the 'specific crisis' that modernist critics see embedded throughout Rhys's

work. What is not generally included in such readings, however, is a more nuanced and

personal account of the issues raised in Rhys's fiction. Though Emery's is a modernist

reading, her argument raises and corresponds to many psychoanalytic issues, again

evidencing the overlap and plurality of Rhys's themes in and amongst divergent genres.

The problems of fragmentation, self and Other/other and the ongoing, reordering and

creation of one's identity that Emery mentions are present throughout what Linett calls

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[84] Frost, p. 163.
[85] Emery, 'Politics', p. 419.

the 'polyvocal, nonlinear narration' of Rhys's heroines, who 'exemplify modernist fragmentation while intimating a deeper sense of pain and loss than most accounts of such fragmentation acknowledge'.[86] Linett also observes, however, that '[w]hile modernist fragmentation may sometimes depict the chaotic but decipherable flow of consciousness, it may also, at other times, both conceal and reveal the rigid and not wholly accessible fragments of traumatized psyches'.[87] There is, undeniably, a strong link between modern and psychoanalytic thought, however, while the themes of trauma and fragmentation underlie most modern literature, modernist theory does not offer a means of addressing the deeper, individual implications of these ruptures. Nor, unfortunately, does modernist criticism manage to engage as effectively with Rhys's final novel as it does with her pre-war novels, illustrating a problem similar to that which postcolonial criticism faces with Rhys's earlier works.

Rhys's focus on trauma has the effect that her narratives become less about outer terrors than inner ones, and perhaps for this reason several psychological and psychoanalytic studies on her work have resulted. The most comprehensive of these is Anne Simpson's study, *Territories of the Psyche*, which is a primarily Kleinian reading of Rhys's novels. Simpson's primary argument suggests that the work of Melanie Klein, who theorised the importance of the pre-Oedipal mother-infant relationship in early child development is paramount to fully appreciating the many parallel themes and issues raised in Rhys's fiction.

> The span of Rhys's development shows her continuous reworking of
> preoccupations that were with her from the start. Over many years, in the
> painstaking refinement of her aesthetic, she summoned again and again a vision

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[86] Linett, 'New Words,' p. 437.
[87] Ibid., p. 450.

of the psychic terrain as a wild and frightening place whose borders were uncertain and where time stood still.[88]

In addition to Klein, *Territories of the Psyche* also incorporates theories proposed by psychoanalysts such as Riviere, Winnicott, Fairbairn, Freud and Lacan. Recognising the central importance in Rhys's texts of both the 'inner states of experience'[89] and the significance of the absent mother, Simpson aims to connect these throughout Rhys's texts, always returning, as she suggests Rhys did, 'to the vexed dyad of mother and child'.[90] By working so consciously from a Kleinian perspective, Simpson recognises and outlines the potential hazards of applying psychoanalytic theories to literature, particularly the problematic dynamic in which one will nearly always take precedence over the other. Throughout much of her study, Simpson avoids prioritising the psychoanalytic texts she uses to contextualise Rhys's fiction, but does at times fall into the very dynamic she warns against. In these sections, the primary literary texts are deprioritised in relation to the analytic theories, which at times feel over-applied or forced. In order to explicate the Kleinian theory of good and bad objects, for example, Simpson argues that '*After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* establishes through a spatial metaphor its protagonist's inclination, as a result of her own sense of desperate lack, to split the world into objects that are all-good or all-bad'.[91] While this point could be made in regard to *Quartet*, which epitomises such black and white thinking, the protagonist of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* struggles throughout the narrative with reconciling precisely the opposite problem: that people are both good and bad. Other such examples follow in

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[88] Simpson, pp. 1-2.
[89] Ibid., p. 5.
[90] Ibid., pp. 7-8.
[91] Ibid., p. 43.

Simpson's study, which at times demonstrates an unmeasured approach to the texts in an effort to prove certain Kleinian theories.

A second study that offers a psychoanalytic reading of Rhys's texts is Heather Ingman's *Women's Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters, and Writing*, which looks at the work of six women writers: Rose Macaulay, Elizabeth Bowen, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Virginia Woof, Dorothy Richardson, and Jean Rhys. Ingman's study addresses the works of these authors in the historical context of their relationship to motherhood and mothering, which she suggests intimately shapes their work. Working from the premise that Freud's work does not sufficiently 'validate the mother-daughter relationship',[92] Ingman argues that the inter-war authors whose work she explores recover and advance the theme of maternity and recontextualise it in their own experiences of mothers and/or motherhood. In Rhys's texts, Ingman argues this dynamic takes the form of an absent maternal presence that is repeatedly illustrated in the failed or incomplete integration of the daughter's identity. This results in the repetition of what Ingman deems the 'quest of Rhys's heroines for the mother/lover',[93] in which various substitutes are sought in an attempt to repair the formative rupture with the maternal. Rhys eventually locates the maternal in writing itself, which Ingman suggests 'gave Rhys the only identity she could be sure of; [her novels] were her way of mothering herself'.[94] The psychoanalytic understanding of absent mothers and insufficient mothering that ground Ingman's work are central to the present study's aim of evidencing the progression of Rhys's fiction.

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[92] Ingman, p. 23.
[93] Ibid., p. 113.
[94] Ibid., p. 124.

An additional example of psychoanalytic criticism, which looks exclusively at Rhys's fifth novel, is Lori Lawson's article, 'Mirror and Madness: A Lacanian Analysis of the Feminine Subject in *Wide Sargasso Sea*'. Lawson's reading focuses on the manifestations of Lacan's theories of the Mirror Stage in Rhys's final novel, providing an in-depth exploration of the Other/other in relation to the self. The thematic preoccupation with the 'other' throughout Rhys's work is a frequent subject of critical observation, but not necessarily in depth critical attention. Scholars from various critical orientations agree that the role of the other is of paramount importance in Rhys's novels and short stories, yet a thorough discussion of what this entails and what the other is compared to and distinct from is curiously lacking in the majority of studies that reference it.[95] Yet, its broad usage across genres speaks to the significance of the concept in relation to Rhys, a correlation that Lawson argues is best explained psychoanalytically. Lawson suggests that because Antoinette 'is ostracized by her mother, and therefore unable to formulate th[e] primary identification'[96] with the first mirroring other (the mother), she is unable to begin the process of identity formation. Lacking the usual means for self-definition, Lawson suggests Antoinette seeks out a series of mirroring objects, each of which fails her. Of further interest in Lawson's study is the role of desire in Rhys's final novel, which Lawson suggests is predicated on the original other and desired object, the mother.[97]

A final critical study that details a valuable perspective on the roles of abuse and trauma in the context of Rhys's fiction is Patricia Moran's *Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys,*

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[95] See Gregg, *Historical*, p. 133; Johnson, E., *Home,* p. 80; Parsons, pp. 132-34; and Radford, p. 117.
[96] Lawson, p. 22.
[97] A more in-depth differentiation of the small other and the big Other can be found in footnote 116 on page 46.

and the Aesthetics of Trauma. Moran's reading of Rhys's work highlights the manner in which Rhys's oeuvre, though not explicitly about traumatic events, is informed and shaped trauma, which Moran argues results in a literary form and style that 'reproduce[s] and aestheticize[s] the characteristics of traumatic memory'.[98] Of particular interest to both Rhys and Woolf, Moran states, are 'the ways in which traumatic events impinge upon the working of memory, and the ways in which traumatic memories in turn impinge upon the lives of those afflicted by them'.[99] The traumatic aesthetic in Rhys's fiction is reproduced or 'staged' in many ways via 'the manipulation of narrative elements, including stream of consciousness narration, textual gaps, repetition, and the confusion of her heroines'[100] past and present. Moran also devotes significant attention to the role of masochism in Rhys's writing and suggests that a masochistic aesthetic is especially pronounced in the author's later works.[101]

The aforementioned studies have each provided valuable direction and insight into my analysis of Rhys's texts, as well as the tools necessary to advance my own hypothesis. Despite the fact that Rhys's fiction is widely acknowledged for the depth of its psychological content, there is surprisingly little psychoanalytic or otherwise psychological criticism that addresses her work and I hope to make further progress in this genre of critical literature. Where the majority of studies address the fragmentary spaces portrayed in Rhys's novels from a literal, social, or cultural perspective, the aim of my study, like Simpson's and Lawson's works, is to examine and shed light on the 'psychic terrain' of Rhys's oeuvre via a psychoanalytic reading. Unlike Simpson and

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[98] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 3.
[99] Ibid., p. 5.
[100] Ibid., p. 7.
[101] Ibid., p. 17.

Lawson, however, my focus will be on the progression of this terrain: how it shifts, changes, and evolves as Rhys's writing progresses – what Simpson refers to as the 'painstaking refinement' of Rhys's creative endeavour – which I will examine from both a literary and psychoanalytic perspective. Bearing in mind Brooks's statement that '[p]sychoanalysis, after all, is a primarily narrative art, concerned with the recovery of the past through the dynamics of memory and desire',[102] this study will endeavour to demonstrate that psychoanalytic theories, specifically those of Freud and Lacan, offer valuable and historically underutilised means of approaching Rhys's fiction.

Some brief attention at this juncture should be devoted to two psychoanalytic theories which will be significant throughout the present study: Lacan's understanding of the structure of the psyche, and his work on language, the latter of which is notoriously complex. Much of the difficulty that attends Lacan's work can be attributed to the fact that the majority of his teachings were presented orally and then subsequently transcribed, resulting in a battery of dense discussions that include multiple digressions, the use of mathematical equations, and a qualitatively different style than that of his written work. As a number of Lacan's theories and many of the terms therein will recur throughout this study, I will address several of these here prior to a more detailed discussion of their utility in the proceeding chapters. It should also be noted that when Lacan is quoted directly, it is often at length, due to the aforementioned complexities of his verbal teaching style. Lacanian scholars, such as Malcolm Bowie, Lionel Bailly, Suzanne Barnard, Bruce Fink, Dylan Evans, Steven Levine, and Jane Gallop, among

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[102] Brooks, Peter, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. xiv.

others, will often be used to summarise and supplement Lacan's seminars for the sake of clarity and brevity.

Lacan's theory that the unconscious is structured like a language which is in dialogue with the other is perhaps his most well-known contribution to psychoanalysis and will be a pivotal point of emphasis throughout this study. Lacan's work is grounded in structural linguistics, which explicates the interaction and exchange of meaning via the intersection of signifiers (sound-images) and signifieds (concepts). Lacan's theory borrows its terminology from Saussure's work on linguistics, including the Saussurian Sign, which outlines the relationship between a concept (signified) and corresponding sound-image (signifier); in Saussure's original formulation, these are united to form a whole, which creates meaning that is communicated via language.[103] While Lacan utilises the vocabulary of Saussure's work, he suggests that the unity or wholeness Saussure's theory espouses presents a falsely hopeful and incomplete picture of linguistics. Lacan focuses his reinterpretation of these concepts on the barrier that he suggests exists between signifier and signified and the importance of what is unable to be captured in the process of their interaction. Lacan's idea that language is unable to capture and express certain things, such as feelings or ideas, will be a crucial link to Rhys's fiction and one of the structuring principles relevant to the discussion of the inexpressible herein.

An 'acoustic image',[104] or signifier, includes words, letters, symbols, signs, numbers, and other distinct, concrete representations of language. These, in turn, comprise the larger systems of language, laws, and other collective rules that govern and organise society, all of which belongs to the Symbolic realm. Signifieds, by comparison,

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[103] Bernard, Suzanne, and Bruce Fink, eds., *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge and Feminine Sexuality* (Albank: SUNY, 2002), pp. 30-31.
[104] Bailly, Lionel, *Lacan: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), p. 52.

are the ideas of things, perceptions, concepts, and feelings that signifiers aim to capture,

all of which exists in the Imaginary realm. The process by which a signifier is applied to

a signified is known as signification and is represented by Lacan in the following

equation, where S is the signifier and s the signified:

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

As signifiers belong to the Symbolic and signifieds to the Imaginary,[105] the process of

signification involves moving from one realm to another, or 'crossing the bar of

metaphor', the process by which signifiers and signifieds interact to generate meaning.[106]

As we cannot directly share our subjective imaginary realms with others, we must name

objects in the Symbolic, in a way that 'structures […] perception itself'[107]; the act of

connecting to others and functioning in the Symbolic world is thus dependent on the

exchange and mutual understanding of signifiers. However, in trying to capture and

express that which is housed in the Imaginary realm, which is not only subjective but also

ineffable, crossing the bar of metaphor will invariably leave something behind, as

language consistently demonstrates what Dylan Evans calls 'an inherent resistance to

signification'.[108] Malcolm Bowie explains the same problem in the following terms:

'[d]ance as one may in the chequered shade of the signifier, parade as one may the

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[105] In Lacanian theory, the Symbolic and the Imaginary do not constitute the whole of one's experience. There is a third realm, the Real, which completes what Lacan called the Borromean Knot. The Real, in contrast to the Imaginary and Symbolic, is beyond language and representation entirely. Despite efforts to articulate or capture the Real, which can only be defined by its unknowable and unsymbolisable quality, the Symbolic will forever stumble in its attempts to pin it down. (see Bowie, Malcolm, *Lacan*, Modern Masters (Fontana Press, 1997), p. 94 and Sheridan, Alan, 'Translator's Note', in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (London, 1994), p. 279.

[106] Bailly, pp. 45-46, 51-54.

[107] Lacan*, Book II,* p. 169.

[108] Evans, Dylan, *An Introductory Dictionary Of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Psychology Press, 1996), p. 115.

plumage of one's own literary style, there yet exists a world that falls entirely and irretrievably outside the signifying dimension'.[109]

The world that exists outside of signification that Bowie describes is the one with which Rhys's fiction is concerned, which includes both the Imaginary realm and the realm of the Real, which is most closely associated with trauma. While the automatic and intuitive elements of language are often taken for granted by readers and linguists alike – who falsely assume language is capable of capturing meaning – both Rhys's work and Lacan's theory of language repeatedly demonstrate the shortcomings of language, as well as the fact that communication is neither a straightforward nor a conscious process. What language cannot express, however, Rhys's narratives make an effort to exhume and explicate. Though words repeatedly fail the characters that populate her novels, the narratives themselves in many cases capture what language cannot – through metaphor, allusion, repetition, and other carefully placed narrative devices. In the Introduction to her study on the presence and portrayal of trauma in Rhys's work, Moran suggests that 'the unsayable assumes aesthetic properties in its symptomatic narrative effects. Hence the psychoanalytic mechanisms of repression, dissociation, denial, and repetition are key in deciphering the pressure of the unsayable'.[110] The communication of the unsayable then is both an underlying problem and a finely tuned aesthetic in Rhys's oeuvre, the latter of which I suggest develops as her novels progress. The linguistic dimension of the present study differentiates it from previous psychoanalytic studies on Rhys; as Rhys's work increasingly signals the importance of the inexpressible and attempts to navigate ways around it, a Lacanian reading that focuses on language, trauma, and the interrelated

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[109] Bowie, p. 94.
[110] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 8.

nature of these offers a particularly appropriate means of deciphering Rhys's texts. I will

return to this idea shortly in the context of Lacan's understanding of linguistics,

intersubjective exchange and the wall of language; first, however, a brief overview of the

Lacanian understanding of the psyche should be put forth.

A Lacanian conception of the structure of the psyche is employed, in large part,

due to its emphasis on the narrative construction of the self. In contrast to the tripartite

structure of the ego, id, and superego that underlies Freudian theory, Lacan differentiates

the individual or 'self' into two distinct categories: the ego and the Subject. The ego

comprises the individual's more conscious and recognised elements of the self and is

responsible for the narrative, coherent identity one constructs, the totality of which is,

rather importantly, 'an imaginary construction'.[111] The primary function of the ego is to

uphold the narrative(s) it creates.[112] As such, Lacan points out that by necessity of the

ego's function, we will witness that a 'series of egos appear. Because the ego is made up

of the series of identifications which represented an essential landmark for the subject, at

each historical moment in his life, in a manner dependent on circumstances'.[113] If the ego

is responsible for the narrative one constructs about oneself, the Subject, by contrast, is

the place from which that narrative arises. While it houses both conscious and

unconscious elements of the self, the Subject can be thought of as 'the unrecognized self

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[111] Lacan, *Book II*, p. 243.
[112] The construction of the ego is structured by conscious beliefs, often supported by factual evidence or statements that reinforce the coherence of one's narrative, such as, 'I go to church', or 'I am a parent'. Not all constructions of the ego will be grounded in such easily verifiable statements, however, and one's ego narratives will inevitably be populated by beliefs that work to uphold the ego's fiction about itself (such as 'I am a good person', 'I am so lucky I don't have kids', or 'I didn't want that job anyway'), which in turn allow the individual to distance him or herself from the pain or discomfort of acknowledging the unrecognised feelings that underlie these statements. This is intimately linked to Lacan's conception of master signifiers, which will be discussed in Chapters One and Three.
[113] Lacan, *Book II*, p. 165.

that is speaking'[114] and also as 'that elusive thing that hides behind the ego, that is

alienated from it, that is created as an act of language, and that is largely unconscious'.[115]

Because '[t]he subject doesn't know what he is saying, and for the best of reasons,

because he doesn't know what he is',[116] the Subject has 'no *objective* existence; it is the

sum of the signifiers that represent [the individual]'[117] who speaks them. The Subject is

thus only revealed by its signifiers, which it communicates without necessarily

understanding what they mean.[118] Within this dynamic, there is an inherent divide or

rupture between what one rationally, consciously feels he knows about himself and the

unconscious parts of the self housed deeper in the psyche. Lacan emphasised that these

unrecognised aspects of the self tend to remain so, as the Subject contains signifiers that

threaten the coherence of the narrative that the ego so desperately tries to maintain. What

one may experience as that which is not oneself, in Lacanian semantics, is more likely to

be merely that which is not *recognised* as oneself, as it originates from a place that is

unfamiliar and hidden.[119]

     In a 1968 interview with the Guardian, Rhys stated her belief that '[i]f you want

to write the truth […] you must write about yourself. It must go out from yourself. I don't

see what else you can do. I am the only real truth I know'.[120] This infusion of the personal

in her writing, however, exists alongside a concurrent awareness that '[n]o one knows

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[114] Bailly, p. 35.
[115] Ibid, p. 69.
[116] Lacan, *Book II*, p. 165.
[117] Bailly, p. 39.
[118] Ibid., pp. 69, 155-56.
[119] Throughout this study, when using Lacanian concepts such as the Subject, Real, Symbolic, Imaginary, or Phallus, these will be capitalised in order to avoid confusion with the ordinary and colloquial uses of these terms.
[120] Rhys, Jean, Fated to be Sad, 1968

anything but himself or herself. And that badly',[121] an idea that hints at the importance of the unconscious in Rhys's fiction. The inability to define or explain certain situations, experiences, and feelings is a recurrent problem for Rhys's heroines, who collectively demonstrate an acute awareness that language is somehow at the centre of the isolation their characters experience, which is particularly noticeable in the protagonists' repeated attempts to connect with others.[122] The difficulty of such exchanges are illustrated by Lacan's theory of 'ordinary language', which occurs between individuals in the Symbolic, and which is problematized by the dynamics that attend the wall of language. Lacan suggests that communication is typically 'conceived of as an encounter of ego with ego',[123] wherein individuals employ 'ordinary language, which holds the imaginary egos to be things which are not simply *ex-sisting*, but real'.[124] In any given interaction, however, Lacan argues that what is actually occurring is an intersubjective exchange between Subjects, rather than egos.

> [W]e in fact address A_1, A_2, those we do not know, true Others, true subjects. They are on the other side of the wall of language, there where in principle I never reach them. Fundamentally, it is them I'm aiming at every time I utter true speech, but I always attain a', a'', through reflection. I always aim at true subjects, and I have to be content with shadows. The subject is separated from the Others, the true ones, by the wall of language.[125]

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[121] Rhys, *Letters*, p. 104.

[122] Simpson notes that a Lacanian understanding of isolation in which, 'by virtue of our ontological status as creatures who are cast alone into a world, it is a poignant feature of our human lives that we quest, always, to experience connection', resonates with the ubiquitous sense of pain that Rhys's novels repeatedly evoke (Simpson, p. 90).

[123] Lacan, *Book* II, p. 245.

[124] Ibid., p. 244, italics in original.

[125] Ibid.; it should be noted that in Lacanian semantics, a' and a'' refer to versions of the small other (*le petit autre*), which 'derives from the Mirror stage: it is not a real 'other' but the reflection and projection of the ego. As such, it belongs to the realm of the Imaginary; it also gives rise later to the concept of *l'objet petit a* (the small a object) […]. Apart from the small other in the mirror, the individual comes to recognise all other people as 'little others', and to treat them as suitable objects of projection and identification. On the other hand, A_1, A_2 refer to *le grand autre* – the Other – which indicates a radical otherness which is beyond the Imaginary and which cannot be resolved and dealt with through identification. This otherness comes from language and the Law – *le grand autre* belongs to the Symbolic order' (Bailly pp. 65-66).

The problem of the inexpressible is thus undermined not explicitly by language, but by a complex system of decentred egos and Subjects in dialogue across different realms. I suggest that this is a concept that Rhys's fiction unknowingly exemplifies: initially in the form of resistance to and anger directed at the Symbolic in her early work[126]; followed by an ambivalent exploration of the inner lives of her characters; and culminating in a bereaved acceptance of the knowledge that 'we can never fully go into the place of other people' which Darian Leader deems 'one of the fundamental aspects of human suffering'.[127]

In the context of Rhys's fictions, these psychoanalytic concepts collectively offer valuable comparisons and means of understanding Rhys's texts on a deeper level. Rhys's novels are, in their most basic form, about the loss and pain of living – about suffering, the complicated inner lives of Rhys's characters, and the difficulty of reconciling the disparate and unknowable parts of the self. A final and fundamental reason for utilising psychoanalytic theories to explore Rhys's works lies in the parallel aims that connect psychoanalysis and the themes that define Rhys's fiction.

> In the insistence throughout her oeuvre on the unassailability of her protagonists' union with unhappiness, Rhys offers finely honed portraits of individuals who are accompanied by a persistent sense of grievance that can never be assuaged. The aggrieved mood and Rhys's sense of life are closely linked, for it is when they are acknowledging the feeling of pain that her characters live their selfhood fully. Underscoring the power of her own melancholy, she establishes that she is committed to finding a way to give sadness a voice, to let it speak without compromise.[128]

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[126] Castro observes that Rhys's style, like Hemingway's, is 'bare, stripped, pared down to the minimum', and resistant to the overuse of signifiers, indicating what might be a distrust of language. (Castro, p. 14.)
[127] Leader, Darian, *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us From Seeing* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2002), p. 24.
[128] Simpson, p. 6.

Both psychoanalysis and Rhys's work speak to the internal suffering of the individual and the need to communicate one's narrative. Bailly summarises the purpose of analysis as the process of 'accompanying the patient towards his/her subjective truth, or towards the point where the objective "me" and the subjective "I" can be united'.[129] Freud's paper, 'Constructions in Analysis', similarly suggests that the progress of the patient is measured by the degree to which he or she can integrate repressed material.

> [T]he work of analysis aims at inducing the patient to give up the repressions (using the word in the widest sense) belonging to his early development and to replace them by reaction of a sort that would correspond to a psychically mature condition. With this purpose in view he must be brought to recollect certain experiences and the affective impulses called up by them which he has for the time being forgotten.[130]

The purpose that informs the analytic process is dependent on uncovering repressed past experiences in order to more fully integrate one's identity to a 'psychically mature condition', which includes the ability to manage internal contradictions, acknowledge uncomfortable truths, and accept what are often vastly unacceptable realities. For the goals of analysis to occur, a great deal of work must be done in navigating and integrating various aspects of the self. It is my aim to show that Rhys's novels follow a similar pattern of self-discovery and an unearthing of the repressed material that Freud describes.

As the present dissertation is unable to explore the myriad facets of Rhys's oeuvre that an extended scope might allow, there are several possible directions to mention in terms of further research. As much more scholarly attention has historically been devoted to Rhys's novels, there is a need for a more comprehensive exploration of her short

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[129] Bailly, p. 35.
[130] Freud, Sigmund, 'Constructions in Analysis', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XXIII (1937-1939): Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works* (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 257-8.

stories, particularly in psychoanalytic criticism. Likewise, Rhys's archives at the

University of Tulsa, Oklahoma, which houses many of the author's drafts, proofs, and

manuscripts, would yield a rich comparative study that examined Rhys's editorial process

in greater detail and explored the significance of the discrepancies amongst the many

drafts of her work.

CHAPTER ONE
Quartet

> [I]n the dream, because of an alleviation of the imaginary
> relations, [the subject] is easily revealed at every moment, all the
> more so to the extent that the point of anxiety where the subject
> encounters the experience of his being torn apart, of his isolation
> in relation to the world has been attained. There is something
> originally, inaugurally, profoundly wounded in the human
> relation to the world.
> –Lacan, 'The Dream of Irma's Injection'[131]

Rhys's first novel, written and set in Paris, marks the beginning of a literary career that

would span five decades, multiple countries, and two continents. Of her five novels, three

claim Paris as a primary setting and, despite having lived there for less than a decade,

Paris is the only place Rhys is said to have ever felt at home.[132] It is also the city that

housed the author's illustrious modernist contemporaries, such as Hemingway, H.D.,

Gertrude Stein, Henry James, Ford Madox Ford, Alice B. Toklas, and James Joyce, and

gave birth to the Lost Generation, many of whom were also expatriates. During the

Twenties and Thirties, the city experienced one of its greatest periods of artistic and

literary achievement, and Parisian bohemia became a well-known stamp of creative

approval. It was in this moment that Rhys fell into Paris, led blindly to the shores of the

Left Bank and Montparnasse by her first husband, John Lenglet, one in a vast series of

haphazard wanderings that would define her life, and later her fiction. It was in Paris that

Rhys met Ford, who supervised and promoted her work, eventually getting her first

volume of short stories published in 1927, for which he wrote the Preface. Ford and Paris

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[131] Lacan, *Book II*, p. 167.
[132] Angier repeatedly notes Rhys's lifelong infatuation with Paris, calling it 'her beloved Paris'. (Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 635.)

would also serve as the impetus for *Quartet*, a novel based on Rhys's affair with Ford. Through three of her first four novels, and many of her short stories, Paris is a constant; and so, despite not stepping foot in France until she was almost thirty, Paris is, in a sense, where Rhys's story begins.

Ford's Preface to *The Left Bank and Other Stories* describes Rhys's artistic purpose as the exploration of 'passion, hardship, emotions' and argues that 'the locality in which these things are endured is immaterial'.[133] The argument, of course, is not entirely this simple. Ford is right, in that Rhys's focus is indeed on the inner lives of her characters rather than their locality and that the problems of isolation, depression, and rootlessness that plague her heroines often exist independent from and regardless of 'the locality in which these […] are endured'. However, Ford could not have anticipated the complexity that would develop as Rhys's oeuvre expanded; nor perhaps, as a white financially secure Englishman, could he have understood the ways in which homelessness, space, time, and position would become central themes in Rhys's work. Specific places, therefore – Paris, London, and the Caribbean especially – play a singularly important role in Rhys's novels, as do more specific and transient spaces, such as hotels, rented rooms, houses, streets, and cafes. Collectively, these spaces do indeed matter very much, particularly in their capacity to parallel the internal, mental, and emotional spaces Rhys's protagonists' experience.

In its most literal and superficial capacity, *Quartet* is a book about love and loss. The novel opens with Rhys's heroine Marya, a 28-year-old married expatriate, wandering through the streets of Paris. Marya gets a letter stating that her husband Stephan has been

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[133] Ford, Ford Madox, 'Preface', in *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1927), p. 26.

arrested and imprisoned. Put in a precarious financial and emotional situation and dangerously close to being 'destitute',[134] the heroine finds unlikely emotional and financial support from H.J. and Lois Heidler, a smart, intelligent English couple who take her into their home. Shortly after, Marya and Heidler begin an affair, of which Lois is aware and which she silently condones. As the relationship inevitably breaks down over the course of the novel so too does Marya, whose emotional state is portrayed as unstable from the start. When Stephan is released from jail, Marya's marriage – held only tenuously together while Stephan was away – also falls apart, and the novel ends following a row in which Stephan hits Marya 'with all his force' and leaves her 'crumpled up and [laying] still' (143). By the novel's conclusion, Marya appears completely broken, in a heap on the floor, having been abandoned by everyone she knows and loves. Over the course of the tragic narrative, which leaves little in its wake but a sense of fragmentation and loss, Rhys deconstructs the solidity of her heroine's external circumstances as well as her inner and psychological resistances, exposing a very dark, bleak, and ambiguous inner landscape.

The themes of interiority and fragmentation are, in a way, most pronounced in Rhys's first novel, as their threat is still impending. From the outset, Rhys's work demonstrates a preoccupation with a shadowy and impending fate lurking beneath the surface.

> She spent the foggy day in endless, aimless walking, for it seemed to her that if she moved quickly enough she would escape the fear that hunted her. It was a vague and shadowy fear of something cruel and stupid that had caught her and would never let her go. She had always known it was there – hidden under the more or less pleasant surface of things. Always. Ever since she was a child. You could argue about hunger or cold or loneliness, but with that fear you couldn't

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[134] Borinsky, Alicia, 'Jean Rhys: Poses of a Woman as Guest', *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 229–43 (p. 232).

argue. It went too deep. You were too mysteriously sure of its terror. You could only walk very fast and try to leave it behind you (28).

This sense of impending doom stalks Marya from the beginning of her narrative and she is consistently aware of its uninvited but persistent presence. The desire to outrun that which is housed within the self is a ubiquitous theme throughout Rhys's oeuvre, which is present in *Quartet* in its primordial form, as an ambiguous, nameless, and fearful 'something' that stalks Rhys's heroine. What is feared is, importantly, not portrayed as within Marya but as hunting her. The locality of what is feared will shift over the course of Rhys's oeuvre and in her later works will be portrayed as residing within Rhys's protagonists rather than outside of them. While the fear will eventually take shape to more clearly represent the unconscious and the return of the repressed, in Marya's narrative the 'something' is as yet hidden and still purposefully kept at a distance.

In addition to an early sense of foreboding regarding the internal conflict Rhys's heroines will face, *Quartet* outlines several additional themes that the author's subsequent narratives will collectively struggle with, including a distrust of language and the Symbolic. The structure of the novel, the heroine's ambivalence towards language, and the system of binaries on which the narrative and the heroine are predicated each contribute to a sense of unease and unfamiliarity with the Symbolic, as well as Rhys's 'insistence on [the] stubborn, unassimilable otherness'[135] of her character. Marya's lack of familiarity with the Symbolic realm – including its laws, patriarchal authority, and, above all, the system of language that underlies it – are evinced in her innate distrust of words and language. The value and efficacy of language are constantly questioned throughout the narrative and communication is portrayed as inaccurate and isolating,

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[135] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 169.

particularly for women, who must participate in a linguistic paradigm of submission to both men and authority. This sense of disconnect with the Other is demonstrated most clearly in the novel's use of repetition, stream-of-consciousness writing, and the act of naming, which repeatedly demonstrate the rupture between self and Other. Such an aesthetic draws myriad parallels to Lacan's theory of language, which illustrates the dynamics and methods by which meaning is verbally conveyed as a series of complex and imprecise processes. In order to appreciate the larger problem of language inherent in the text, it is necessary to examine the specific ways in which it is presented as problematic.

One of the more overt examples of linguistic failure in the novel is the writing and receiving of letters. There are numerous scenes in *Quartet* that involve written communication, each of which ostensibly functions as a means of conveying relatively basic information (i.e. where and when Marya should meet Heidler, or why Stephan was arrested). Several of these, however, are more fully detailed and speak both to the inefficacy of language and a more basic division between the protagonist and the other. The first of these occurs towards the beginning of the novel, when Marya receives a letter from her aunt, whom she has asked for money following Stephan's arrest.

> Your letter distressed me. You are rather vague – you are always a little vague, dear child. But I gather that all is not well with you. It is difficult for me to offer any advice, since you write so seldom and say so little when you do write. I feel that we live, and have lived for a long time, in different worlds (46-47).

The aunt repeatedly notes Marya's communication as 'vague', suggesting the inexactness and ambiguity of her language, which must be 'gather[ed]' to extract meaning. Though an initial reading of this passage appears to suggest that the aunt is commenting on the clarity of the language or the style of communication found in Marya's letter, she

specifically refers to Marya, rather than her letter, as 'vague': '[*y*]*ou* are rather vague – *you* are always a little vague, dear child' (my emphasis). The depiction of Marya as ambiguous and 'vague' is in accord with her portrayal throughout the novel, in which she is experienced as enigmatic and unclear by other characters. Though she typically experiences emotions strongly, Marya's awkward, inarticulate use of language cannot portray her character's true feelings. Though it is ostensibly for the purposes of connection and communication, the letter instead substantiates the gulf that exists between the two women, drawing attention to the fact that they 'live in different worlds'.

Despite the clarity of the language that is exchanged between Marya and her aunt, as well as the straightforward request (money), the communication is confused and results in the heroine once again finding herself misunderstood and emotionally abandoned. This example not only highlights the ubiquitous difficulty of relating thoughts and feelings in the face of the wall of language, but also sets the stage for a pattern that will recur throughout Rhys's fiction, in which language reinforces the heroine's deeply embedded belief that the other will not understand or acknowledge her. The unsuccessful mirroring that occurs in this exchange is the first of many instances that exacerbate the sense of fragmentation with which the heroine is plagued, as well as the first example of a substitutive maternal character that fails to respond appropriately to Rhys's heroine's needs. The chapter abruptly ends with the aunt's letter; there is no acknowledgement, discussion, or response from Marya, who goes silent and characteristically never mentions either the letter or her aunt again.

The ineffectuality of language is again considered, once more in the context of letters, near the end of the novel. After she is banished to Nice following a climactic row with Heidler and Lois, Marya attempts to communicate her feelings to Heidler:

> Marya sat in an empty café out of the sun 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 the white paper. Words. To make somebody understand. 'I must make him understand', she thought (121).

The description of words as 'black marks on white paper' portrays the heroine's frustration with the Symbolic language at her disposal as she frantically attempts to convey her anxieties via a series of essentially meaningless 'black marks'. The 'empty café', in which the heroine is seated 'out of the sun'[136] is in fact populated by a waiter, whose presence is repeatedly noted, as well as a girl at a nearby table, who appears to be crying while writing a letter of her own. The discrepancy between the narrator's description of the 'empty' café reinforces Marya's sense of isolation and loneliness. Rhys often uses settings to reflect the internality of her characters, both of which are invariably dark, dismal, and lonely; the 'empty café' is thus in keeping with the deserted Parisian streets, small solitary rooms, and lonely hotels in which the heroine repeatedly finds herself, which mirror her isolation and increasingly fragmented interiority. There is thus an underlying sense that Marya, rather than the café, is somehow empty, bereft of both company and the language necessary to express herself. Though she considers it 'rotten' (121), Marya finishes and posts her 'incoherent epistle' (122) to Heidler, presumably having failed in her attempt to 'make him understand' (121). The portrayal of her

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[136] The motif of darkness, especially contrasted with light, recurs throughout Rhys's oeuvre, especially familiar in the descriptions of the streets, rooms, and hallways that pervade her works. Referred to only fleetingly in *Quartet*, light, dark, and the spaces in between, are more typically associated with Rhys's later works, particularly *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. (See Gregg, *Historical*, pp. 123, 132; Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 62; and Simpson, p. 130.)

thoughts and feelings as 'rotten', suggest a deeply internalised belief that the heroine

herself is somehow corrupted or bad. As Marya predicts, the letter is indeed ineffective,

perhaps in part because what is requested, to return to Paris, is clearly not what is truly

desired.[137] Though the heroine states that she wishes to make Heidler 'understand', it

seems that Marya herself does not understand the nature of what she wants and her

jumbled and inaccurate communication appears to issue from a place that is not wholly, if

at all, conscious.

The innate emptiness that Marya embodies can be compared to Lacan's theories

of the Thing and the *objet petit a,* both of which appear to germinate in Rhys's first

novel. Both theories are predicated on the idea that a sense of absence is present in the

individual from a very early age resulting from a formative split that separates the

individual from something that it deeply desires.[138] The resulting hole, the Thing that is

missing, is the representation of loss itself,[139] which is characterised by profound and

impenetrable feelings of emptiness and lack. Frances Tustin's clinical experience on the

nature of regression illustrates a similar dynamic, in which Tustin observes his neurotic

patients, 'are grieving about the loss of they know not what. They have an agonized sense

of loss and brokenness that is unthinkable and inarticulate'.[140] The essentially

unknowable quality of the Thing is key to understanding its impenetrability, as well as

the constancy of the unquenchable desire it leaves in its wake. This situation is further

problematized by the fact that the Thing, strictly speaking, does not exist and can

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[137] Bailly emphasises that Lacan maintained that every desire, at its core, was essentially a demand for love (Bailly, p. 113.)
[138] Ibid, p. 112.
[139] Ibid., pp. 136-140.
[140] Tustin, Frances, 'The Autistic Encapsulation in Neurotic Patients', in *Master Clinicians on Treating the Regressed Patient*, ed. by L. Bryce Boyer and Peter L. Giovacchini (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1990), p. 124.

therefore not be recovered; it is absence itself. And yet the unconscious desire to fill the hole left in the wake of the Thing remains, and thus one will forever attempt situate things in its place. The objects and people which are situated in this position of desire are what Lacan refers to as the object causes of desire, or the *objet petit a*. Because these are merely objects which stand in for that which is truly desired, the *objet petit a* tends to be changeable and is regularly replaced by new and different desirable objects. Where the Thing is fixed and immutable, the *objet petit a* is inconstant and temporary. Thus, the object of desire must regularly be replaced.[141]

In Rhys's early fiction, the emptiness Lacan describes is established through a variety of objects, themes, and motifs which resemble the *objet petit a*, including Rhys's portrayal of her characters' desire for clothes, makeup, and romantic relationships, each portrayed as distinct and valued objects of desire. What is truly unsettling about her characters' experiences, however, are the moments in which the true desire that underlies these objects becomes untenable; in these moments Rhys's fiction implies there is nothing that can ever fit the shape of the hole that needs to be filled. The difficulty that is so often associated with reading Rhys's texts derives in large part from her tendency to acknowledge such uncomfortable and infrequently recognised psychological truths, of which this is perhaps the most basic and terrifying example. This tendency will become more pronounced and less veiled in Rhys's later works, but is present in her early novels as well. In *Quartet*, for example, Marya's primary desired object, Heidler, repeatedly fails to offer the fulfilment she assumes their relationship will entail; instead, he humiliates her and eventually abandons her. The *objet petit a*, in this case, instead reveals

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[141] See Bailly, Chapters 7 and 8.

an internal, unquenchable emptiness as Marya's desired object not only disappoints but also hurts her.

In addition to written communication, a similar problem arises when Marya attempts to express herself verbally, indicating the heroine's lack of familiarity with the Symbolic. This problem is especially apparent in scenes in which Marya attempts but invariably fails to speak up for herself or state her opinions, ostensibly issuing from her inability to effectively utilise language. In contrast to Lois, who 'volubly' (48) expresses 'well-read opinions about every subject under the sun […] so perfectly sure of all she said that it would have been a waste of time to contradict her' (48), Marya is portrayed as having a 'little, pitiful voice' (66). The confident authority with which Lois speaks is distinctly at odds with Marya, who is quiet and timid throughout the novel and though she often disagrees with her, Marya rarely challenges Lois, despite an occasional 'longing to assert her point of view' (48).

> Words that she longed to shout, to scream crowded into her mind: 'You talk and you talk and you don't understand. Not anything. It's all false, all second-hand. You say what you've read and what other people tell you. You think you're very brave and sensible, but one flick of pain to yourself and you'd crumple up' (51-52).

Marya's reluctance to speak appears to border on an inability to do so and Rhys repeatedly portrays her as paralysed by language and profoundly anxious about communication. When confronted with a situation in which she feels unable to express herself or threatened by the consequences of what others might interpret, Marya often retreats to a position of silence, which is illustrated as a safer position. The anxiety around language is so profound that even with those she is closest to, Marya cannot bring herself to speak. When Heidler first tells Marya he loves her, for example, she merely

'[s]tare[s] at him, silent' (57). When her friend Cairn complains that 'it's a sad world! […] Sometimes it's so difficult to know what the hell to say' (73), Marya firmly advises him: '[d]on't say anything' (73) and herself adopts a position of silence in their conversation. The silence and trepidation of Rhys's heroine communicate a deeper rift in the relationship to language and the Symbolic, which is portrayed, at times, as resulting in a dissociation reminiscent of a trauma. The theme of silence, particularly self-imposed silence, illustrates the inherent distrust of language in Rhys's early novels, as well as a lack of initiation into the Symbolic realm.

The heroine's anxiety around language and her resulting childlike passivity are both curious and frustrating and have thus attracted much critical attention. Gregg's postcolonial reading suggests that the heroine finds herself simultaneously 'constrained and marginalized by the discursive system within which she is caught'.[142] Castro similarly observes that this theme of passivity is qualitatively present in each of Rhys's protagonists and suggests its persistence is attributable to a ubiquitous 'sense of impoverished dislocation' and a concomitant 'lack of fixed identity [that] leaves the characters vulnerable' to a host of problems, including the dictatorial relationship the Heidlers establish and exploit.[143] Both Gregg's and Castro's readings independently suggest that the issues regarding identity and dislocation in Rhys's texts are not simply correlative but are in fact one and the same problem, in which cultural dislocation is responsible for Rhys's heroines' fragmented sense of self. While the influence of the exilic condition undoubtedly plays a part in the heroine's fragmented sense of self, the foundations of this rupture arguably lie in a much deeper and formative split. In other

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[142] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 145.
[143] Castro, p. 21.

words, it is not necessarily the heroine's outer world that is disharmonious and fragmented, as a postcolonial or modern reading would suggest, but her inner world, which ultimately leads to a projected sense of dislocation in her outer experience.

Throughout Rhys's oeuvre, communication is portrayed as both inherently flawed and connected to the isolation Rhys's characters experience. The conversations depicted in *Quartet* demonstrate both the largely unconscious nature of speech and the tendency to marginalise or misrepresent others via language by either classifying or affixing imprecise labels (adulterer, whore, criminal) to others. This dynamic is pervasive throughout the relationships portrayed in the narrative and is particularly evident in that of Marya and Heidler's affair. As their relationship comes to an end, the couple begins to quarrel more frequently and the quality of their communication deteriorates. During one of the last arguments that precedes their parting, 'Heidler [begins] to argue patiently, talking as it were from the other side of a gulf between them' (99). The 'gulf' here, which neither Heidler nor Marya can seem to navigate via language, is reminiscent of the 'two worlds' illustrated in Marya's letter from her aunt. Though Heidler is 'patient' and the two continue to try to communicate, the gulf is portrayed as permanent and insurmountable. The breakdown in their communication heralds the breakdown of their relationship, as it does with Marya and Stephan's marriage. The evidence here suggests that language either causes or represents the inherent gulf between individuals and reinforces the sense of isolation that is with Marya from the start.

There are other more specific cues throughout the novel that point to the problem of language as an imprecise system of communication. Rhys's use of 'as it were' in the above passage – a phrase that recurs multiple times throughout the novel (10, 50, 70, 99)

– suggests that language is, at best, an approximation of meaning. Katie Owen notes, in

her introduction to the novel, that Rhys's inclusion of such a vague and empty phrase jars

'with our knowledge of her perfectionism as a writer'[144]; its inclusion leaves the reader

mindful of its presence and curious as to its function. The Oxford English Dictionary

describes 'as it were' as 'a parenthetic phrase used to indicate that a word or statement is

perhaps not formally exact though practically right'.[145] Rhys's use of 'as it were' echoes

a similar linguistic tic that Moran identifies in a passage of Rhys's Black Exercise Book,

in which Rhys discusses her mother 'and ends a passage of her feelings with the blanket

abbreviation "etc.,"'[146] which Moran suggests 'functions as a kind of shorthand, a breezy

gesture in the direction of all the conventional emotions a daughter is supposed to feel for

her mother'.[147] Rhys's use of 'as it were' in attempting to describe the gulf between

individuals, as well as her employment of 'etc.' to express her feelings toward her own

mother, point to the difficulty of describing two primary issues that would haunt her

fiction: the divide between self and Other/other and the maternal. In both cases cited

above, the difficulties embedded in each situation are brushed aside with a dismissive

phrase that communicates only the ambivalence and vagueness of the situations or

individuals they describe. The subtle repetition of 'as it were' throughout *Quartet* thus

points to the recurring problem of the inexpressible, a theme which we may recall from

the previous chapter 'assumes aesthetic properties in its symptomatic narrative effects'[148]

within Rhys's texts. The emphasis on the inexpressible will become more pronounced

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[144] Owen, p. xviii.
[145] 'As it were'. In 'As, Adv. and Conj'., *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/11307> [accessed 30 August 2015].
[146] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 99.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid., p. 8.

throughout Rhys's oeuvre but is discernible in its preliminary stages in examples such as these, which call attention to the problem of describing the indescribable.

The focus on labeling and naming is similarly of great importance in *Quartet* and highlights a key theme of Rhys's oeuvre, as well as the somewhat hypocritical stance of Rhys's first novel. The notion that words and labels act as problematic approximations to their intended meaning is most overtly demonstrated throughout the text in the processes of naming that take place. The heroine repeatedly and often passionately remarks to the Heidlers that the words and names they attach to things do not reflect knowledge of the thing itself. During one of their arguments, Marya tells Heidler that she hates his friends who imagine 'they know a thing when they know its name' (101), suggesting the reductive quality of the signifiers they employ and their failure to depict an accurate and meaningful representation of what is beyond a name. Heidler specifically is described as having a 'mania for classification', (92) while Lois enjoys 'classifying' things and 'fitting the inhabitants [of Montparnasse] […] into their proper places in the scheme of things' (48). The conclusions the Heidlers draw as they 'classify' things are portrayed as wholly inaccurate and simplistic renderings of the things themselves. Sue Thomas observes that the couple must label things, including Marya, in order to contain her (and themselves) 'in images that accord with a bourgeois signifying system' predicated on categories of 'good […] and bad'.[149] Rhys portrays the reliance on such binary labels as narrow-minded, inaccurate, and lazy. The problem of Rhys's condemnatory perspective, of course, is that her aesthetic in *Quartet* succumbs to the same system of binarisms and classification. The depiction of the Heidlers as monsters of oppression and Rhys's heroine as an innocent victim results in what Francis Wyndham called the 'angry and

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[149] Thomas, Sue, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 78.

uneven'[150] tone of the novel. Rhys's reliance on categories of good/bad, rich/poor,

light/dark combined with her singular talent for depicting the 'drably terrible life of the

under-dog' (85) elicits sympathy for her heroine and engenders a dynamic that the text

itself describes as a 'ruthless, merciless, three-cornered fight' (91), in which the reader is

encouraged to participate. Specifically with regard to Heidler, Karen Owen notes that

Rhys's portrayal 'is almost uniformly aggressive and as a result unconvincing',[151] a

depiction which is further problematized by a tendency to 'place blame on others', 'not

enough self-irony', and an inability to see the perspectives of others.[152] Angier's reading

of Rhys's first novel is similar; she describes Marya as 'Jean's first attempt at the heroine

as innocent victim, and she fails', as *Quartet* is simply too 'flawed by the demon of self-

pity'.[153] The result is a splitting of the text, where the heroine's internal and simplistic

delineations are projected externally. The desire to place blame is particularly useful in

comparing Rhys's earlier novels to her later work, which make great strides towards a

position of acceptance, compassion, and empathy. Rhys later acknowledged that *Quartet*

was indeed melodramatic[154] and was able to rectify the inconsistency of this position in

her later work, which was increasingly more considerate of multiple perspectives and less

dichotomous in the depiction of protagonists and villains. The notions that arise from this

dichotomy in *Quartet* shape one of the novel's primary themes and gives rise to a master

signifier that will prove central to mapping the progression of Rhys's heroines: that of the

victim or underdog.

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[150] Rhys, *Letters*, p. 171.
[151] Owen, p. xvii.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Angier, Carole, 'Introduction', in *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. vi, v.
[154] Ibid., pp. xvi-xvii.

The divide between victims and victors, the haves and the have-nots of the narrative, is a theme that extends throughout the entirety of Rhys's oeuvre and is thus one area in which textual progression can be demonstrated. While modern day critics tend to praise the author's 'attunement to the experience of marginalization' in her novels, despite the 'injustices perpetrated upon' her characters,[155] early reactions to Rhys's work tended to respond more critically and deemed the Rhys woman 'hopelessly and helplessly at sea in her relations with men, a passive victim doomed for destruction',[156] and a figure 'of narcissistic self-absorption'.[157]

> [W]hereas at one stage her novels were read only as finely crafted depictions of her own victimhood, now critics recognize her incisive social critique, her wit, irony, and intelligence, and her insight both into the workings of power and into the dark places of the psyche.[158]

Whether Rhys's characters are indeed victims or simply women responding to 'the horror of their experience'[159] of abuse and marginalisation is not nearly as compelling as the progression of this theme, which originates in *Quartet* as a one-dimensional depiction of victimisation. I hope to demonstrate that in Rhys's later novels, particularly following *Voyage in the Dark* and the textual collapse of binaries therein, one can track the development of this theme to a position which acknowledges the internal fragmentation of Rhys's characters that is at the core of her literary aesthetic. Thus, while the earliest iteration of the victimised protagonist may be the result of a reductive portrayal of marginalisation, Rhys will continue to develop this theme throughout her oeuvre, which

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[155] Simpson, pp. 4, 141.
[156] Thomas, p. 5.
[157] Ibid., p. 3.
[158] Carr, Helen, 'Williams, Ella Gwendoline Rees [pseudo. Jean Rhys]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*<http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/article/31833?docPos=1> [accessed 3 December 2012]
[159] Simpson, p. 141.

will later more fully recognise 'the dark places of the psyche' from which the feelings of fragmentation and marginalisation originate.

Unapologetically grounded as it is in Rhys's binary depictions of right and wrong, it is indeed difficult to read *Quartet* without taking sides[160] and equally difficult to avoid acceding to Rhys's repeated insistence on her heroine's victimisation. Lacan describes the repeated claim to such a phrase, sentiment, or position – as is present in Rhys's depiction of Marya as a victim – as the expression of what he deems master signifiers. Bailly describes master signifiers as refrains of the same expression or idea by a speaker, typically in relation to the self, which serve to '[prop] up the ego'[161] and often function to 'mask their opposites'.[162] As such, these phrases often 'have a significance that is nothing to do with the literal signified of the signifiers',[163] but rather serves 'to orientate the other signifiers in the signifying chain into a fiction that supports [the] ego'.[164] Žižek describes the emergence of master signifiers as resulting from an absence of coherent identity:

> because of this lack of identity […] the concept of *identification* plays such a crucial role in psychoanalytic theory: the subject attempts to fill out its constitutive lack by means of identification, by identifying itself with some master signifier guaranteeing its place in the symbolic network.[165]

Thus, while master signifiers ostensibly communicate the continuity and coherence of the subject, their repetition in fact points to an absence or lack. By repressing these more uncomfortable realities they remain 'unenunciated [and] buried in the unconscious' and

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[160] It is also telling that each of the four 'fictional reinventions' of characters – Ford, Stella Bowen, John Lenglet, and Rhys – felt compelled to tell *their* side, each recording their perspective in an autobiographical or semi-autobiographical account of the affair, including: Ford's *When the Wicked Man*, Bowen's memoir *Drawn From* Life, and Lenglet's *Barred*, which Rhys translated for him. While individually these do nothing to get one closer to the 'truth' or facts of the story, they do speak collectively to the fact that each individual perceives him or herself to be the victim of the same story.

[161] Bailly, p. 63.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid., p. 61.

[164] Ibid., p. 62.

[165] Žižek, Slavoj, 'Formal Democracy and Its Discontents.' *Am. Imago* 48 (1991): p. 190.

the Subject is able 'to redirect signifiers in a signifying chain painful to the speaker in such a way that a signifying chain with the opposite, bearable, or even comforting meaning emerges in conscious speech'.[166] The most prominent master signifier in *Quartet*, as previously mentioned, is that of the victim. The construction of this master signifier is grounded in a series of black and white dichotomies that capture the disunity, conflict, and power differential between the weak, disenfranchised victim, Marya, and the powerful and contemptible Heidlers. The means by which Rhys establishes this dynamic is worth exploring prior to theorising the deeper reasons behind its construction.

Perhaps the most explicit means by which the 'victim' master signifier takes shape is in Rhys's depiction of strength. Throughout the text, Rhys portrays Marya as delicate, vulnerable, weak, and powerless, while the Heidlers are described as sturdy, invulnerable, and dominant. The initial description of the couple is marked by attention to their physical qualities; they are described as 'fresh, sturdy people' (11), Heidler as 'exceedingly healthy' and Lois as a 'strong, dark woman' (13). Marya, on the other hand, is introduced as 'not very tall, slender-waisted' (7), 'a decorative little person – decorative but strangely pathetic' (8). The repeated descriptions of the couple as 'invulnerable' (78, 79, 115) and 'hard' (49, 53, 56, 64) emphasize not only their physical, but emotional superiority to Marya, who recognises that 'she simply hadn't a chance against them' (79). Long before any conflict is introduced, Marya is already at a clear disadvantage to the physically superior, financially stable, and socially respectable Heidlers.

> He looked as if nothing could break him down. He was a tall, fair man of perhaps forty-five. His shoulders were tremendous, his nose arrogant, his hands short,

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[166] Bailly, p. 63.

broad and so plump that the knuckles were dimpled. The wooden expression on his face was carefully striven for (11-12).

The wooden expression on Heidler's face mirrors his interiority: he is emotionally hard in a way that Marya is not; as is Lois, who is depicted as similarly invincible.

> There she was: formidable, very formidable, an instrument made, exactly shaped and sharpened for one purpose. She didn't analyse, she didn't react violently; she didn't go in for absurd generosities or pities. Her motto was: 'I don't think women ought to make nuisances of themselves. I don't make a nuisance of myself; I grin and bear it, and I think that other women ought to grin and bear it, too' (76).

Lois is in many ways the antithesis of Marya, who analyses obsessively, reacts wildly, and does not seem to be shaped or sharpened for any ostensible purpose: 'You see, I'm afraid the trouble with me is that I'm not hard enough. I'm a soft, thin-skinned sort of person' (42). The description of Heidler as 'wooden' and Rhys's metonymic portrayal of Lois as 'an instrument' stress not only the strength of the couple, who are compared to cold, inflexible objects, but their emotional invulnerability and inhumanity as well.

This portrayal of superiority is also evidenced in the heroine's reliance on the Heidlers throughout the novel, which is revealing of the deeper foundations of the dynamic therein. The bizarre ménage a trois that develops between the threesome, which is initially portrayed as grounded in concern and gratitude, quickly becomes one of perverse exploitation and dependency, in which Marya is treated as both child and servant. Acting from opposing sides of an obvious and tacit power differential, the trio falls into a pattern of subservience and control, fuelled unconsciously by their complex and aggrieved individual relationships. Marya, for instance, brings Heidler his coffee every day, 'for he was very majestic and paternal in a dressing-gown, and it seemed natural that she should wait on him' (47). Similarly, while she does not like Lois, Marya reflexively acquiesces to her requests to run errands, wait on her, and make her up for

parties. The dynamic of subordination that develops as the situation becomes increasingly convoluted and acrimonious depicts Marya as weak and servile and the Heidlers as imperious and tyrannical. By the end of the text, Marya is portrayed as an 'unfortunate dog abashing itself before its master' (102). This depiction of the heroine as a servant, slave, and animal has attracted the attention of both feminist critics, who suggest the master/slave relationship portrayed throughout the text is representative of the patriarchal culture the heroine inhabits, and postcolonial scholars, who locate this dynamic in the colonial history of slavery. A psychoanalytic reading of Marya's childlike status within the Heidlers' household, however, suggests a more deeply rooted familial dynamic. Indeed, Simpson locates the basis for the heroine's position of subservience as issuing not from a system of patriarchy, but a more fundamental and 'primitive' longing.

> [T]he exploration in *Quartet* of why and how a woman would allow herself to be inscribed within an exploitative, patriarchal code works backs to expose primitive states of consciousness and locate the springs of a profound longing – a condition of eternal grievance – that places emphasis elsewhere, outside the boundaries of conventional concern as determined by a literary patriarchy.[167]

The longings Simpson refers to, combined with the heroine's position of dependence, suggest the recreation of a family dynamic within the narrative, wherein Marya's character is in want of a maternal and/or paternal figure. Such a reading is reinforced by Rhys's repeated descriptions of the heroine as a child (39, 71, 72, 104) and both Stephan's and the Heidlers' roles as protective parental figures,[168] resulting in the first example of the 'quest of Rhys's heroines for the mother/lover' figure.[169] Though textual associations to the embodied mother are not yet explicit in Rhys's first novel, the longing for the maternal has already taken root.

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[167] Simpson, p. 85.
[168] Ingman, p. 112.
[169] Ibid. p. 113.

The conflict that unfolds between Marya and the Heidlers is grounded in a basic

dichotomy of authority and power versus weakness and vulnerability. The resulting

dynamic is a narrative that repeatedly portrays the cruelty of others, including Heidler,

Lois, judgmental hotel landladies, strangers the heroine encounters in the street, and

eventually Stephan. The heroine explains her experience of cruelty to Lois as such: 'I've

realized, you see, that life is cruel and horrible to unprotected people. I think life is cruel.

I think people are cruel' (42), which she concludes by stating, 'I've got used to the idea

of facing cruelty. One can, you know' (42). This system of cruelty that affects

'unprotected people' is portrayed as a constant and inescapable experience in the

heroine's reality, which she has had to adapt to ('I've got used to the idea'). What

initially appears to be a social observation – which tellingly does not move the hardened

Lois – articulates a dynamic of cruelty that Marya has internalised as omnipresent and

immutable. Throughout the narrative, the heroine identifies with her position as one of

the 'unprotected' people and is likewise moved by 'a passion of tenderness and

protection' (98) for all those she deems similar to her.

> Soon, for her sentimental mechanism was very simple, she extended this passion
> to all the inmates of the prison, to the women who waited with her under the eye
> of the fat warder, to all unsuccessful and humbled prostitutes, to everybody who
> wasn't plump, sleek, satisfied, smiling and hard-eyed. To all the people who never
> went to tea-parties or gave them. To everybody, in fact, who was utterly unlike
> the Heidlers (98).

In this distinctly unflattering and aggressive portrait of the Heidlers, Rhys extends the

textual resentment and indignation to all Heidleresque people, under a veil of concern for

inmates, their wives, prostitutes, and other social outcasts with whom Marya identifies.

Though no solution is posed, a conflict is firmly established between the self and

Other/other that belies not an isolated, individual dynamic specific to Marya's

relationship with Heidlers, but a deeper and more ubiquitous internal experience of those in a position of power or authority.

The theme of masochism in Rhys's texts is first evident here, in the myriad textual references to humiliation and the heroine's inferiority. A cursory reading of *Quartet* might interpret these elements of the narrative at face value, as externally located in cultural norms or problems inherent in a society that ignores or capitalises on the impoverished. When the heroine's masochistic dynamic with the Heidlers is considered in conjunction with Rhys's subsequent texts, however, a larger pattern of degradation and internally localised suffering becomes evident. Moran speaks extensively to this facet of the novel, which she considers a symptom of Rhys's extended body of work, arguing that 'Rhys shades her portrayals with the elements of degradation and humiliation characteristic of masochism. As in relationships of romantic thralldom, masochism involves a complex need for recognition from an idealized, powerful other'.[170] As the novels progress, 'Rhys's protagonists seem drawn into masochist relationships as a form of repetition compulsion and inarticulated psychic need' as 'a way of managing psychic pain, early object loss, and the experience of fragmentation'.[171] A more thorough discussion of masochism and repetition compulsion will each be outlined in the following chapter, but for now this correlation serves to evince an early pattern of masochism that is present from Rhys's first novel.

The system of masochism embedded within *Quartet* can also be read as a form of social commentary and it is worth pausing to demonstrate this concomitant reading of the text, in particular the portrayal of society as a machine which is an extended and

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[170] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 126.
[171] Ibid., p. 127.

recurring theme throughout Rhys's oeuvre.[172] The systematic way in which society

operates is portrayed in *Quartet* as an ordered and powerful machine that, like the

aforementioned discussion of signifiers and language, is emblematic of the Symbolic

realm. Society is portrayed as the larger system in which individually and collectively a

multitude of smaller systems operate including language, the law, cultural norms, social

hierarchies, and money, to name a few. Throughout Rhys's oeuvre society is treated as

inherently flawed and often with great disdain, a portrayal that many modernist readings

argue is fundamental to Rhys's artistic purpose.[173] The problem assumes particular

importance in *Quartet*, however, in its varied allusions to the inevitability and

inescapability of a culture of injustice that preys on those who are unprotected. Hotels are

a prime site for this display of inhumanity in Rhys's fiction and hotel patronnes

invariably embody the cold rules of society that Rhys's novels deplore. The hotelier of

the heroine's first dwelling place, Madame Hautchamp, is described as 'formidable. One

heard the wheels of society clanking as she spoke. No mixing. No ill feeling either. All so

inevitable that one could only bow the head and submit' (31). When Madame Hautchamp

speaks, one does not hear words but the mechanical 'clanking' of society itself,

suggesting that whatever she may say will invariably be involuntary, repetitive, and

socially acceptable. This characterisation is reminiscent of the description of Lois as a

'formidable' 'instrument' that is sharpened for the purposes of functioning in the

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[172] Owen, p. x.

[173] Erica Johnson, for instance, puts forth a compelling argument that links the themes of animals and machines as functions of Rhys's 'posthuman Imaginary', wherein 'her characters express abhorrence at historical and modern human relationships… [and] seek recourse to it by enmeshing with non-human elements of the world. They desire to be mannequins, they imagine themselves to be animals; they feel that to be a machine is preferable to being a woman' (Johnson, Erica, '"Upholstered Ghosts": Jean Rhys's Posthuman Imaginary', in *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First Century Approaches*, ed. by Patricia Moran and Erica Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 209–27 (p. 211)). This portrayal of the animal world and the inanimate world as both superior to the human world is a telling glimpse of the attitude embedded throughout Rhys's novels regarding the inhumane treatment of man to man.

Symbolic world around her. Both examples suggest the individual's proper place in the mechanised system of society, as well as the heroine's discomfort and lack of familiarity within the Symbolic realm. Significantly, it is the mother who is responsible for the child's introduction to the Symbolic. 'The mother is in many ways the gatekeeper of the Symbolic – it is her presence/absence that creates the polarities in which proto-thinking can begin, it is she who embodies the Other, and only she can invoke the Name-of-the-Father'.[174] The individual's induction to the Symbolic, in other words, lies with the mother, a figure that is preternaturally absent throughout Rhys's oeuvre.

Marya's problematic initiation to the Symbolic is further illustrated in Rhys's portrayal of the heroine's experience of the law, (which, importantly, is one of the primary components of the Symbolic realm). Marya's interaction with law is primarily illustrated in her visits to the prison, in which Fresnes acts as a microcosm of society, with the inmates, the jailors, and their wives portrayed as its working parts.

> [S]he 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 uselessly, pushing her as they edged. So that she was always forced to stand touching their musty clothes and their unwashed bodies. She remembered her tears and her submissions and the long hours she had spent walking between two rows of street lamps, solitary, possessed by pity as by a devil (58-59).

The wives of the other prisoners, who, as mentioned previously, Marya later identifies with, are portrayed as lifeless cogs in a machine. Maurel suggests that throughout Rhys's texts 'the representation of the judicial is fundamentally ironic, the ironic effect being engineered by hyperbole. The law is each time presented as a sort of spectacle tacitly exposing its meaninglessness'.[175] The sense of meaninglessness that is attached to the heroine's experience of the prison is illustrated not only by the way in which the women

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[174] Bailly, p. 139.
[175] Maurel, p. 75.

move – 'uselessly' and 'mechanically' – but by the seeming interminability of the line, the heroine's despair as she waits, and her ultimate submission to the process. The idea that one is trapped in such a system is a recurrent and problematic theme throughout the novel, and is underlined by the repetition that is associated with such scenes throughout the narrative. Owen notes Rhys's use of repetition and suggests that the unsettling experience of reading the text can be attributed to the succession of 'recurring and mutating images [that] work almost on a subliminal level'.[176] Though Owen's reading focuses primarily on recurring images (such as hats and fairground imagery), the repetitive nature of language in Rhys's novel is perhaps even more unsettling, erratic, and disconcerting. The persistent repetition of words, phrases, and entire passages within the novel structurally mirrors the inevitable submission to an imperfect system (whether of language, law, or society), as well as – and precisely due to – the repetitive and eternal nature of that system.

There are simply too many unique instances of repetition within *Quartet* to identify; such a list would, ironically, become repetitive. There are, however, several textual examples that convey repetition both thematically and linguistically and which are worth pausing to illustrate in greater depth. The first of these is a description of Marya's experience of life as a chorus girl:

> There she was and there she stayed. Gradually passivity replaced her early adventurousness. She learned, after long and painstaking effort, to talk like a chorus girl, to dress like a chorus girl and to think like a chorus girl – up to a point. Beyond that point she remained apart, lonely, frightened of her loneliness, resenting it passionately. She grew thin. She began to live her hard and monotonous life very mechanically and listlessly. A vague procession of towns all exactly alike, a vague procession of men also exactly alike. One can drift like that for a long time, she found, carefully hiding the fact that this wasn't what one had expected of life. Not in the very least (15).

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[176] Owen, p. xvii.

In addition to comparing the protagonist's existence to a machine, the recurrence of words and phrases within this passage underscores the repetitive nature of the 'mechanical' life that is described. The use of 'procession', for instance, communicates a repetitiveness, not only in its definition, 'a parade' or 'orderly succession',[177] but also in the literal procession of the word procession. A sense of repetition is also present in the opening phrase of the passage, '[t]here she was and there she stayed', which not only states the heroine's lack of movement and but also repeats itself ('there she […] there she') to suggest the permanency and immobility of her situation.[178] A similar example of repetition is found when Marya asks Heidler 'if he really imagined she could live there between them' (78); as she asks, she muses on the number of times she has posed the same question: 'I wonder how many times I've said that. A vain repetition, that's what it is. A vain repetition' (79). Similar to Rhys's employment of 'procession' in the above passage, here she repeats the phrase 'a vain repetition', directly acknowledging not only the repetitive cycle in which her character is inscribed, but also the hopelessness of her situation. The repetitive language Rhys uses, as well as the seemingly inescapable situations she describes, suggest the difficulties inherent in escaping the system or dynamic in which the heroine is caught. As Rhys is noted for her perfectionism as a writer, one can assume these instances of repetition are purposeful and deliberate, used to stylistically draw attention to the repetitive nature of Marya's existence.[179]

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[177] 'Procession, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/151800> [accessed 30 August 2015].
[178] Reorganized without this repetition, the sentence simply reads, 'she stayed [where] she was', which creates a distinctly less dramatic effect.
[179] Owen, p. xviii.

There is one occasion of repetition in the novel, however, that seems unconscious and perhaps unintended, in which a particularly descriptive, jarring sentence appears, word for word, in two distinct instances, twenty-two pages apart. The sentence, which first appears mid-way through the novel as Marya tries to keep her unwanted thoughts at bay, reads: 'Then her obsession gripped her, arid, torturing, gigantic, possessing her as utterly as the longing for water possesses someone who is dying of thirst' (91). The second instance occurs under similar circumstances, and the sentence occurs again, identically: 'Then her obsession gripped her, arid, torturing, gigantic, possessing her as utterly as the longing for water possesses someone who is dying of thirst' (113). Preceding the sentence on both occasions, Marya is attempting 'to keep her mind blank' (91, 113); while she manages this temporarily, both instances are followed by a flood of obsessional thoughts. Whether Rhys intended this sentence to creep into the text verbatim in such close proximity is unclear, though in either case its inclusion is curious. For in addition to demonstrating the repetitive nature of the heroine's thoughts, these scenes highlight her corresponding and perpetual desire to repress them as much as possible.

The aforementioned repeated sentence, though anomalous, underlines two thematic concerns: the intrusion of unwanted thoughts and need for their repression. The heroine's tendency to associate her immediate encounters with memories and feelings from her past introduces an aesthetic that will continue throughout Rhys's oeuvre, in which past and present exist almost simultaneously for the heroines of her novels. The painful associations these conjure in the protagonist's present, which are regarded as painful and intrusive, are typically followed by a diversionary tactic or defence mechanism, which generally takes the form of either a distraction (in an attempt to

change the course of the heroine's thoughts) or, more commonly, by becoming

intoxicated (to deaden the unpleasant sensations brought on by such thoughts or

memories). These reactions recall the overarching theme of Freud's *Civilization and Its*

Discontents, in which various pursuits, including religion, intoxication, romantic love,

and artistic endeavours, work to alleviate or reduce one's suffering. The underlying basis

of this 'desire to dispose of stimulation' is summarised by Brian Clack, who states that

'human beings seek mental tranquility and regard powerful emotions as undesirable

intrusions which need quickly to be discharged, thus producing a state of quietude'.[180]

While Rhys's heroines are generally quite adept at maintaining such an equilibrium, there

are times when the floodgates that house these unwelcome thoughts are opened; here,

Rhys is at her best and her most terrifying.

In *Quartet*, the emotions that accompany Marya's painful memories are

repeatedly portrayed as unbearable; her character longs to 'stop thinking. Stop the little

wheels in her head that worked incessantly. To give in and have a little peace. The

unutterably sweet peace of giving in' (84). The mechanism of thought, described here as

the ceaseless turning of 'little wheels', characterises the heroine's thinking as mechanical

and unremitting. This cyclic, automatic process from which she seeks escape is illustrated

in another parallel in which Marya's brain is compared a clock:

> The little clock on the table by the bed was ticking so loudly that Marya got up
> and shut it away in a drawer. But she could still hear it, fussy and persistent. […]
> The mechanism of her brain got to work with a painful jerk and began to tick in
> time with the clock. […] She had made an utter mess of her love affair, and that
> was that. She had made an utter mess of her existence. And that was that, too. […]
> 'What's the matter with you?' she would ask herself. 'Why are you like this?
> Why can't you be clever? Pull yourself together!' Uselessly. 'No self-control.

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[180] Clack, Brian R., *Love, Drugs, Art, Religion: The Pains and Consolations of Existence* (Farnham:
Ashgate, 2014), p. 44.

> [...] That's what's the matter with me. No training.' [...] [She] was a fool who could do nothing but cry behind a locked door (91-92).

Though some critics, such as Castro, argue that Rhys's use of clocks throughout *Voyage in the Dark* is representative of an anxiety about the passing of time,[181] the correlation here to the cyclical nature of unwanted thoughts seems less about time itself than representative of deeper inescapable patterns and intrusive memories. The heroine's answer to the intrusion of such thoughts and the anxiety they induce is that, like the clock, they must be shut away. Yet despite her efforts, she cannot manage to escape their persistent and unwelcome presence: the act of thinking is as painful as the process is automatic. Marya's thoughts are portrayed as coming relentlessly and steadily, one after another; once they take hold of her, she is seemingly powerless to stop the rush of negative, overwhelming, and self-defeating ideas that fill her mind. Much like the ticking second-hand of the clock, the heroine is trapped in a circular, unending procession of negative, intrusive thoughts that she aims to avoid.

This intrusion of the past and the heroine's desire to escape her thoughts and avoid the distressing experience they produce contributes, if not underlies, her dependence on drugs and alcohol. Though the reliance on narcotics is a theme that spans Rhys's oeuvre, references to drinking are particularly abundant in *Quartet* and *Voyage in the Dark*. In *Quartet*, alcohol is the heroine's drug of choice, though she is also fond of sleeping pills and, on one occasion, inhales an unnamed white substance offered to her at a party. The appeal of alcohol (in comparison to alternative narcotics) lies in its availability, relative social acceptability, and reliability to induce the numbing effect Marya seeks (in contrast to the white substance, which makes her ill). The use of alcohol

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[181] Castro, pp. 32-33.

and narcotics to alleviate psychological pain is again reminiscent of Freud's argument in

Civilization and Its Discontents, in which he deems intoxication 'the crudest, but also the

most effective' method of 'averting suffering'.[182] Rhys's portrayal of her characters'

reliance on alcohol and other depressants is worth noting, as Clack reminds us that the

type of intoxicant is often dependent on the user's need, with stimulants working to

excite the user and depressants functioning to numb him. 'Hence, drugs are often used

both when the world has become too much for us *and* when it has become too little; both

when there is too much going on *and*, conversely, when there is not enough'.[183] Rhys's

protagonists tend to fall into the former category, in which they seek escape or

anaesthetisation to avoid 'too much' of something. Thus, in particularly difficult or

hopeless situations – which tend to be fairly pervasive in Rhys's works – Marya

habitually relies on the numbing properties of alcohol.

> It was no good arguing [with Heidler], there she was, the villain of the piece; and
> it hurt, of course. When the lonely night came it started hurting like hell. Then she
> would drink a couple of Pernods at Boot's Bar to deaden the hurt […]. And a
> minute afterwards the merciful stuff clouded her brain (95).

Most references to alcohol in *Quartet* are to Pernod, a French brand of absinthe. As such

a strong alcohol effectively 'deadens' Marya's hurt and clouds her head, it is often

textually portrayed as a remedy or treatment, where what is being treated is psychological

pain. In addition to its primary function, which aims to alleviate emotional pain, alcohol

also helps Marya to experience a sense of cohesion that she typically lacks whilst sober.

> It was astonishing how significant, coherent and understandable it all became
> after a glass of wine on an empty stomach. The lights winking up at a pallid
> moon, the slender painted ladies, the wings of the Moulin Rouge, the smell of

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[182] Freud, Sigmund, 'Civilization and Its Discontents', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete
Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization
and Its Discontents, and Other Works,* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 78
[183] Clack, *Love, Drugs*, p. 49, emphasis in original.

petrol and perfume and cooking. The Place Blanche, Paris. Life itself. One
realized all sorts of things. The value of illusion, for instance, and that the shadow
can be more important than the substance. All sorts of things (20-21).

In a state of intoxication, Marya experiences the world as orderly and meaningful:

allowing her to ascribe value to a world she neither understands nor feels at home in.

The idea that Rhys's heroine desires a respite from her thoughts is further

evidenced in her repeated desire to rest and sleep, both of which are effective means by

which her character avoids the pain of her waking life and the depression that seems to

haunt her. Marya is often portrayed as longing for a nap or rest, particularly after

emotionally charged conversations or situations. Following Miss Nicolson's visit to Nice,

for example – where the older woman chastises the heroine and makes her feel inferior –

Marya drinks herself to sleep (124). Earlier in the novel, during one of her visits to see

Stephan in prison, he begins to talk about love, but Marya stops him: 'Don't let's think

about love at all. You know, sometimes I'm so sad! Life is so hard and puzzling, awful, it

seems to me. If I could rest just for a bit. I'm longing to rest for a bit' (110), seemingly

convinced that the 'hard', 'puzzling', and 'awful', aspects of life can be alleviated by the

'rest' she craves. As her character is neither employed nor engaged in hobbies or pursuits

that are particularly demanding of her time, rest does not seem an especially elusive or

unobtainable aim for Marya's character. One can assume that perhaps 'rest' in the

common sense of the word does not fully convey the heroine's desires, which seem to be

grounded in a desire to block life out completely when it becomes too overwhelming or

difficult. This idea is substantiated later in the novel, when Marya requests sleeping pills

from her doctor in order to block out her consciousness altogether.

> The doctor was small and brown and he asked a great many questions in a
> staccato voice. Then he tapped and pinched and probed with hands that hurt

rather. 'I want,' said Marya, 'something to make me sleep. Something rather
strong, please. I've been taking veronal, but it makes me sick.' 'Ah?' said the
doctor. He wrote out two prescriptions, told her to wear a hat in the sun and went
away looking wise (126).

The request for '[s]omething rather strong' is revealing of the degree to which the heroine

yearns for an escape from her existence and the memories and influence of her past.

However, while alcohol, narcotics, and sleep provide a respite, what Marya truly seems

to desire is a total disengagement from her unhappy existence.

The themes of discontent and escape are not exclusive to Rhys's heroine, as

Stephan is also portrayed as longing to break free of himself, suggesting the desire is

perhaps a ubiquitous one. Stephan's plan to leave Paris after his release from jail is

grounded in his idea that by physically moving or running away, he might evade the

troubling thoughts and memories that haunt him:

I can't anymore. You don't know what it is. I can't. I've cried myself to sleep like
a little boy night after night. Well, and what's the use of that? One stays and cries,
that's all. And there's so much that I want to forget and so much that I don't dare
to think of. I'm not myself any more. Life is pressing on me all the time.
Constantly. To doubt everything. My God, it's horrible, I must get away. If I
could get away, I might be myself again. There's an emigration bureau at Genoa
(133).

Troubling thoughts, painful memories, and the sensation that 'life is pressing on [him]'

contribute to Stephan's desire to escape, possibly to Italy, where he 'might be [him]self

again'. The notion that one's mental state is related to one's locality, however, is

portrayed as unlikely both in this scene and when Marya is sent to the south of France to

rest, where instead her mental health deteriorates, her suicidal ideations become stronger,

and her sleep and depression worsen. Whatever Rhys's characters are avoiding, it seems

to have very little to do with the particulars of the external spaces they occupy and more

to do with their fragmented and unintegrated interiorities. Like Marya, Stephan seems

possessed by something from which he can neither escape nor identify. His statement both that he is 'not [him]self any more' suggests the experience of a dual or divided self, a part of which is unfamiliar or unacknowledged, while his hope that he 'might be [him]self again' communicates a longing for a unified sense of identity. These anxieties are reminiscent of Lacan's theory of the division of the self, specifically the unknown Subject, which houses the unrecognised parts of the psyche and threatens the coherence of the individual. That which Stephan experiences as unfamiliar or 'not [him]self' is, in Lacanian semantics, that which he does not *recognise* as himself, as it originates from the Subject, with which he is unfamiliar.

The idea of escaping can also be seen, and is perhaps epitomised, in the copious textual references to death and suicide, which will recur throughout Rhys's oeuvre. While sitting beside the Seine watching the lights reflecting on the water, Rhys's heroine hears a boy calling out to her, asking if she is poised to commit suicide:

> She stayed there till a passing youth called: 'Hé, little one. Is it for tonight the suicide?' Then she hailed a taxi and went back to Montmartre, thinking indifferently as she paid the driver: 'And I haven't much money, either. This is a beautiful muddle I'm in' (25).

The instances in which suicide is textually proffered often coincide with moments in which the heroine feels particularly trapped or considers the 'muddle' or 'mess' she has made of her life. Again, towards the end of the novel, Marya tells herself, '[i]f you had any guts; if you were anything else but a tired-out coward, you'd swim out into the blue and never come back. A good way to finish if you'd made a mess of your life' (127). Though Marya always returns to her 'hard and monotonous life' (15), the allure of suicide is palpable and recurring. This instinct and the corresponding drive that haunts Rhys's oeuvre can be elucidated by Freud's theory of the death drive, which in contrast to

the Nirvana or pleasure principle, acts 'in the service of the death instincts, whose aim is to conduct the restlessness of life into the stability of the inorganic state'.[184] Many scholars have scrutinised and reduced Freud's theory to a definition based on its title rather than the aims of the drive itself, namely the desire for both stability and a return to a previous inorganic state.[185] Some scholars of Rhys's fiction have made similar reductive analyses which contend that the recurrent inclusion of references to suicide suggest her heroines' desire for death in a literal sense. A closer reading of the texts, however, illustrates something closer to the instincts Freud describes, one example of which is found in Marya's desire for the experience of protection, release, and nothingness.

> [S]he passed under the railway bridge where the cobblestones were always black and glistening, and the walls ooze with damp, she felt for the first time a definite sensation of loss and pain, and tears came to her eyes. She walked on with the fixed idea that if she went far enough she would reach some obscure, dark cavern away from the lights and the passers-by. Surely at the end of this long and glaring row of lamps she would find it, the friendly dark where she could lie and let her heart burst (117).

The heroine gravitates towards the idea of 'some obscure, dark cavern' beyond the reality of the unfriendly Parisian streets she inhabits, confident that, at the end, she will be able to lie down 'and let her heart burst'. She progressively moves 'away from the lights and passers-by' of the city and into the deeper and darker recesses of the cavern, moving

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[184] Freud, Sigmund, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923-1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, XIV vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), 155–70 (p. 160).

[185] The death drive as illustrative of the destructive tendency in the service of the reduction of tension and as a theoretical model of physical conflict is central to its usage in the present context of Rhys's work. Laplanche and Pontalis's work *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, speaks to the criticisms that have been leveled against Freud's concept of the death drive, as well as its continued theoretical application. They emphasise in particular the importance of 'the dualistic tendency' which 'is fundamental to Freudian thought' particularly in the case of 'the instincts, for these are the forces which, in the last reckoning, confront one another in psychical conflict'. (Laplanche, Jean, and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p. 99.)

away from the activity of the world. The fact that 'loss and pain' immediately precede her

pursuance of the 'friendly dark' suggests that the upheaval of difficult emotions

precipitate this drive. The reverie concludes with the image of her bursting heart. The

question both of what the heroine seeks to escape, as well as that which she wishes to

find, begins to become more explicit, as the vague, dark place in which she imagines she

can find peace promises to eradicate the pain of her life, as well as provide a sense of

safety. Though initially the heroine attempts to quell her experience of loss and pain with

narcotics, sleep, and love, she eventually seeks a state of inorganic nothingness, a place

of stability in which she imagines her suffering might be extinguished. The cavernous

nature of the 'friendly dark' place is evocative of the womb and what Beverly Clack

describes as the 'absence of content that suggests the void to which we will be returned to

at death'.[186] As 'the mother represents the possibility of returning to the undifferentiated

state of the womb',[187] Marya's longing for such a place is indicative not only of her

desire for a pre-birth state, but a larger connection between Rhys's heroines and their

complex relationship to the maternal. Without the protection of either a 'friendly dark'

place or a person to keep her safe, the fragmentation that Rhys's first heroine experiences

is a model for those which will follow in her subsequent novels: a series of protagonists

who are uncommonly displaced, terminally homeless, and utterly alone.

To emphasise this sense of homelessness, Rhys uses several recurrent metaphors

centred explicitly around the home, primarily in relation to images of rooms, hotels, and

the unwelcoming streets on which these are situated, each of which, Owen suggests, are

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[186] Clack, Beverly, *Sex and Death: A Reappraisal of Human Mortality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 88.
[187] Ibid., p. 85.

vital to Rhys's fiction.[188] Throughout the novel, Marya lives solely in hotel rooms or in

houses that belong to other people, physically inhabiting them but neither able to feel at

home nor welcome in such spaces. The experience of one of her hotel rooms, for

example, is typical of most of the rooms in which she finds herself:

> [t]he room was large and low-ceilinged, the striped wallpaper faded into
> inoffensiveness. A huge dark wardrobe faced a huge dark bed. The rest of the
> furniture shrank away into the corners, battered and apologetic. A narrow door on
> the left led into a small, very dark dressing-room. There was no carpet on the
> floor (14).

The portrayal of the furniture as 'battered and apologetic' and the room as dark and

lacking comforts, such as carpeting, dispels the hope that Marya could possibly be at

home in such a place. The description of the wallpaper as 'inoffensive' suggests the

neutrality of the room – it neither incites feelings of warmth and homeliness, nor is it

particularly terrible. It is simply a room, like all other rooms, to which the heroine

attaches no sense of belonging. The hotel rooms she and Heidler meet in towards the end

of their affair are marked by a similar lack of warmth and belonging; when she finally

remarks that she hates 'this *louche* hotel and the bedroom and the wallpaper and the

whole situation, and my whole life' (100), Heidler simply asks her why she does not

switch hotels. Marya replies drearily, '[a]ll these sort of hotels are the same' (100). The

connection between the room, the wallpaper, her circumstances, and her existence is a

startling but telling jump that portrays the hotel as a place of transience and the hotel

dweller as temporarily sheltered but ultimately homeless. Konzett's reading of Rhys's

fiction argues that the hotel acts as a 'paradigmatic space'[189] and 'transitory dwelling […]

in which migration and displacement will redefine the term 'home' in a new variation of

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[188] Owen, p. xiv.
[189] Konzett, Delia Caparoso, *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 164

being at home in permanent homelessness'.[190] Though Rhys's characters often take

refuge in such places to 'shut out a malignant world' (28), they never feel at home in the

rooms in which they hide. Homes, for Rhys's protagonists signify many things, but a

sense of belonging is not one of them.

The threatening nature of the world Rhys's heroine inhabits is portrayed not only

as an external threat, but also as internalised by Marya, whose very thoughts are haunted

by the fear of such inhospitable places. As the heroine restlessly tries to sleep in her hotel

room, she is described as imagining an interminable street lined with hostile houses:

> 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'
> hoofs behind her, out of sight (29).

This scene combines the imagery of both streets and houses, which in Marya's mind she

is forced to walk down 'endlessly', recalling again the theme of repetition and

interminability. Her imagined march through an unwelcoming landscape follows her

sensation that is identified only as 'the fear'. The correlation between the menacing,

closed-off, and uninviting houses and the protagonist's fear is typical of the uncanny

quality that is typically evoked by Rhys's representation of houses. Spyros Papapetros

locates this theme of hostile houses in the larger modern representation of unwelcoming

dwelling places in his work, 'Malicious Houses'. Papapetros's argument proposes 'that

the ultimate secret that the malicious houses of the early-twentieth-century are housing –

once venerated and now hated and despised – is the secret animosity that their inheritors

harbor against them, an animosity produced by the descendants' own primeval crime',

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[190] Ibid., p. 3

which he suggests mirrors 'modernism's own cannibalistic intentions'.[191] Papapetros's

suggestion that the malicious nature of houses that pervade modern fiction can be

localised within the individual is also a recurrent metaphor throughout Rhys's oeuvre, in

which representations of such unwelcoming houses will be increasingly explored and

eventually, in her final novel, burnt down.

If rooms and streets mirror Rhys's heroines' sense of place, the idea that the

world is inhospitable, and the fear that they have little place in it, then Rhys's portrayal of

corridors, stairs, and ladders are equally significant in expressing her heroines' trajectory

within this space. Over the course of Rhys's five novels, a series of corridors and stairs

both haunt Rhys's fiction and play a profoundly important role in course of her heroines'

progression, in which the Rhys woman is forever navigating her way through darkness

and either ascending or descending to some unknown destination. A sense of foreboding

is present in *Quartet* as Marya sits in her hotel room and muses on 'all the corridors and

staircases which had led her to this dim, musty-smelling room […] [she] felt bewildered

and giddy' (26). A set of stairs will ultimately lead Rhys's final protagonist in *Wide*

Sargasso Sea to the attic of Thornfield Hall, to madness, death, and the fiery suicide that

embeds Rhys's text in Brontë's and with which she concludes her oeuvre. In *Quartet*,

Rhys situates her inaugural heroine in a space that is similarly described by images of

stairs and corridors, which elicit a sense of anxiety and doom.

> She crossed a cobblestoned courtyard and a dark, dank corridor like the open
> mouth of a monster swallowed her up. At the extreme end of this corridor a queue
> of people, mostly women, stood waiting, and as she took her place in the queue
> she felt a sudden, devastating realization of the essential craziness of existence.
> She thought again: people are very rum. With all their little arrangements, prisons
> and drains and things, tucked away where nobody can see. She waited with cold

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[191] Papapetros, Spyros, 'Malicious Houses: Animation, Animism, Animosity in German Architecture and Film: From Mies to Murnau', *Grey Room*, 2005, 6–37 (p. 17).

hands and a beating heart, full of an unreasoning shame at being there at all (44-45).

There is a sense of impending darkness as the heroine ventures into the un-lit and damp corridor that leads to the prison as Fresnes; the place toward which she gravitates characterised by a monster and a room with no light. The themes of darkness and monsters, coupled with the recurring images of inhospitable rooms, unwelcoming houses, and unnamed terrors that pervade *Quartet* are each components of the heroine's own equally treacherous internal landscape, which Rhys has skilfully mapped out for her next protagonist to follow.

CHAPTER TWO
After Leaving Mr Mackenzie

The world goes forward in the hands of exhausted survivors […]
The world may […] exhibit all the symptoms of decay and
change, all the terrors of an approaching end, but when the end
comes it is not an end, and both suffering and the need for
patience are perpetual.
–Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*[192]

Rhys's second novel ostensibly picks up almost precisely where *Quartet* left off: in Paris,

in the wake of the heroine's affair with another character based on Ford. Perhaps

unsurprisingly, Rhys's sophomore novel is often considered a sequel of sorts to

Quartet,[193] its characters thinly disguised with new names but plagued by nearly identical

circumstances, challenges, and coping mechanisms. For this reason, one may be tempted

to suggest, as Alicia Borinsky does, that the narratives and characters are not merely

similar but the same: '[t]here are not many stories told in each of these books. It is always

the same woman'.[194]*Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, for instance, both

negotiate issues of loss, belonging, and identity; situate their heroines in the margins of

society; and are narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator that recounts the sordid,

sad world of the protagonist and the uncertainty and unpredictability that characterise her

[192] Kermode, Frank, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 82.
[193] Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms*, p. 150.
[194] Borinsky, p. 230.

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life. The novels also share a similar structure and a pared-down, minimalist style, which is fundamental to all of Rhys's work. From the outside, *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*– and their characters – are almost interchangeable, their differences so subtle that only multiple, close readings will shed any light as to their disparities.

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie tells the story of Julia Martin, whom we find alone in a small Parisian hotel room. The story begins six months after the end of her affair with Mr Mackenzie, though she continues to live off the small weekly allowance he gives her. When she is suddenly cut off, Julia confronts the eponymous character in a restaurant, but her pleas are unsuccessful and she leaves dejected and impoverished, both emotionally and financially. A man named Horsfield, who has witnessed the scene, follows her as she leaves the restaurant and quickly becomes a source of economic (and to some extent emotional) reprieve. With Horsfield's help, Julia goes to London to see her family. The majority of the novel chronicles the losses Julia faces upon her return to London as she tries and fails to engage with her family: her relationship with her sister Norah is mutually plagued by jealousy and resentment; her mother dies before she can mend their complicated relationship; and she is spurned by her Uncle Griffiths, who tells her he prefers her sister. In a rather overt display of repetition compulsion, the heroine also undermines her relationship with Horsfield. Following the death of her mother, Julia returns to Paris at the novel's close and again seeks out Mackenzie, though this time only with a blunt request for money. The novel concludes with Julia walking the streets of Paris, vaguely contemplating suicide.

Rhys's second novel continues to explore the tenuous social position of its heroine and her status as an outsider, however, there are multiple changes that mark *After*

Leaving Mr Mackenzie as distinct from *Quartet*. While Rhys portrays Marya as the sole victim of her first novel, Julia seems to more fully appreciate the effect she has on her own life, an awareness of her own fragmented identity, and an increased tolerance to address emotional and psychological concerns. This expanded awareness is reflected geographically as well: where Marya's narrative is set solely in France, with only a short, forced trip from Paris to Nice, Julia travels from Paris to England and back to Paris, her trajectory indicative of a growing ability to progress beyond one place, as well as a heightened sense of dislocation. Julia does not merely venture to a different city, but to a different country altogether, crossing cultural, geographical, and political borders to reach her destination. Importantly, she also does so alone. Movement is also hinted at in the novels' titles, which offer a clue as to the social and psychological positions of their heroines. While Rhys's first novel explicitly embeds Marya within a system, or quartet, of other individuals, Julia is marked from the outset as being very much alone, after having 'left' Mr Mackenzie. Marya's position of safety and inclusion contrasted with Julia's solitary narrative marks an abandonment of the organised system that both engulfs and stabilises the heroine's position in *Quartet*.

The importance of the heroine's detachment from the Ford character and the system of conformed mechanisation he represents is the first and most glaring departure of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie.* In *Quartet*, Marya is portrayed as caught within a closed system in which she is used by and at the mercy of others within it, perpetually victimised by Heidler, Lois, the legal system, hateful landladies, and even her husband. As such, *Quartet* makes easy distinctions between its heroes and its villains and there is little room for moral ambiguity – it is blatant what and whom Rhys desires her readers to

identify as right and wrong. The resulting text is a work that is coloured by a

disingenuous sense of persecution and exploitation.

> Rhys's point of view is so patently that of the main female character [in *Quartet*]
> and so biased in her favor that the abrupt shifts into the thoughts of another
> character – often the one against whom the heroine is reacting – destroy the
> continuity of the narrative and weaken its psychological verisimilitude.[195]

Mellown observes that while this bias is present in both Rhys's first and second novels,

'*Quartet* is the worst offender' and that 'the problem is less critical in *After Leaving Mr*

Mackenzie'.[196] Mellown's reading suggests that *Mackenzie* offers a more balanced and

less melodramatic representation of its heroines' circumstances. Indeed, in her second

novel, Rhys begins to introduce the concept of shared responsibility, allowing 'the reader

to see that Julia is at least, in part, responsible for her own misery'.[197] Relationships with

others are still problematic and language remains insurmountable, however, *After*

Leaving Mr Mackenzie affords the reader a more balanced view wherein both Rhys's

protagonist and the other characters of the novel are portrayed as inherently flawed. This

has multiple implications for Rhys's narrative, including a less severe rendering of

enemies and antagonists, a less pronounced sense of blame, and a diminished focus on

revenge.[198] In many ways, these changes render *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* a more

honest and believable narrative than *Quartet*. This shift heralds the first of many

instances of maturation amongst Rhys's heroines, and also of Rhys's writing, which will

increasingly become more aware and inclusive of others' perspectives. In addition to a

more balanced portrayal of the faults of its characters, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* also

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[195] Mellown, Elgin W., 'Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys', *Contemporary Literature*, 13 (1972), 458–75 (p. 470).
[196] Ibid.
[197] Gilson, Annette, 'Internalizing Mastery: Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, and the Fiction of Autobiography', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 50 (2004), 632–56 (p. 645).
[198] Ibid.

begins to allow room for mounting uncertainties and unknowns, which will eventually yield the very disoriented and ambiguous landscape of Rhys's later work. Thus, while the plotlines of *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* share structural and contextual similarities, the second incarnation of the Rhys woman is importantly distinct from the first.

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, like *Quartet*, at first appears to be a story of circularity in which Julia ventures from Paris, to London, and back to Paris again (just as *Quartet* begins in Paris, moves temporarily to the South of France, only to conclude again in Paris). Despite the distance she travels and the experiences she endures, the novel ultimately returns its heroine to her starting point: a cheap hotel room, seeking out Mackenzie for money, and wandering the streets of Paris. Like Marya, Julia is portrayed as trapped in an inescapable wheel of unfortunate circumstances with no meaningful or hopeful ending. It is unclear whether Julia's experiences in London in any way enable her to return to Paris under even marginally different circumstances – better equipped or with additional wisdom – or if she simply returns, dejected and unchanged, to precisely where she started. The problem of cycles and systems (of family patterns, relationships, life cycles) are paramount to an informed reading of the text, which works extensively with images of circles and spirals. One of the most haunting of these instances occurs during Julia's afternoon walk, which she repeats 'every day whatever the weather – the act itself a daily repetition' (13). While looking in the shop windows, Julia is moved by a picture she sees.

> That afternoon she stood for a long time in the Rue de Seine looking at a 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 une spiral, flottant*

> *dans l'espace, que les homes grimpent et redescendent tres, tres, tres serieusement'* (13).

The French inscription that accompanies the picture translates to, '[l]ife is a spiral, floating in space, that men clamber up and descend with great seriousness',[199] which both demarcates the importance of the motif of repetition and forebodes the impending circularity of the heroine's narrative.

Many critics read Rhys's texts, as well as her characters' lives, as narratives structured by repetition or defined by a pattern of circularity. Many critical reviews have taken issue with the perpetual cycles of Rhys's stories, in which her female characters are marked by what many interpret as self-induced victimisation that takes them from one similar story of dependence to the next. The text does nothing to dispel such a reading, as the narrator states: 'it was obvious that [Julia] had been principally living on the money given to her by various men. Going from one man to another had become a habit' (20). By the narrator's admission, there is a cycle re-enacting itself in the heroine's life, in which she knowingly seems to take part. Such a re-enactment is reminiscent of Freud's theory of 'the compulsion to repeat', which can be usefully compared to the death drive in that both processes 'exhibit to a high degree an instinctual character and, when they act in opposition to the pleasure principle, give the appearance of some "daemonic" force at work'.[200] The instinctual nature of the compulsion to repeat thus manifests as '*an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*' (36, italics in original), which aims to 'find expression in a repetition of the same experiences' (22). Freud posits this

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[199] Berry, Betsy, 'Between Dog and Wolf: Jean Rhys's Version of Naturalism in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*', *Studies in the Novel*, 27 (1995), 544–62 (p. 553).
[200] Freud, 'Pleasure', p. 35.

process can occur both actively and passively (22), and is often experienced as beyond the control of those of whom it takes hold.

> The impression they give is of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some 'daemonic' power; but psychoanalysis has always taken the view that their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves and determined by early infantile influences (21).

Driven by such a 'fate' or influenced by such a '"daemonic" power', the affected individual unknowingly engages in 'the compulsion to repeat the events of his childhood' (36). Such a cyclical replaying of such early life events demonstrates 'that the repressed memory-traces of his primaeval experiences are not present in him in a bound state' (36). When the reader of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is told, rather vaguely, that '[g]oing from one man to another had become a habit' for Julia, there is the distinct sense that the pattern which is recurring is deeply embedded not only in the heroine's narrative, but in her psyche as well. More concrete illustrations of this tendency will be evidenced later in the narrative, most notably in the heroine's relationships with Mackenzie and Horsfield, while the textual inclusion of the heroine's mother, sister, and uncle will serve to indicate possible formative experiences that Julia's later relationships aim to replicate.

While a dependence on men is indeed a primary means of Julia's survival, she is both more selective and more aware than Marya of the system in which she is choosing – and sometimes chooses not – to participate. In the opening pages of the text we find Julia living in hotel financed by Mackenzie, in a state resembling hibernation. Several scenes later, she sits in a restaurant across from him, slowly ripping up the final cheque he has offered her – the first overt act of defiance by one of Rhys's heroines. With this movement from within the machine of organised society to ideologically outside its margins, Rhys marks Julia as an outsider in a way that Marya is not. While Marya lived

under the Heidlers' roof and was both protected and exploited by them, Rhys's second

heroine steps outside of this dynamic, which catapults her into the depths and hardships

of a life in society's margins. Konzett suggests that Julia's sense of discontent originates

from her circumstances (rather than internally), which move her further outside the norms

and expectations of established society. 'She is no longer looking for shelter in marriage

but enters the novel as the already-abandoned mistress of Mr. Mackenzie. Rhys

intensifies the dislocation of her heroine, who also vents her resentment and disillusion in

more unmistakable terms'.[201] Gilson argues that Mackenzie's character functions as a

'catalyst for Julia's downward spiral',[202] again invoking the image of circularity

associated with Rhys's texts and also introducing the theme of madness that will be

explored in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Such a dislocation from Mackenzie's organised society

allows Julia a greater capacity for independence, but also contributes to her degraded

social position and corresponding isolation; she is at once freer, but also more lost and ill

at ease than Marya. This profound sense of isolation and exclusion in *Mackenzie*, coupled

with the heroine's inability to support or fend for herself, has led some critics, such as

Howells, to deem it Rhys's most 'forlorn' work.[203]

The unbearably bleak experience of isolation in *Mackenzie* is present both in the

heroine's sense of isolation and a corresponding sense of unease in the reader, who is

forced to experience the crippling effects of alienation alongside Julia. In a departure

from *Quartet*, which maintains its solidity and cohesion by means of a more linear plot

and narrative fluidity, *Mackenzie* emphasises its heroine's experience of homelessness

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[201] Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms,* p. 150.
[202] Gilson, p. 643.
[203] Howells, Coral Ann, *Jean Rhys*, Key Women Writers (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 53.

and isolation by employing literary tools such as gaps, unfinished thoughts, and shorter, more disjointed chapters that typically end abruptly. As a result, *Mackenzie* leaves in its wake a number of unexplained scenes, frustrating uncertainties, and unanswered questions which render the novel as a whole jilted and confused. The reader never discovers, for example, what prompts the bizarre scene in which Julia screams out in the stairwell on her way to her room with Horsfield, an act that effectively brings an end to their relationship. While attempting to sneak Horsfield into her room a second time, Julia stops suddenly in the darkened hallway and repeatedly screams, '[w]ho touched me? […] Who's that? Who touched my hand? What's that?' (118), waking the occupants of the other rooms, including the landlady. Though she is portrayed as genuinely confused about who has touched her, she later explains that she thought 'it was – someone dead' (120), imbuing the text with a delirious and ghostly aesthetic. In this and many other scenes throughout the novel, the heroine's actions and strange reactions are never explained, rendering the text as confused and hallucinatory as Julia herself.

Rhys's experiments with perspective function in a similar way, instilling a sense of confusion, while emphasising the idea that no single, uniform narrative truth exists.[204] In the initial restaurant scene in Paris where Julia meets Mackenzie, both the restaurateur and Horsfield witness their discussion, wherein Julia rips up Mackenzie's cheque and slaps him lightly with her glove. The restaurateur, who is a friend of Mackenzie's, keeps his eye on the pair for the entirety of the scene, ready to come to his friend's aid at any time. Horsfield witnesses the same scene from behind the couple, able to see them in a mirrored reflection that inverts their original image. Four perspectives are represented in

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[204] This idea is more fully examined in Rhys's later novels, particularly *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which three unique perspectives – Rochester, Antoinette/Bertha Mason, and Grace Poole – narrate their own distinct sections of the novel.

this scene, but only the reader is able to discern them all and appreciate the discrepancies therein. The restaurateur's perspective is biased by loyalty; Horsfield's by vantage point and a lack of context; Julia's by emotion; and Mackenzie's by his sense of guilt and need for decorum. The question of the narrator's reliability is also at stake here, as there remains a perceptible bias towards Julia's character throughout the novel. Objective truth is portrayed here as impossible, while subjective truth is depicted as ill-informed at best, delusional at worst, recalling the psychoanalytic problem of the divided and unknown components of the self. As a result, Rhys's second work demonstrates not only an increased tolerance of multiple perspectives and shared responsibility, but also a capacity to simultaneously allow for mounting uncertainties and unknowns.

Rhys heightens her protagonist's sense of isolation with a continued focus on the experience of exile and her portrayal of the dislocation of the twentieth-century traveller. Johnson argues that as Rhys's novels progress, place and identity become less firmly linked as Rhys increasingly refuses to align herself or her characters 'with any one geographical place, either politically or culturally,' resulting in 'a lack of fixity'.[205] *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, more so than *Quartet*, offers a glimpse into the anxieties of belonging that are associated with exile and expatriatism. As mentioned earlier, Marya's place in *Quartet* is relatively stable in terms of her geographic location; the story is set predominantly in Paris, Marya lives with the Heidlers (or in a hotel they pay for), and never moves beyond the borders of France. Her role is also relatively unambiguous, as Rhys casts Marya in stereotyped positions such as the underdog, victim, and mistress. Julia, by contrast, is constantly moving from one unwelcome location to another and is notably devoid of any labels which might denote a sense of belonging. She begins her

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[205] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 17.

journey in one country, where she is precariously financially situated in a hotel for which Mr. Mackenzie pays. After he arranges to put an end to the monthly payments, Julia slips into an apathetic depression and decides to travel to London on a whim: because a taxi honks 'before [she] counts to three' (44). Once in London, she lives in a series of cheap hotels on hand-outs from family, who are suspicious of and have lost patience with her; Mr. Horsfield, who initially supports her but soon grows tired of her; and her former lover, Neil who writes her a cheque but wants nothing to do with her. Julia ultimately returns to Paris as miserable, alone, and hopeless as when she started. While Marya's place was in Paris with the Heidlers, either as their guest, rival, or mistress, it quickly becomes clear that Julia has no place, geographically, culturally, relationally, or otherwise. If one's identity is in any way related to the place one inhabits or the role one occupies, then Julia, possessing neither, is Rhys's first true literary example of an exile.

Johnson argues that by dramatizing 'basic principles of dwelling and place-based dimensions of identity' in this way,[206] Rhys creates an undercurrent of displacement in her fiction, thereby bridging the difficulties of her characters' external and internal worlds. The result of this vague and complicated juxtaposition is an overwhelming sense not only of geographic isolation, but also of a deeper lack of belonging to anything by which Julia might be able to define herself internally. Even the most basic physical attributes that may contribute to identity are absent for Julia, whose 'career of ups and downs had rubbed most of the hall-marks off her, so that it was not easy to guess at her age, her nationality, or the social background to which she properly belonged' (11). In this passage and throughout the novel, Konzett notes that Julia's 'appearance proves to be

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[206] Ibid., p. 24.

strangely disconnected from traditional markers of identity',[207] making it increasingly difficult for other characters or the reader to situate her with any degree of certainty. The lack of context and missing markers of identity are indicative not only of Julia's alienation from others and society, but also from herself. This relationship between geographic, family, and cultural ties and the problem of fractured or absent identity is at the heart of Rhys's second text.

The idea that one has no place – within either a culture, society, family, relationship, or country – from which one might cultivate an identity is a theme dealt with throughout Rhys's oeuvre, each novel exploring the ramifications of placelessness in greater depth than the work that precedes it. By undermining place and belonging, Rhys is able to move her texts and her heroines away from the centre and towards the periphery or margins, where the ramifications of homelessness can be more fully explored. By disrupting traditionally stable categories of belonging, including ethnicity and nationality, Konzett argues that Rhys is free to explore 'the more fluid fields of identity' and the inner lives of her characters.[208] In the early pages of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie,* we can see the foundations of place beginning to collapse, as Julia is evicted from her 'cheap hotel on the Quai des Grands Augustins' (7). Despite being described as '[a] lowdown sort of place' (7), the hotel is also 'a good sort of place to hide' (9) and Julia is depicted as relatively content in what resembles a state of hibernation within the safety of her rented room. The emphasis on place in these early descriptions ('a lowdown sort of *place*', 'a good sort of *place* to hide'), as well as the specific duration of her six-month stay, suggest that while Julia is alone, she is still affixed to a stable and semi-permanent place, which

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[207] Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms,* p. 150.
[208] Ibid., p. 18.

allows her to be situated in time and space and thus feel somewhat secure. As soon as her

financial arrangement with Mackenzie is disrupted, however, Julia loses the shelter of the

hotel and the benefit of a place – however transitory – to call her own. She is immediately

set adrift in the world with only vague shreds of identity remaining to her, all of which

begin to unwind or falter in the course of the narrative.

Julia's final split from Mackenzie – this time financially – portends a series of

splits and separations that shape the fragmentary aesthetic of the novel. Gregg writes

extensively on the subject of splitting within Rhys's oeuvre, the theme of the double, and

the consequent binarisms that result:

> The double is perhaps the most recurrent topos, and certainly the most
> complicated. There are not many Rhys texts from which this figure is excluded.
> The use of the double suggests a subjectivity split by the pressure of difference
> and exclusion based on binary oppositions: black and white; the West Indies and
> England; insider and outsider; sanity and insanity; resistance and conformity to
> the dominant social codes. The figure of the madwoman consigned to the upper
> room, another recurrent image, is tied to the concern with the doppelgänger.[209]

Gregg suggests that the pressure of the binary categories in which Rhys situates her

heroines contributes to a splitting of their individual subjectivities within her narratives.

For this reason, '[t]he self of which Rhys writes is variously inscribed as a double, an

ontological split, a shared identity, an absence, anonymous, drifting away from itself,

splintered into mirror images',[210] which call into question her heroines' solidity. Though

Gregg's comments are made in regard to Rhys's larger body of work, *Mackenzie* is the

first of Rhys's novels to provide specific textual examples of a double, split, and

unfamiliar self.

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[209] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 197.
[210] Ibid., p. 50.

Sage argues that Julia's character in particular 'suffers time and again from a fear that she is unreal, that people can't hear her or see her properly'.[211] When she first meets Mackenzie in the restaurant, Julia is described as both 'pale as a ghost' and 'silent and ghost-like' (22); soon after, however, she begins to describe herself as such. The first of these instances occurs when Julia recounts a story to Horsfield about sitting for a female sculptor named Ruth. Julia explains that after telling Ruth the complicated and difficult story of her life and desperately wanting her to understand, Ruth made it clear 'that she didn't believe a word' (40) of Julia's account of her own life.

> It was a beastly feeling I got – that I didn't quite believe myself, either. I thought: 'After all, is this true? Did I ever do this?' […] 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. And it was a beastly feeling, a foul feeling, like looking over the edge of the world. It was more frightening than I can ever tell you. It made me feel sick to my stomach. I wanted to say to Ruth: 'Yes, of course you're right. I never did all that. But who am I then? Will you tell me that? Who am I, and how did I get here?' (41)

In the aftermath of the experience, Julia tells Horsfield that she returned home that evening in search of her personal documents – including photos, letters, her marriage book, passport, and her deceased child's papers – but could not find them: 'it had all gone, as if it had never been. And I was there, like a ghost' (41). Moran suggests that when Julia's recounts the story 'she does so in a way that underlines her own distance from it',[212] an idea that is echoed in Rhys's portrayal of Julia's ambiguity and Horsfield's frustration:

> She spoke as is she were trying to recall a book she had read or a story she had heard and Mr Horsfield felt irritated by her vagueness, 'because,' he thought, 'your life is your life, and you must be pretty definite about it' (38-39).

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[211] Sage, Lorna, 'Introduction', in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. xi-xii.
[212] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 120.

The true difficulty, as well as the sadness, of Julia's position is not that Ruth and

Horsfield doubt her, but that she doubts herself. The absence of material 'proof' of her

life makes Julia question her very existence and lays out yet another set of binary terms

that the heroine seems to feel she must choose between: she is either a real person or a

ghost.

> The repetition of 'beastly feeling' underscores Julia's inability to describe
> adequately with words, in human terms, what she had endured. She is reduced to
> inchoate animal status. A narrative is as much constructed by the hearer as it is by
> the speaker. A story is only a story if it is heard […]. If epistemological and
> discursive value or legitimacy is withheld by the hearer, the ontological status of
> the speaker is thereby fractured or destroyed. Julia was marginalized – pushed to
> 'the edge of the world', silenced – by not being heard or believed.[213]

The sculptor's inattention and dismissal of the heroine sends her into a panic that Julia

can only assuage by locating material proof that she exists. This passage is one of many

examples in Rhys's fiction that illustrates the trauma of one's experience of being

disregarded.

Eventually, the compounding of such experiences seems to leave Julia only one

option: to adopt an affect of indifference. Drawing on affect theory, Erica Johnson

explains that 'Julia absorbs the affect of indifference into herself in such a way that she

encrypts herself in it. In several of her descriptions of Julia's indifference, Rhys clearly

invokes death, as when she alludes to Julia's entombment'.[214] The process of Julia's

emotional entombment can be observed over the course of the novel, with each

successive unhealthy relationship having a damning and cumulative effect. In the end, the

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[213] Gregg, *Historical*, pp. 148-49.
[214] Johnson, E., 'Upholstered Ghosts', p. 222.

failure to be acknowledged, wanted or loved[215] precipitates what Johnson calls an 'internal collapse' which 'is manifest as a hollowed-out affect, as though what has gone "kaput" is Julia's very will to live'.[216]

> Julia wishes to have her emotional state recognised and treated with respect and dignity, but in each successive encounter she feels spurned and rejected; she then reacts with rage, refusing to countenance the social decorum that requires the repression of all strong emotion.[217]

While Julia's fears begin with the anxiety that she is somehow unreal, repeated exposure to cold indifference – particularly from her family – leads to her feelings of ghostliness and her contemplations of suicide.

Part Two of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, entitled 'Return to London', revisits the motif of ghostliness and the absence of a stable and solid self. When Julia arrives in London, she promptly writes two letters: one to her sister, and another to her former lover Neil. She concludes her letter to Neil with the statement, 'I hope you won't think of me as an importunate ghost' (48). Where the previous anxiety about Julia's unreality was internalised, here the same insecurities are externalised and projected onto another individual, whom Julia fears will not only recognise her lack of cohesion and ghostliness, but will find her contact annoyingly demanding. In 'The Neuroses of Defence', Freud describes the concept of projection, in which one's anxieties or insecurities are deflected onto another:

> The primary experience seems to be of a similar nature to that in obsessional neurosis; repression occurs after the memory of it has released unpleasure – it is unknown how. No self-reproach, however, is formed and afterwards repressed; but the unpleasure generated is referred to the patient's fellow-men in accordance with the psychical formula of projection. The primary symptom form is *distrust*

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[215] Moran, Patricia, '"The Feelings Are Always Mine": Chronic Shame and Humiliated Rage in Jean Rhys's Fiction', in *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First Century Approaches*, ed. by Erica Johnson and Patricia Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 190–208 (pp. 190-191).
[216] Johnson, E., 'Upholstered Ghosts', p. 223.
[217] Moran, 'Feelings', p. 197.

(sensitiveness to other people). In this, belief has been withheld from a self-reproach.[218]

By projecting her own feelings of ghostliness and importunity onto Neil, Julia avoids the discomfort of acknowledging them herself. Her anxiety, however, is not so easily repressed and the embodiment of her own spectral image confronts her again less than a page later.

> She walked on through the fog into Tottenham Court Road. The houses and the people passing were withdrawn, nebulous. There was only a grey fog shot with yellow lights, and its cold breath on her face, and the ghost of herself coming out of the fog to meet her. The ghost was thin and eager. It wore a long, very tight check shirt, a short dark-blue coat, and a bunch of violets bought from the old man in Woburn Square. It drifted up to her and passed her in the fog. And she had the feeling that, like the old man, it looked at her coldly, without recognizing her (49).

This image of the ghost and the disregard that it seems to show her reinforces Julia's anxieties regarding her unreality and further illustrates her problematic relation to herself. Indeed, her sense of fragmentation is so profound that even her own mirror image either does not recognise her or ignores her. Gilson argues that the ghost Julia encounters is indicative of a profound division within the heroine herself.

> Her past self is detached from her present self and does not even recognize this new being; Julia seems to identify the ghost as her 'true' self (now dead) and looks back at her with longing, unable to understand how she has come to be the self she is now.[219]

The scene is marked by an uneasy sense of ambiguity, not only because of the ghostly double, but the lack of regard and recognition it shows Julia. The heroine is thus portrayed as doubly dispossessed of a sense of cohesion, as she experiences exile both

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[218] Freud, Sigmund, 'Draft K The Neuroses of Defence from Extracts from the Flies Papers', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume I (1886-1899)*, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), 220–29 (p. 226).
[219] Gilson, p. 644.

externally, as a nationless outsider, and internally as well, detached in some way from herself.

One cannot adequately address this episode without pausing to consider its parallels to Freud's study on the uncanny, which is uniquely suited to exploring the spectral and disorienting qualities of this scene. To appreciate Freud's understanding of this term, one must first turn to the history of the word and its original in German, *unheimlich*, as Freud does in his essay 'The "Uncanny"'. Part I of Freud's essay details an extensive etymology of the term, in which Freud notes that 'the nearest semantic equivalents' to *unheimlich* in English are 'uncanny' and 'eerie', but that the meaning is more closely equivalent to 'unhomely'.[220] Freud's definition is predicated on the idea that the 'uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, 'the unhomely') is, in some way, a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, 'the homely')'.[221] Thus, Freud's working definition of the uncanny is not simply that which evokes fear or dread but that which is terrifying precisely because it is rooted in the familiar, or 'homely'. Eventually, the two terms – *heimlich* and *unheimlich* – become increasingly ambivalent until they very nearly collapse, consequently increasing the tension and uncanny quality of the words themselves. This more nuanced and complex understanding, in which *heimlich* and *unheimlich* cannot be fully differentiated, leads Freud to Schelling's conception of the uncanny as that which '*ought to have remained ... secret and hidden and has come to light*',[222] which is the definition Freud utilises for the remainder of his analysis.

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[220] Freud, Sigmund, 'The "Uncanny"', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, XXIV vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), 217–56 (p. 219).
[221] Ibid., p. 220.
[222] Ibid., p. 224.

Part II of Freud's study details various manifestations of the uncanny within culture – dead bodies, automatons, life-like dolls, missing or detached body parts, ghosts, and doppelgängers, to name a few – and suggests literature is particularly rife with such examples. Structuring his argument around E.T.A. Hoffman's short story, 'The Sand-Man', Freud explains that while '[m]any people experience the feeling [of uncanniness] in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts',[223] it is only when the familiar and unfamiliar intersect that the uncanny is truly present. Freud takes the doppelgänger as an example, in that it is a familiar image of the self yet simultaneously unfamiliar in its separateness. The doppelgänger is threatening in its divisiveness as it undermines the unity of the self that one typically takes for granted and, rather than providing comfort, is experienced instead as 'the uncanny harbinger of death'[224] and/or 'a thing of terror'.[225] Freud explains that the topos of the doppelgänger or double can 'be traced back to infantile sources'[226] and belongs to a primitive phase of our mental development. As such, it represents the return of the repressed and consequently ushers in the sensation of uncanniness, which Freud reminds us 'is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression'.[227] When dealing with the double in literature, it is important to note that such an interpretation only holds when an author's text conforms with everyday reality, rather than a world of fantasy or make-believe. In other words, it is necessary to discern the conditions of a text and the author's intentions prior to embarking on an investigation

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[223] Ibid., p. 241.
[224] Ibid., p. 235.
[225] Ibid., p. 236.
[226] Ibid., p. 234.
[227] Ibid., p. 241.

of potentially uncanny elements. When it is clear that a text presents itself in line with the familiar world, as Rhys's does, the realm of the uncanny can potentially emerge.

The heroine's ghost in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* embodies many of the features that Freud suggests commonly attend the notion of that which is uncanny: the image is simultaneously a doppelgänger and a ghost, who emerges on a foggy London street as Julia wanders the city. Upon seeing her double, Julia recognises herself but is also separate from the spectre, which is cold and does not acknowledge her. The ghost is a familiar, indeed mirror image of the protagonist, but is simultaneously strange and unfamiliar, evoking a disturbing and uncanny quality. If the appearance of such a figure suggests the return of the repressed, what might this doppelgänger-ghost represent that has returned? Aside from the disconcerting sensation that Julia has been split in two, the most jarring feature of her doppelgänger is its cold disregard, which Julia experiences as both hostile and dismissive. If an essential feature of the uncanny is that 'the familiar turns on us and becomes unfamiliar',[228] Julia's projection of these feelings onto her ghost might equally represent self-hatred or a complete disavowal and dismissal of the self. Importantly, it is the ghost who looks through Julia, rather than the other way around, suggesting that the apparition is, in a way, more solid than the heroine herself. A profound concern embedded in this interaction (or lack thereof) are the everyday realities one takes for granted, such as one's sanity and basis in reality. Gilson argues that this image of the split self precipitates Julia's 'slide into a chaotic and incoherent identity' and ultimately 'a madness brought on by a marginalization'.[229] Thus, in addition to the

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[228] Clack, Brian R., 'At Home in the Uncanny', *Religion*, 38 (2008), 250–58 (p. 255).
[229] Gilson, p. 644.

problem of splitting and an internalised sense of hostility, there is also the question of what to make of Julia's sense of (ir)reality and the issue of madness that underlies it.

The problem of splitting as well as the sensation that the individual has been separated from him or herself is reminiscent of R.D. Laing's exploration of subjective duality in *The Divided Self*.[230] Laing's study is concerned with the experience of being in the world for those who experience a degree of unreality. Laing refers to a person afflicted by such a condition as 'schizoid'.

> [T]he totality of [the schizoid's] experience is split in two main ways: in the first place, there is a rent in his relation to the world and, in the second, there is a disruption of his relation to himself. Such a person is not able to experience himself 'together with' others or 'at home in' the world, but, on the contrary, he experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation; moreover, he does not experience himself as a complete person but rather as 'split' in various ways, perhaps as a mind more or less tenuously linked to a body, as two or more selves, and so on.[231]

Both in its depiction of separateness from the world and from the self, this description captures much of Julia's predicament. Alone in nearly every sense – without loved ones, a home, or a sense of identity – Rhys's character epitomises Laing's schizoid individual, who typically 'feels both more exposed, more vulnerable to others than we do, and more isolated'.[232] Laing suggests such a state is the result of an 'exquisite vulnerability' and goes on to say that the schizoid individual may experience himself as divorced from both reality and himself.

> [H]e is irreal; wholly symbolical and equivocal; a purely virtual, potential, imaginary person, a 'mythical' man; nothing 'really'. If then, he stops pretending

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[230] Also see Abel's article, 'Women and Schizophrenia', which was the first to suggest a link between Rhys's fiction and Laing's theories. 'Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys', *Contemporary Literature*, 20 (1979), 155–77 (p. 173).

[231] Laing, R.D., *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 17.

[232] Ibid., p. 37.

to be what he is not, and steps out as the person he has come to be, he emerges as Christ, or as a ghost, but not as a man: by existing with no body, he is no-body.[233]

Laing's depiction of the schizoid's ambiguous and ghostly experience of himself closely mirrors Rhys's characterisation of Julia. Alone and ambiguously situated in the world, Julia experiences a profound splitting of her self and visualises precisely the ghostly presence that Laing describes. Julia is portrayed as literally split in two and, tellingly, despised by her own ghost.

Assuming that Julia's ghost is the manifestation of the divided self that Laing describes, I propose that the heroine's lack of cohesive identity and sense of unreality are the primary latent crises in *Mackenzie*. Recalling that this ghostly entity is cold and does not recognise her suggests that what has been split off is a disavowal of and coldness towards the self, an internalised fear that she is either unreal or unworthy. The theme of unreality is reinforced by the equivocal and shifting nature of time and space and the recurring theme of death in life,[234] each of which serve to obscure the protagonist's sense of solidity. According to Laing, such anxieties are typical of a person with schizoid tendencies, who operates in the world with a '*low threshold* of security'.[235]

> [He] may feel more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body […]. If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of

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[233] Ibid.

[234] In Rhys's final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the inverse of this theme – life in death – is also explored by means of giving renewed life to the marginalised Bertha Mason of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

[235] Laing, p. 42.

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keeping himself and others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself losing his self.[236]

Laing's conception of the schizoid sense of unreality and the creative safeguarding of identity has implications for each of Rhys's heroines, as well as Rhys's oeuvre as a whole, but is particularly helpful in explicating Julia's attempts at self-preservation. Both her previous frantic attempt to prove her identity to herself with her papers and passport and her psychic split into body and ghost signals not merely an anxiety but a panic about the nature and solidity of her existence.

While each of Rhys's novels deals in various ways with their heroines' problematic notions of identity, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* seems to embody a particularly fragmented aesthetic, as it contains the moment of lost identity in which the Rhys woman begins to go 'back & down' to the more troubling foundations of her lost identity. The shift from Marya's relatively cohesive (if tenuously held together) identity in *Quartet*, to the disintegration and collapse of Julia's sense of self in *Mackenzie,* marks the latter as the first of Rhys heroines to explore the deeper and more fundamental concerns that will later take shape in Rhys's oeuvre, in part due to the destabilising presence of Julia's family members, who seem to actively disrupt the heroine's sense of cohesion. While any mention of the heroine's family of origin is absent from *Quartet*, Rhys's second novel is populated by the protagonist's mother, her Uncle Griffiths, and her sister Norah, each of whom wreak havoc on the heroine's sense of self. Rhys's stark depiction of what this experience entails is manifest in the representation of her heroine's formative relationships, which are then mirrored in the failure of her later relationships. Julia is thus set adrift in the cold world of Rhys's second novel, in which she – and we –

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[236] Ibid., pp. 42-43.

must begin to grapple with her formative experiences of loss and the deeper reasons for her inherent sense of isolation.

The notion that Rhys's heroines' difficulties are rooted largely in their family dynamics is an idea that attends nearly all psychoanalytic studies of Rhys's fiction, including the work of Simpson, Moran, Lawson, and Ingman, as well as Reventós's study on matrophobia in Rhys's work. The influence of the maternal, in particular, is the subject of much critical interest and scholarly attention. As mentioned in the Introduction, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* offers one of the more diverse and extensive textual explorations of a heroine's family dynamic in Rhys's oeuvre, as it addresses the heroine's relationships with her sister, uncle, and mother over the course of the text. The first of these is the heroine's relationship with her sister, which is portrayed as highly strained and contentious. Though at times Rhys portrays Julia and Norah as longing to be affectionate with one another, the relationship is more often defined by a mutual hostility. Their final row occurs immediately following the mother's funeral: '[Norah] enjoyed seeing her sister grow red and angry, and begin to talk in an incoherent voice. Julia talked on and on, answering the yellow gleam of cruelty in Norah's eyes' (98). While Norah is described as 'cruel', both sisters are portrayed as flawed; their altercation and final interaction concludes with Julia repeatedly screaming that her sister is 'jealous' of her, which culminates in Norah's tearful exit (98-99). The dynamic between the two women is initially portrayed as fractured and remains so throughout their reunion and the death of their mother, the latter of which may offer an indication as to the nature of their rivalry.

When the heroine arrives in London, her mother is close to dying and is being looked after by Norah and a nurse. Norah allows Julia to visit but maintains that their

mother will not recognise her: '[s]he won't know you […]. You realize that, don't you?

She doesn't know anybody' (52). When she arrives at the flat the next day, Julia is

portrayed as nervous and almost childlike as she stares at the floor:

> Julia refused tea, sat down, crossed her legs, and stared downwards. She felt too nervous to talk. The meeting with her mother was very near; yet she was still unable to imagine or realize it. Supposing that her mother knew her or recognized her and with one word or glance put her outside the pale, as everybody else had done. She felt a sort of superstitious and irrational certainty that if that happened it would finish her; it would be an ultimate and final judgement. Yet she felt cold even about this. She could not realize that it would matter (69).

The anxiety at seeing her mother is palpable, but it is notably not due to the fact that she

is ill or dying, but instead because Julia fears her mother might recognise her and 'put her

outside the pale'. The admission, however, along with the fear that such a judgment

might 'finish her', is quickly negated by the indifference expressed at the end of the

passage: '[y]et she felt cold even about this. She could not realize that it would matter'.

When Julia does see her mother, it is at first unclear whether or not the woman recognises

her daughter. Eventually, however, Julia's fear is realised: 'she saw her mother's black

eyes open again and stare back into hers with recognition and surprise and anger' (72).

The fact that the heroine's anxiety foretells her mother's response suggests that Julia has

experienced such a reaction from her mother previously, which is precisely what the

subsequent chapter of the text confirms.

The mother-daughter relationship is given additional context following this

traumatic interaction, as Julia sits with her sleeping mother the next day and reflects on

their relationship.

> Julia sat there remembering that when she was a very young child she had loved her mother. Her mother had been the warm centre of the world. You loved to watch her brushing her long hair; and when you missed the caresses and the warmth you groped for them. . . And then her mother – entirely wrapped up in

the new baby – had said things like, 'Don't be a cry-baby. You're too old to go on like that. You're a great big girl of six'. And from being the warm centre of the world her mother had gradually become a dark, austere, rather plump woman, who, because she was worried, slapped you for no reason that you knew. So that there were times when you were afraid of her; other times when you disliked her. Then you stopped being afraid or disliking. You simply became indifferent and tolerant and rather sentimental, because after all she was your mother (77).

This passage explicates the heroine's early experience of her sister as the object of her mother's affection, as well as the shift from an experience of the mother as 'the warm centre of the world', to a position of fear and dislike, followed finally by a resigned sense of indifference and tolerance. Moran suggests that '[w]hat Rhys describes as "indifference" on the daughter's part suggests a numbing of pain',[237] which is indicative of a response to trauma. The shift in experience from the mother as initially 'warm' to 'dark, austere', and violent suggests the trauma is potentially borne both of physical pain ('she was worried, slapped you for no reason that you knew') and neglect or emotional pain, with the latter being emphasised as the more troubling aspect of the two. Moran suggests that this untenable reality of the maternal relationship instils 'the presence of chronic shame' in Rhys's protagonists.[238] As Julia cannot yet face this humiliation from her family, shame instead assumes the properties of sadness, anger and eventual indifference, which

> function as emotional substitutes for the more totalising eradication of self that shame involves, thereby concealing the painful recognition of being shamed; sadness and anger in turn develop into the depression and humiliated rage that are hallmarks of Rhys's older protagonists.[239]

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[237] Moran, *Aesthetics,* p. 157.
[238] Moran, 'Feelings', p. 190.
[239] Ibid., pp. 190-91.

Ingman suggests 'that a daughter looking at such a mother' as Rhys portrays here, 'will be unable to derive a positive sense of identity from her'.[240] The fact that Julia dismisses her feelings of fear and dislike towards her mother and quickly and automatically replaces them with indifference parallels the indifference the mother displays towards her, suggesting the mother's hateful and dismissive attitude towards her daughter have been learned and introjected in order to avoid the painful reality of her mother's disregard.

What is clear from both textual examples above is an absence of appropriate maternal engagement from the mother, as well as the trauma that is borne of this dynamic. Julia is at once a stranger to her mother – both as she lay dying and in her memory of being disregarded in her youth – and simultaneously recognised by her, but only to be put 'outside the pale'. Such an unsatisfactory maternal relationship informs not only Julia's strained and difficult family relationships, but also her confused sense of self and her relationship choices in adult life. The lack of cohesion Julia experiences is evidenced in the aforementioned passages that portray her as 'ghostly', as well as her distance from her own narrative, illustrated in her repeated but detached telling of her life story. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* also portrays its heroine's reliance on mirrors, which Horsfield comments on throughout their encounters. The maternal influence on the protagonist's fragmentary experience of herself can be attributed to variety of similar psychoanalytic theories, including Lacan's 'mirror stage'; Winnicott's work on identity formation and the idea of the 'True Self'; Balint's conception of the 'basic fault'; and Klein's work on early maternal relationships. Though structurally and semantically divergent, the basis the each theory focuses on the importance of positive maternal

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[240] Ingman, p. 108.

interaction and a fundamental level mirroring that is necessary for the child to organise a coherent, versus chaotic, sense of self. To these theorists we can add the words of Roland Barthes, as Ingman does in her chapter devoted to Rhys: 'the gratifying Mother shows me the Mirror, the Image, and says to me: "That's you." But the silent Mother does not tell me what I am: I am no longer established, I drift painfully, without existence'.[241] For the child who experiences the latter, regardless of which specific school of psychoanalytic thought is followed, a host of psychological consequences will result, not altogether dissimilar to those displayed by Rhys's heroines.

The death of the mother in Rhys's second novel is an interesting departure from the majority of her other texts, in which the heroine's mother is either entirely absent or deceased. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* both include the death of the mother in the course of the narrative, the former offering a far more explicit portrayal of the death itself, including the suffering that precedes it and the funeral that follows. Rhys's decision both to contain the troubled mother-daughter relationship in her second novel and her repeated decision to textually kill the mother figures that populate her narratives speaks to an ongoing and profound dynamic of anxiety regarding the maternal. Freud's theory of obsessional neurosis outlines the means by which such difficult realities are often managed in the neurotic patient. In order for the individual to tolerate a vastly unacceptable reality – which in Julia's case might be that her mother does not love her and that she, by extension, is unlovable – a mechanism of defence stands in against the original unbearable idea, which is repressed.

> [W]e are at first in doubt what it is that we have to regard as the instinctual representative that is subjected to repression – whether it is a libidinal or a hostile

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[241] Barthes, Roland, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), p. 168.

trend. This uncertainty arises because obsessional neurosis has as its basis a regression owing to which a sadistic trend has been substituted for an affectionate one. It is this hostile impulsion against someone who is loved which is subjected to repression. The effect at an early stage of the work of repression is quite different from what it is at a later one. At first the repression is completely successful; the ideational content is rejected and the affect made to disappear. As a substitutive formation there arises an alteration in the ego in the shape of an increased conscientiousness […] It is very probable that the whole process is made possible by the ambivalent relationship into which the sadistic impulsion that has to be repressed has been introduced. But the repression, which was at first successful, does not hold firm; in the further course of things its failure becomes increasingly marked. The ambivalence which has enabled repression through reaction-formation to take place is also the point at which the repressed succeeds in returning. The vanished affect comes back in its transformed shape as social anxiety, moral anxiety and unlimited self-reproaches; the rejected idea is replaced by a *substitute by displacement*, often a displacement on to something very small or indifferent. […] Thus in obsessional neurosis the work of repression is prolonged in a sterile and interminable struggle.[242]

According to Freud, in cases of obsessional neurosis, repression occurs in the creation of a more tolerable version of the original feared content, which eventually returns in the form of anxiety and self-reproach. Julia's ambivalence toward her mother, along with her anxiety and tendency towards self-denigration, are indicative of the mechanisms of repression that Freud depicts, while Rhys's recurrent textual matricide portrays the 'prolonged […] and interminable struggle' he describes.

In addition to Julia's relationship with her mother, a final source of familial trauma is evidenced by the heroine's interaction with her Uncle Griffiths, whom she seeks out to request financial help. Uncle Griffiths is portrayed as the paternal figure in the novel, as he 'had represented to the family the large and powerful male. She did not remember her father well; he had died when she was six and Norah was a baby of one' (57). The beginning of their meeting is uneventful and polite, if a bit stilted, and Uncle

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[242] Freud, Sigmund, 'Repression', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, XXIV vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), 141–58 (pp. 156-57).

Griffiths is repeatedly described in terms that emphasise his dominant and patriarchal

position: '[t]o Julia he appeared solid and powerful, and she felt a great desire to please

him, to make him look kindly at her' (58). The solidity of Uncle Griffiths stands in stark

contrast to the heroine, who is portrayed as uncertain, meek, and fragmented as she sits

before him. Her demure and respectful behaviour ends, however, when her uncle insults

her former husband, at which point Julia assumes a state resembling dissociation.

> She felt as though her real self had taken cover, as though she had retired
> somewhere far off and was crouching warily, like an animal, watching her body
> in the armchair arguing with Uncle Griffiths about the man she had loved (59).

The uncle's aggressive and inappropriate comment triggers a fight or flight response in

Julia, who 'take[s] cover' and retreats psychologically to a position outside 'her body'.

The conversation continues and the two quarrel as the heroine remains in her dissociative

state:

> Uncle Griffiths was still talking: 'You always insisted on going your own way.
> Nobody interfered with you or expressed any opinion on what you did. You
> deserted your family. And now you can't expect to walk back and be received
> with open arms'.
> 'Yes', she said, 'it was idiotic of me to come. It was childish, really. It's childish
> to imagine that anybody cares what happens to anybody else' (61).

Julia's repeated reference to her childishness is revealing of the origins of her reaction to

her uncaring uncle and suggests an early trauma in which care, support, or love was

perhaps expected but not given.

Julia's date with Horsfield follows the interaction with her uncle and continues to

illustrate both the heroine's experience of psychological wounding and the sense of

dissociation that follows. After leaving her uncle, Julia wanders back in the darkened

streets to her rented accommodation and thinks:

> [i]t was the darkness that got to you. It was heavy darkness, greasy and compelling. It made walls around you, and shut you in so that you felt you could not breathe. You wanted to beat at the darkness and shriek to be let out. And after awhile you got used to it. Of course. And then you stopped believing that there was anything else anywhere (62).

This passage is evocative of the aforementioned description of the mother, in which the heroine similarly describes her as 'dark' and capable of inducing pain. The acceptance and indifference to the 'darkness' here is also reminiscent of the Julia's confused attitude towards her mother, both of which end with the heroine dismissing her pain. Julia's date with Horsfield follows this scene and the above description of the enveloping darkness. Horsfield takes Julia to a restaurant and throughout their meal she remains somewhat dissociated and split-off:

> She wanted to attract and charm him. She still realized that it might be extremely important that she should attract and charm him. But she was unable to resist the dream-like feeling that had fallen upon her which made what she was saying seem unreal and rather ludicrously unimportant (63).

This description of a 'dream-like feeling that had fallen upon her' is the embodiment of the traumatic aesthetic that Moran argues Rhys's novels attempt to portray. Frost corroborates Moran's reading, noting that 'Rhys's work is full of such moments, when desire and will are overruled by a counterforce of self-destruction: a dynamic that has typically been read as passivity but in fact suggests determined negation'.[243] Rhys's interest in representing these scenes, particularly 'the ways in which traumatic events impinge upon the workings of memory, and the ways in which traumatic memories in turn impinge upon the lives of those afflicted by them',[244] is especially apparent throughout the family scenes of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. Thus, while the relationship between Julia and Uncle Griffiths is less critically analysed than that of the

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[243] Frost, p. 187.

[244] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 5.

mother-daughter pair in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, it is equally revealing of the familial trauma that Rhys aims to capture.

In addition to illustrating the complicated traumatic response that results from Julia's interaction with her uncle, the date with Horsfield and their relationship as a whole reinforces the idea that the heroine's interiority is vexed by a sense of abandonment. In her brief relationship with Horsfield, which breaks down after Julia's strange outburst in the stairwell, as well as her failed relationship with Mackenzie, there is a pattern of desertion which Simpson suggests is influenced by the heroine's need to choose objects similar to those of her formative familial relationships.

> In Julia's choice of men who will replicate the abandonment that she has experienced in her earliest intimacies, she moves along a vicious cycle, enacting a repetition compulsion to ensure that external factors will confirm the 'truth' of bad internal objects and work to exteriorize prevailing and dominating anxieties in the intrapsychic world.[245]

Building on Rhys's previous novel and later evidenced in her subsequent works, the repetition of abandonment will prove to be a unifying theme that defines the majority of Rhys's heroines' relationships, which are invariably plagued by violence, loss, and rupture.

The isolation and despair that follows the heroine's re-traumatisation is disorienting and difficult for many readers, which can be seen in the shift in critical response to Rhys's second novel. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* arguably received the harshest reviews of Rhys's career and left critics ambivalent about the author's superb writing talent coupled as it was with subject matter that most found distasteful. The original reviews following the novel's publication often cited its sordid and unsavoury

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[245] Simpson, p. 58.

content,[246] with one critic referring to the book as 'an episode in the life of a prostitute'[247] and another to Julia as the 'paid mistress to one man after another'.[248] In his review of the history of critical responses to *Mackenzie*, Mellown broadly states that critics at the time of the novel's publication were simply 'uncomfortable with the subject matter'.[249] Berry's analysis is similar but goes into greater depth than Mellown's regarding the specific nature of critical distaste: '[despite] much praise for formal and stylistic accomplishments, the consensus seems to be that, despite all its formal artistry, Rhys's tale is grimy, sordid, unappetizing, pessimistic, and disturbing'.[250] Rhys's novels are each undeniably dark, pessimistic and – depending on one's moral compass – sordid, and consequently such labels frequently affix themselves to Rhys's work; however the critical reception to *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is uncommonly harsh, with many of the claims laid against it lacking substantive evidence.[251] Book critics employed to produce unbiased commentary and objective reviews instead seem almost personally affronted by the novel – which I would argue is precisely the case. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is indeed 'unappetizing' and 'disturbing', though not for the reasons levelled against it, but because Rhys so effectively creates a vacuum of identity, into which readers may also fall. Frank Swinnerton, a staunch supporter of Rhys's work, summarises the novel in a 1931 review for *The Evening News* as, in equal parts, disagreeable and compelling.

> [A] terribly sharp picture drawn by an artist whose ruthlessness is as great as her gift of understanding. Julia's helpless state, her indifference, the squalor and indignity amid which she lives are shown without waste of a word. They have an

[246] Mellown, Elgin W., *Jean Rhys: A Descriptive and Annotated Bibliography of Works and Criticism* (London: Garland, 1984), pp. 23-36.

[247] Quoted in Ibid., p. 24.

[248] Gerald Gould, 'New Novels. All Sorts of Societies.' *Observer*, No. 7289 (8 February 1931), p. 6.

[249] Mellown, *Bibliography*, p. xvi.

[250] Berry, pp. 544-45.

[251] As with *Quartet*, for example, there is not a single instance in *Mackenzie* that explicitly describes a sexual encounter. This theme will be explored further in the following chapter.

engrossing importance to the reader. They seize his imagination. He lives in this *milieu* willy-nilly, unable to escape. And it was this quality, that, although the theme is disagreeable, one continues to read to the end as eagerly as if it were a romance.[252]

As Swinnerton points out, the 'disagreeable' world Rhys creates not only captures the imagination of readers, but transports them into the heroine's reality, where Julia's isolation, lack of identity, and despair cannot be witnessed from a safe vantage point outside the novel, but must be experienced within it alongside the heroine. I propose the inability to escape the unacceptable world Rhys creates is at the heart of much critical distaste levelled against the novel.

The transmission of experience that Swinnerton describes is reminiscent of Simpson's argument that Rhys's texts demand not so much a reader as an empathetic witness. In order to fill the void of the other who invariably ignores or dismisses her heroines, Rhys's characters 'demonstrate, despite their keen sense of isolation, a profound need for connection with the other who witnesses their stories'.[253] The need for a witness to one's narrative is demanded both within the pages of the text – for example, in Julia's repeated telling of her story, first to the female sculptor, then to Horsfield – as well as from Rhys's audience, which results in a dynamic reminiscent of the analytic relationship. Simpson is particularly adamant that throughout Rhys's oeuvre, the audience unknowingly 'participates in a kind of interaction that replicates the complex tasks in [psychoanalysis]'.[254] Smith makes a similar comparison and remarks that readers 'of Rhys's text must be aware that its author's masochistic aesthetic also has significant *readerly* affects insofar as the implicitly sadistic elements of any hermeneutics may well

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[252] Swinnerton, Frank, 'Give Me a Tale with a Real Plot', *The Evening News* (London, 6 February 1931), section A London Bookman's Week, p. 5
[253] Simpson, p. 18.
[254] Ibid.

be simultaneously engaged and exposed in the route of the transference'.[255] Again, the

reader is implicated in a kind of pseudo-analytic relationship with the text, which is

marked by the elements of witnessing, narrative interpretation, and transference. The

masochistic and sadistic components of the reader-text relationship that Smith describes

are worthy of further attention, as these potentially underlie the prevalence of negative

reactions to Rhys's novels, particularly those in response to *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*.

Determining how and to what degree masochism and sadism function in Rhys's

narratives is an exacting task. Most readings seem to favour exploring – and often

criticising – the masochism embedded in Rhys's works, while ignoring the corresponding

sadistic elements of the narratives. One reason for this may be the more overt display of

masochism throughout Rhys's pre-war novels, coupled with a well-veiled and more

covert display of sadism. A second hypothesis for this is the overlap between the two

concepts, which Freud explains in the following terms:

> If one is prepared to overlook a little inexactitude, it may be said that the death
> instinct which is operative in the organism – primal sadism – is identical with
> masochism. After the main portion of it has been transposed outwards on to
> objects, there remains inside, as a residuum of it, the erotogenic masochism
> proper, which on the one hand has become a component of the libido and, on the
> other, still has the self as its object. This masochism would thus be evidence of,
> and a remainder from, the phase of development in which the coalescence, which
> is so important for life, between the death instinct and Eros took place. We shall
> not be surprised to hear that in certain circumstances the sadism, or instinct of
> destruction, which has been directed outwards, projected, can be once more
> introjected, turned inwards, and in this way regress to its earlier situation. If this
> happens, a secondary masochism is produced, which is added to the original
> masochism.[256]

If masochism is simply aggression turned inwards on the self, the closeness of the two

concepts lies in the common instinct of destruction. The difference, then, is merely

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[255] Smith, R. McClure, '"I Don't Dream about It Any More": The Textual Unconscious in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 26 (1996), 113–36 (p. 130, italics in original).
[256] Freud, 'Masochism', p. 164.

directional: if directed outwards, the instinct is sadistic, if directed inward, it is masochistic. The two concepts cannot be disjoined if one is interested in exploring masochism, as the word is defined in terms of its opposite (sadism) and both are borne of the same drive or instinct (the death drive). In addition to the obvious masochistic elements of Rhys's fiction – particularly the self-inflicting suffering for which her characters are often criticised – there lies another, more inconspicuous sadism that is perhaps partially responsible for the negative reactions to and harsh criticism of Rhys's texts.

Before considering the more latent displays of sadism in Rhys's writing, it is worth pausing briefly to discuss the more tangible manifestations of masochism that will inform the basis of such a discussion. Of the many criticisms levelled against the Rhys woman, perhaps none has received as much attention as the masochistic and lackadaisical attitude of Rhys's pre-war heroines – to the point that many question whether they are indeed heroines at all. Dell'Amico identifies the passivity and victimisation of Rhys's protagonists as characteristic sources of frustration inherent in her pre-war novels.

> [M]any, if not all, readers of Rhys find fault with the modernist period novels, perceiving patterns of victimization in the female protagonists' thoughts and actions above and beyond that which corresponds to author's feminist method of depicting female gender conformity. 'Passive' and 'victims' are the common terms employed in the criticism, and the characters' excessive passivity is usually said to point to Rhys's complicity with that which she otherwise critiques.[257]

From Marya's victimised mentality to the exasperating passivity displayed by each woman in turn as they drunkenly fumble their way through Rhys's narratives, it is often difficult for many readers and critics alike to champion and support characters that seem to do little – if anything – to support themselves. Johnson similarly observes that 'Rhys's

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[257] Dell'Amico, Carol, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys* (Routledge, 2010), p. 57.

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heroines have often been characterized by critics as victims and even as masochists because of the suffering they endure at the hands of those who refuse them access to self-definition and agency'.[258] Smith comments on Rhys's masochistic aesthetic as well, stating it has 'often been observed that Rhys's fiction returns obsessively to relationships tinged with masochism and that her major characters exemplify a maddeningly self-destructive passivity'.[259] The brand of masochism described by Smith, Johnson, and Dell'Amico is one defined by self-inflicted pain brought about largely by passivity and helplessness. The idea that Rhys's characters to some degree participate in and invite the masochistic dynamics that define these relationships will find further evidence as Rhys's oeuvre unfolds, as will the deeper psychological foundations for this dynamic. This, however, is where many critics leave the discussion of masochism: identified as a textually contained source of distress with little to no bearing on the reader-text relationship. This is also where the lines between masochism and sadism begin to blur.

Beyond the complexities of Julia's narrative and the suffering contained therein, the text itself is imbued with a masochistic undertone, which precipitates a complicated and at times sadistic reader-text dynamic. Thus, in addition to constructing narratives populated by characters that display masochistic dynamics in their dealings with other characters, the texts themselves are, to varying degrees, masochistic and sadistic. Moran suggests that not only does 'Rhys [shade] her portrayals with the elements of degradation and humiliation characteristic of masochism'[260] but also that her aesthetic itself is masochistic.

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[258] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 29.
[259] Smith, R.M., p. 130.
[260] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 126.

> [F]rom depicting masochistic characters to embodying masochism and trauma within literary form itself: portraits of romantic thralldom and erotic domination give way to a masochistic aesthetic, one that deploys repetition, suspends and disavows climax, blurs reality and fantasy, and enacts patterns of reversal.[261]

In her postcolonial study of each of Rhys's five novels, Dell'Amico notes this dynamic as well and argues that although each of Rhys's novels display elements of masochism that *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is 'the most thoroughly masochistic of her fictions'.[262] To describe the novel itself – rather than just its characters – as masochistic, may help explain the abundance of negative critical reviews that attended Rhys's second novel. Dell'Amico notes that 'a core component of the masochistic enterprise, literary or otherwise, is *exhibiting* suffering and embarrassment'; from Dell'Amico's perspective, Rhys is a masochistic writer, 'highly interested in "letting everybody see it" – that is, as a writer interested in *representing humiliation per se'*.[263] The act of displaying the pain, trauma, and the repeated indignities and misfortunes that befall the heroine over the course of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* renders the novel one of the most pronounced displays of masochism in Rhys's oevure. Thinking back to Simpson's comments and Smith's ideas about '*readerly* affects' and the transference inherent in the reader's relationship to Rhys's novels, however, there seems to be a particular point at which the masochistic element collapses into a more sadistic display. The need for the audience to share the burden of the suffering demonstrated in the text, leads to a masochism that is no longer solely self-inflicted, but shared and simultaneously directed both inward *and* outward, towards its audience. In other words, the destructive force is outwardly expressed and intended to affect the reader, displaced as it were from a purely textually

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[261] Ibid., p. 128.
[262] Dell'Amico, p. 58.
[263] Ibid., p. 63, italics in original.

contained aesthetic to a readerly aesthetic. If masochism is pleasure derived from one's own pain or humiliation, and sadism is the tendency to derive pleasure by inflicting pain on others, Rhys's novels perhaps exist somewhere in between – a type of masochism that includes a concomitant expulsion and sharing of suffering.

It is perhaps unsurprising that most critics find themselves, consciously or not, drawn into the complicated and, at times, contentious reader-text dynamic of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. It is still less clear, however, precisely what distinguishes this particular novel as the harshest on its audience. To be certain, *Quartet* and the novels that follow *Mackenzie* contain masochistic and depressing qualities; yet it is Rhys's second novel that strikes a chord as particularly so. Returning to Laing's theories about the disunified or split self, one may notice parallels between the ways in which *Mackenzie* manages its relationship to the other and Laing's theory of depersonalisation. According to Laing, '[a] firm sense of one's own autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with the loss of identity'.[264] For 'the ontologically insecure'[265] individual, such as Julia, the anxiety of the other may take several forms, including engulfment (in which one's identity is at risk of being immersed in the other) and implosion (or emptiness), as well as petrification (relating to one's fear of lifelessness and lack of autonomy).[266] The first and second of these responses, engulfment and implosion, both employ a similar method of alleviating anxiety wherein the individual isolates him or herself in order to avoid the identified threat posed by the other. The third response to

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[264] Laing, p. 44.
[265] Ibid., p. 43.
[266] Ibid., pp. 43-47.

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anxiety, petrification, however, utilises a different mechanism of defence, which Laing

identifies as depersonalisation.

> Depersonalisation is a technique that is universally used as a means of dealing with the other when he becomes too tiresome or disturbing. One no longer allows oneself to be responsive to his feelings and may be prepared to regard him and treat him as though he had no feelings. The people in focus here both tend to feel themselves as more or less depersonalised and tend to depersonalise others. The act of turning him into a thing is, *for him*, actually petrifying. In the face of being treated like an 'it', his own subjectivity drains away from him like blood from the face. Basically he requires constant confirmation from others of his own existence as a person.[267]

When the self is experienced as threatened by another in this manner, the insecure person

may be tempted to depersonalise the other – that is, to divest him of his humanity or

individuality – in order to maintain his own. In each of the situations Laing outlines, what

remains constant is a need to avoid a perceived threat.

In Rhys's narratives, the act of depersonalisation is evidenced in two primary

ways. The first and more obvious of these is found in the actions of Rhys's characters,

who variously disregard the humanity of others and at times their very existence. Julia,

for example, is marginalised in turn by the sculptor, Neil, and her uncle, each of whom

treats her dismissively or inhumanely, while Julia herself is often guilty throughout the

text of using others for money and failing to regard them as individuals. Secondly, and

more surreptitiously, however, is the author's depiction of individuals from her own life,

such as Ford, who are represented as fictional characters in her novels. This

objectification, in which real people from Rhys's past are dispossessed of their true

identity and rewritten as characters is reminiscent of Laing's theory of depersonalisation,

and can be meaningfully examined alongside Winnicott's theories of transitional objects

and transitional space. In her article, 'Internalizing Mastery: Jean Rhys, Ford Madox

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[267] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

Ford, and the Fiction of Autobiography', Gilson suggests that Mackenzie-the-character operates as a transitional object for Rhys and is used to address her relationship with Ford in a psychologically safe space. For this reason, Gilson argues that 'Mackenzie plays such a small part in the novel because he is less a character than an object of mind'.[268] Indeed, Mackenzie's character is physically present only briefly, framing the opening and closing pages of the novel, however, his absence is felt throughout the narrative, the title of which bears his name. Mackenzie/Ford is thus somehow everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, an 'absent presence, an object of mind that has been repressed'.[269] Gilson further suggests that Ford is actually present in all of Rhys's pre-war novels, beyond the obvious role he plays in *Quartet* and *Mackenzie*; his role as Rhys's tutor and mentor, his influence on her writing style, and his suggestion that she adopt her pen name Jean Rhys, places Ford historically at the centre of Rhys's writing. Ford is Rhys's creator and destroyer, her lover and her adversary, and as such he assumes an important role in her early fiction, in which he serves as the depersonalised and transitional object.

This preoccupation with the identified and hated object places the Ford character at the centre of Rhys's first two novels, first as Heidler and then as the eponymous character of *Mackenzie*. In both roles, the Ford character presents Rhys's heroines with an unhealthy relationship they must navigate and an 'other' they ultimately cannot bear.

> It is in this way that Mackenzie (and indeed, Heidler too, because Mackenzie seems to build on him and to refer back to him diachronically) functions as a transitional object, by representing an imaginative intervention in reality that operates in such a way as to release Rhys-the-author from the emotional devastation that the fictional Rhys figures experience.[270]

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[268] Gilson, p. 643.
[269] Ibid., p. 644.
[270] Ibid., p. 646.

According to Gilson, the two fictional incarnations of Ford function directly to transition the pain of Rhys's experience with her lover and mentor onto a more manageable plane in which she could unleash her anguish and anger. By placing the Ford character at the centre of her early fiction, Rhys reduces him to an object over which she has total control. 'Mackenzie is neither the real Ford who tormented Rhys, nor a completely imaginary character who lives in her fiction. Rather, he is both, a figure who is simultaneously Ford and not-Ford'.[271] Gilson suggests the purpose of this endeavour is, '[i]n Winnicottian terms […] to destroy the object/Ford',[272] vanquishing it of its power, overcoming its absence, and rendering it insignificant. *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* collectively supply the space in which this can occur and in which the problematic object (Ford) can be addressed. As such, Rhys's early novels provide a transitional space 'in which the real and the not-real are mingled, thereby allowing Rhys to creatively reinvent her relationship to the world'.[273]

Despite this sense of movement in relation to the Ford character-object, Rhys's second novel again denies its audience a sense of purpose or meaning following the protagonist's dreary journey. The final pages of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* find Julia back in France, tired and dejected, asking Mackenzie for money once again – this time with no pretense – and wandering the streets of Paris. Konzett suggests this ending and the novel as a whole, with its 'absence of any decisive action and its resigned and dejected tone, illustrates a vacuum of meaning'.[274] Berry similarly suggests that the nihilism of Rhys's second novel 'is complete and relentless,' heightening the difficulty of

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[271] Ibid., p. 645.
[272] Ibid., p. 646.
[273] Ibid., p. 645.
[274] Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms*, p. 152.

the novel for its audience.[275] The heroine's ambiguous journey extends from the novel's first page to its last and her fate remains suspended at the novel's close, which culminates in an unfulfilling and frustrating conclusion similar to that of *Quartet*. As Julia's narrative ends exactly where it started – in Paris asking Mackenzie for money – a sense of repetition pervades her story from start to finish (which we may recall Moran argues 'is the key element structuring the masochistic aesthetic'[276]).

The degree of nihilism, masochism, and sadism that distinguishes Rhys's second novel from her former and forthcoming narratives continues to frustrate the reader-text relationship, which is arguably at its most contentious here. If the reader is aware of and can approach the novel with an expectation of its 'ambiguity in combination with its negative resolution',[277] however, he or she may be able to tease out some meaning or, at the very least, some satisfaction with an intensely unsatisfactory ending. Rather than finding the novel's ending or the entirety of the text upsetting, Dell'Amico suggests that accepting its largely nihilistic aesthetic 'contributes to our sense that the book/interlude is somehow about something that could have been, but never, finally, will be'.[278] This predicament is analogous to that which the heroine describes at her mother's funeral:

> 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. […] Julia had abandoned herself. She was kneeling and sobbing and wishing she had brought another handkerchief. She was crying now because she remembered that her life had been a long succession of humiliations and mistakes and pains and ridiculous efforts. Everybody's life as like that. 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).

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[275] Berry, p. 558.
[276] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 140.
[277] Dell'Amico, p. 80.
[278] Ibid.

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Berry observes that the act of reading Rhys's second novel re-creates the same sense of frustration and desire that its heroine experiences; namely, that 'what we need and must acquire is inextricably bound to what we desire and may never know'.[279] Though the ending may not yield the outcome we want, it remains an unfailingly honest representation of something that eludes both Rhys and her characters and which her forthcoming novels will continue to work to understand.

The final lines of the novel both reflect the ambiguity faced by both Rhys's heroine and her readers: '[t]he street was cool and full of grey shadows. Lights were beginning to come on in the cafés. It was the hour between dog and wolf, as they say' (138). These closing lines are perhaps the most commonly cited and endlessly interpreted of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. In her introduction to the novel, Lorna Sage cites this passage in order to illustrate her description of *Mackenzie* as 'a novel poised between hope and despair'.[280] Moran similarly suggests that the novel 'ends in a liminal space',[281] while Chrysochou reads the closing lines as representing an 'in-betweenness [that] refers back to the indeterminacy which governs any attempt to characterize Julia. Although arguably there is the potentiality for metamorphosis, Julia is left hanging between worlds'[282]; it is this sense of potentiality and 'in-betweenness' that engenders the sense that Rhys's larger narrative effort, and the Rhys woman by extension, has a long way yet to go. Berry's article, the title of which is drawn from the final lines of the novel, bases

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[279] Berry, p. 552.
[280] Sage, 'Introduction', p. xiii.
[281] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 147.
[282] Chrysochou, Panayiota, 'In-between States: Twilight Horror in Jean Rhys' *After Leaving Mr.Mackenzie* & Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 7 (2011), 139–51 (p. 149).

its naturalistic reading on the etiology of the original French phrase, 'entre chien et loup',

whose defining feature is marked by contrast:

> 'Entre chien et loup' is an expression that dates back at least to the fourteenth
> century and applies to French shepherds, who handed over their flocks at dusk to
> those who would tend them through the night. *Mackenzie*'s ending suggests,
> literally and emblematically, this twilight hour – an implicitly dangerous period
> for the sheep, who for a time are without a shepherd.[283]

A professional French translation by Céline Graciet, however, offers an additional and

perhaps more psychologically meaningful description, which suggests that the phrase

denotes the 'limit between the familiar, the comfortable versus the unknown and the

dangerous'.[284] Applying Graciet's reading to the novel's final lines yields perhaps the

most interesting and evocative possibility, as it suspends the end of *After Leaving Mr*

Mackenzie between the safety of the known and the impending threat of the unknown,

between the present land of conscious thought and the sea of the unconscious, which will

begin to spill over in Rhys's third and subsequent novels.

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[283] Berry, p. 559.

[284] Graciet, Céline, 'Naked Translations', *Entre Chien Et Loup*, 2004
<http://www.nakedtranslations.com/en/2004/entre-chien-et-loup> [accessed 28 January 2015].

CHAPTER THREE
Voyage in the Dark

> When we are stricken and cannot bear our lives any longer, then a tree has something to say to us: Be still! Be still! Look at me! Life is not easy, life is not difficult. Those are childish thoughts. […] You are anxious because your path leads away from mother and home. But every step and every day lead you back again to the mother. Home is neither here nor there. Home is within you, or home is nowhere at all.
>
> A longing to wander tears my heart when I hear trees rustling in the wind at evening. If one listens to them silently for a long time, this longing reveals its kernel, its meaning. It is not so much a matter of escaping from one's suffering, though it may seem to be so. It is a longing for home, for a memory of the mother, for new metaphors for life. It leads home. Every path leads homeward, every step is birth, every step is death, every grave is mother.
>
> –Hermann Hesse, 'Trees'[285]

Voyage in the Dark sits squarely at the centre of Rhys's oeuvre, however, the events of the narrative are based on the author's first years in England and as such the book acts as a prequel of sorts to Rhys's previous two novels. After arriving in England at 16, Rhys recorded her experiences in a series of exercise books while she was touring as a chorus girl; these notes and diaries eventually served as the basis for *Voyage in the Dark*, which Louis James calls Rhys's 'most personal and evocative book'[286] and which Angier notes was the author's favourite amongst her works.[287] The novel is indeed a turning point in Rhys's writing; while *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* portrayed narratives drawn from Rhys's adult life, *Voyage in the Dark* steps back to the past and, in doing so,

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[285] Hesse, Hermann, *Wandering* (London: Pan Books, 1975), pp. 52-53.
[286] James, 'Sun Fire', p. 126.
[287] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 57.

progresses. In this novel, Rhys's writing begins to live up to the author's belief in the importance of descending 'back & *down'*.

For years Rhys stored the exercise books that contained the foundations of *Voyage in the Dark* at the bottom of a suitcase and never looked at them[288]: presumably what they contained was too painful to revisit. Eventually, after finishing *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, however, Rhys returned to the journals in her suitcase, baggage she had literally and metaphorically carried with her for nearly two decades. When asked in an interview if she wrote the novel 'as a form of purgation,' Rhys responded that she initially wrote the events down in diary form because it 'relieved' her, but then subsequently had to 'put it away for years'.[289]

> Then, twenty years later, fate had it that I tackle it again. I hadn't really written a book; it was more or less a jumble of facts. From the notes I'd done ages before I managed to put together *Voyage in the Dark.*[290]

The process was in fact probably more difficult than Rhys's answer in this interview suggests. After working on the novel for several months in 1931, at the end of the year she had to set the novel back down and did not resume working on it again until 1933.[291] That year she finally finished it with the help of, as she describes it, 'two bottles of wine per day'.[292] Over twenty years in the making, its final formulation 'repeatedly deferred, delayed, suppressed and ignored',[293] *Voyage in the Dark* is arguably Rhys's most laborious undertaking. Given the difficulty of its inception, I propose Rhys wrote this part of her story at this point in in her life because it was the first time that she could. Her first

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[288] Kloepfer, 'Masquerade', p. 443.
[289] Rhys, 'Paris Interviews', p. 199.
[290] Ibid., pp. 199-200.
[291] Angier, *Life and Work*, pp. 286-91.
[292] Rhys, *Letters*, p. 23.
[293] Kloepfer, 'Masquerade', p. 443.

two novels – both of which worked through difficulties of her adult present – enabled Rhys to return to the more sacred narrative of her past and to the deeper and more troubling issues of loss and unbelonging contained in her exercise books.

On the surface, Rhys's third novel is reminiscent of its predecessors, and consequently some critics have received it in a similar way to *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, distracted by its content and sordid plotline. Ostensibly, *Voyage in the Dark* tells the story of 'the desolate life of a chorus girl'[294] named Anna Morgan, who moves to England from Dominica following her father's death. The novel opens with Anna's memory of moving to England at 16 and then picks up her story two years later, as she is touring as a chorus girl around small English towns and theatres. Walking back to her hotel with her friend and fellow chorus girl, Maudie, one night, Anna meets Walter Jeffries, a man in his mid-thirties. Back in London after the tour has ended, Anna and Walter begin a relationship. Anna falls in love with him, but Walter rather abruptly ends their relationship via a letter written by his cousin, Vincent. Anna is heartbroken and in need of both money and distraction. She works as a manicurist and is briefly kept by another man named Carl; when that ends, Anna slips into a life of prostitution. After an unplanned pregnancy, the novel culminates with a botched abortion, which leaves Anna haemorrhaging. A doctor assures her friend Laurie in the novel's final lines that Anna will be 'all right […]. Ready to start all over again in no time, I've no doubt' (159).

Given the illicit events of the novel, some critics have focused on the literal elements of the plot, specifically on Anna's tale of degradation and prostitution, perpetuating the history of derisive critical response to Rhys's protagonists. Loendorf notes that from critics such as these, Anna is often branded as 'a weak, irresponsible and

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[294] James, 'Sun Fire', p. 115.

parasitic woman who consequently slides down the social scale'[295] and portrayed as deserving of the treatment and misfortunes that befall her character. Many other critics, however, find the work not only a stylistic, artistic, and literary triumph, but a meaningful exploration of fragmentation, formative relationships, and the repetition of psychic wounds in the greater context of Rhys's fiction. In its most elemental form, Kloepfer suggests that *Voyage in the Dark* is 'a masquerade of loss'.[296]

> The text opens not in the present of Anna's narrative but with her memory of a loss, of leaving her homeland, a geographical locus evocative of the author's native Dominica and a psychological space frequently associated in Rhys with her maternal heritage.[297]

The loss of the maternal and of one's origins frames the narrative as well as the majority of scholarly attention, which take one or both of these as a point of critical departure. The themes that haunt Rhys's third novel are rich in psychoanalytic interpretation as well, as issues of maternal trauma, exile and identity (particularly that which is problematized by multiple axes of locality), otherness, and the collapse of binarisms all weave their way into the rich landscape of *Voyage in the Dark*.

As with all of Rhys's novels, the title of *Voyage in the Dark* bears significance as well and much has been theorised about what Anna's 'voyage' may represent. Many critics place the emphasis of her journey on gendered and feminist issues and argue that Anna's predicament is largely based on her marginalised status in a patriarchal world. Borinsky, for instance, suggests that the voyage is one into womanhood,[298] while

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[295] Loendorf, Harald, 'Two Tunes: Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark*', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 46 (2000), 24–36 (p. 24).
[296] Kloepfer, 'Masquerade', p. 459.
[297] Ibid., p. 448.
[298] Borinsky, p. 235.

Atherton contends that the novel's title expresses a journey paralysed by patriarchal oppression.

> In Rhys's novel, the tension between what is imposed upon women and what they instinctively desire leaves women confused and disorientated, on a journey that does not lead to any sense of clarity or empowerment, as is implied by the title.[299]

Atherton concludes that Anna's journey is ultimately rendered 'confusing, lonely, and disorienting' and 'lacks any structure or sense of purpose due to the imbalance of power to which Anna and the other female characters are subjected'.[300] The basis of feminist interpretations such as Atherton's and Borinsky's appears to be that Anna's 'voyage' is disabled or stalled by gender inequalities and is thus more or less out of her control.

A modernist reading, such as Seshagiri's, however, suggests the title of the novel is something of a foreboding, which anticipates 'the uncertain future aesthetic of modernism itself, which by the mid-1930s was no longer able to purchase artistic triumph with its cache of experimental techniques and was, accordingly, voyaging into a kind of darkness'.[301] The suggestion that modernism was venturing into unknown territory is an interesting observation, but perhaps not the one Rhys was making in the choice of her novel's title, which throughout Rhys's oeuvre are invariably reflective of personal concerns rather than cultural movements. It is also worth noting that a central trope of many modernist works more generally involved the subject of journeys or pilgrimages. Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Richardson's Pilgrimage, for example, each take the psychological or emotional journey of their characters as the structuring principle of their respective works. When considering modernist and feminist

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[299] Atherton, p. 151

[300] Ibid., p. 158.

[301] Seshagiri, Urmila, 'Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix: Jean Rhys and the Evolution of the English Novel in the Twentieth Century', *Modernism/Modernity*, 13 (2006), 487–505 (p. 488).

readings (both of the title specifically and of the novel as a whole) it is worth remembering that Rhys never aligned herself with any single genre, and her intent is unlikely to be consistent with interpretations as historically or culturally specific as Atherton's or Seshagiri's. Such readings may offer valuable insights about the context of Anna's circumstances or the difficulties of her journey, but they may also limit the vast possibilities of the novel.

The title of *Voyage in the Dark* is, I believe, indicative of both the overarching aim of Rhys's oeuvre, as well as the psychological space of her third novel: namely, the understanding of the self and the process of unearthing unconscious material. It is worth reiterating that in general the novel is a dark work, as both its title and its critics suggest. The assumption present in many of the novel's negative reviews and interpretations – in which Anna fails to move forward, or is suspended between two opposing forces – rests on the idea that a successful voyage is one marked by forward movement. If the voyage Anna undertakes is symbolic of a deeper progression towards a more fully formed conception of self and identity, however, then its course is neither defined by linear nor forward movement, but rather by a return to the buried contents or repressed elements of her unconscious. The OED defines a 'voyage' as 'an act of travelling […] (or passage), by which one goes from one place to another (esp. at a considerable distance)', as well as an 'undertaking', 'pilgrimage', or 'journey in which a return is made to the starting-point'.[302] Significantly, there is no indication that the trajectory of a voyage must be oriented in any one direction. On the contrary: one's voyage could be a movement directed backwards or downwards, 'a return to a starting point', indicating a reverse,

[302] 'Voyage, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/224789> [accessed 22 February 2015].

retrogressive, or cyclical path. Critics such as Hanna, Wilson, and Gregg concur that the structuring principle of Anna's 'voyage' is indeed the psychological journey she undertakes, which is more usefully read as a voyage 'from the periphery to the [...] dark center of the Self',[303] to Anna's 'past/psyche',[304] or 'the dark night of the soul'.[305] The result of Rhys's solipsist approach to writing,[306] combined with her focus on the interiority of her characters,[307] is a tertiary novel that begins to document the journey 'back & *down*' into the dark and unknown recesses of her heroine's psyche.

As with many of Rhys's novels, a series of binaries and divisions structures *Voyage in the Dark*, the central division of which its heroine's West Indian past and her English present. Within this fundamental split lie further delineations, such as gender and language, which are variously ascribed to and compared with either Dominican or English culture. The impossibility of reconciling the dichotomy of the West Indies and England is the central focus of the novel and the manifest difficulty of Anna's situation. Caught between two worlds, Anna cannot successfully navigate her way through either the memories of her past or the unfamiliar world of her present. As a result, she finds herself very much an exile in England, stranded and alone, without either a home or family. The opening of the novel captures the heroine's predicament of placelessness, portraying an irreparable barrier between Anna's West Indian past and her English present:

> It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling

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[303] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 123.
[304] Hanna, Mary, 'White Women's Sins or Patterns of Choice and Consequence in the Two Endings of *Voyage in the Dark*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 15 (2006), 132–63 (p. 149).
[305] Wilson, Lucy, 'European or Caribbean: Jean Rhys and the Language of Exile', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 10 (1989), 68–72 (p. 69).
[306] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 121.
[307] Simpson, p. 22.

things gave you right down inside yourself was different. Not just the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, grey. But a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy. […] Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. Other times England was the real thing and out there was the dream, but I could never quite fit them together (7).

The vast and irreconcilable discrepancies between Anna's old world and her new one suggest that the move to England represents a 'rupture in her life'[308] that cleaves her character in two. Moran argues that in Rhys's portrayal of Anna, the author 'depicts a protagonist who has lost all sense of continuity in her life history as a result of traumatic events' and that the opening lines of the novel illustrate both 'the breach in [Anna's] sense of continuity' as well as the depth of '[t]he rupture in her psyche'.[309] As she cannot make her worlds fit together, Anna must repress 'everything [she] had ever known' and learn to be in the world – and teach herself to feel – in an entirely new and different way. It is this repression of her past that splits her character in two, resulting in a '*displacement* and *split consciousness*' that Hanna deems the 'profound structuring principle and psychological condition [of] the text'.[310]

The locations that define the rupture in Anna's life – the West Indies and England – are initially represented as profoundly different, as well as profoundly important in her quest to establish a cohesive identity. Distinct to the point of being mutually exclusive to one another, many readings of *Voyage in the Dark* suggest that Anna simply cannot reconcile the harsh, grey reality of England with the lush, colourful memories of her Caribbean home. While describing the beauty of her homeland to Walter she tells him, '[i]t's very beautiful. I wish you could see it' (45), but then pauses and reconsiders: '[o]n the other hand, if England is beautiful, it's not beautiful. It's some other world. It all

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[308] Loendorf, p. 26.
[309] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 124.
[310] Hanna, p. 152, italics in original.

depends, doesn't it?' (45). Brown states that '[t]his zero-sum aesthetic, in which only one

or the other can have the quality of beauty, reinforces the original impression that neither

"world" can have anything to do with its other'.[311] In Anna's initial division of England

and the West Indies, the former is characterised by rules, conformity, language, and a

stifling morality[312] – none of which Anna can successfully adapt to – while the West

Indies is portrayed in Anna's memory as 'a much more tangibly human place full of

sights, sounds, and smells'.[313] The most important difference between the two seems to

be marked by each locale's capacity for humanity and freedom, which seem markedly

distinct. The West Indies is a written as a sensuous 'feminized landscape […] without

boundaries',[314] while London especially is depicted as a 'dehumanizing labyrinth'[315] full

of walls, rooms and other structural enclosures, forever 'divided and

compartmentalized'.[316]

Drawing on such distinctions, some critics such as Atherton, cleanly divide the

gulf between the metropole and the Caribbean in strict Apollonian and Dionysian terms.

Atherton suggests that the West Indies is portrayed as 'a climate conducive to

expressions of primal and unbridled carnality, whilst grey, urban England with its cold

formalities and strict codes of etiquette, demands suppression of such desires'.[317] Others

consider the difference between Anna's worlds in terms of the racial oppositions they

represent, such as Sheehan's reading that 'the Caribbean is a black space and Britain is a

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[311] Brown, J. Dillon, 'Textual Entanglement: Jean Rhys's Critical Discourse', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 56 (2010), 568–91 (p. 572).
[312] Angier, 'Introduction', p. vii.
[313] Brown, 'Entanglement', p. 571.
[314] Johnson, Kerry, 'Mapping the Sea Change: Postcolonialism, Modernsim and Landscape in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3 (2003), 47–62 (p. 58).
[315] Parsons, p. 132.
[316] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 83.
[317] Atherton, p. 153.

white space'.[318] Louis James's reading is similar: Anna is somewhere in the middle of

these two distinct cultures, 'marooned between being white and being black'.[319] While

slightly divergent in approach, each of these readings seems to suggest that the places

which could define Anna and from which she might be able to construct an identity are in

diametric opposition to one another, and it is this tension that underlies the problematics

of the novel.

The real and remembered spaces that stage Rhys's third novel suggest that the

complicated idea of home, rather than its literal or geographical manifestations, underlies

the difficulty of the heroine's 'voyage'. More than Rhys's previous or subsequent novels,

Voyage in the Dark is consumed by questions about the complex and unknowable nature

of home: what defines home; whether it exists at all and, if so, where one is to locate it;

what it means to be home, and, by extension, to be homeless. While the merits of the

Caribbean and challenges of England frame such questions and allow them to be posed in

a meaningful way, they do not themselves comprise the questions or the answers. Angier

suggests that a sensitivity to and awareness of the origins of Rhys's characters are pivotal

to understanding both the heroines and the texts.[320] In *Voyage in the Dark*, readers are in

a unique position to glimpse both the heroine's past and her present, which are

represented by two seemingly diametrically opposed locations. The significance of

Anna's childhood memories, which find representation in images of the West Indies,

place profound importance on the psychological burden of the heroine's past and

upbringing. By differentiating specific geographic points not as *objects* of representation,

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[318] Sheehan, Tom, 'Jean Rhys's Caribbean Space-Time', *The Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 4 (2007), 141–54 (p. 141).
[319] James, 'Sun Fire', p. 119.
[320] Angier, 'Introduction', pp. vi-vii.

but as representatives of the representation of home, loss, and the maternal, one can begin

to more fully appreciate the heroine's predicament and the true significance of the West

Indian passages in the novel.

To begin to unfurl more the profound issues of desire and loss that the West

Indies represent in the text, it is useful to consider Lacan's notion of unary and binary

signifiers, as well as revisit the corresponding concepts of repression, desire, and the

Other. Drawing on Freud's concept of *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* to illuminate the process

of alienation, Lacan states:

> We can locate this *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* in our schema of the original
> mechanisms of alienation in that first signifying coupling that enables us to
> conceive that the subject appears first in the Other, in so far as the first signifier,
> the unary signifier, emerges in the field of the Other and represents the subject for
> another signifier […].Hence the division of the subject – when the subject appears
> somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as 'fading', as disappearance.
> There is, then, one might say, a matter of life and death between the unary
> signifier and the subject, *qua* binary signifier, cause of his disappearance. The
> *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* is the binary signifier. This signifier constitutes the
> central point of the *Urverdrängung* – of what, from having passed into the
> unconscious, will be, as Freud indicates in his theory, the point of *Anziehung* – the
> point of attraction, through which all the other repressions will be possible.[321]

Taking Lacan's formula, one can work backwards towards the crux of what might be

held in Rhys's geographic signifiers, particularly the West Indies. Rhys's 'home' should

therefore not be taken as a *literal* space that is missed or longed for, but as the ideational

representative, or 'representative of the representation'[322] of that which constitutes the

primal repression. In Rhys's text, home, or the West Indies, acts as the ideational

representative or 'point of attraction' and often stands in for that which is desired. To

uncover the foundations of desire contained in the image of home, one must again work

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[321] Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 218.
[322] Ibid.

backwards, this time by way of the first other the subject encounters, and the desire this

engenders in the subject. Lacan expands on the above argument by invoking an earlier

one, stating that the alienation of the Subject occurs by a process of separation.

> [T]he subject finds, one might say, the weak point of the primal dyad of the signifying articulation, in so far as it is alienating in essence. It is in the interval between these two signifiers that resides the desire offered to the mapping of the subject in the experience of discourse of the Other, of the first Other he has to deal with, let us say, by way of illustration, the mother. It is in so far as his desire is beyond or falls short of what she says, of what she hints at, of what she brings out as meaning, it is in so far as his desire is unknown, it is in this point of lack, that the desire of the subject is constituted.[323]

The lack that exists within the interaction of the Subject with the first Other, then, forms

the basis for desire. We may be reminded here of the famous Lacanian assertion that

'[m]an's desire is the desire of the Other'.[324] The primordial anxiety with which Rhys

imbues the idea of home is indicative of precisely this failed dynamic with the Other. The

result in *Voyage in the Dark* is a linguistic signifier – 'the West Indies' – which may then,

in turn, be 'repressed […] and thus, perhaps, reconfigured and released'.[325] This process

is also reminiscent of the argument that structures Freud's 'Remembering, Repeating and

Working-Through', which I have previously argued informs the trajectory of Rhys's

oeuvre as a whole. *Voyage in the Dark* marks a turning point in this process, as

previously repressed signifiers begin to make their way onto the page.

The primary signifiers in Rhys's third novel are representatives of representations

of home and Other, which begin to surface by way of Rhys's comparison of England to

the West Indies, the latter of which many critics observe is idealised in the heroine's

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[323] Lacan, *Book XI,* pp. 218-9.
[324] Ibid., p. 235.
[325] Levine, Steven Z., *Lacan Reframed* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p. 87.

depictions of her homeland.[326] Kerry Johnson suggests that the romanticised recollection

of the West Indies is meant to ward off the alienation that Rhys's protagonist experiences

in the colonial centre.[327] In the act of idealising the West Indies, however, its darker

elements must be repressed. Erica Johnson argues that because of this false and idealised

memory of Anna's home, the West Indies can never realistically be considered as 'as a

home to which she can return'.[328]

> Anna draws on her island memories, inscribed as they are with underlying social
> tensions, in an attempt to construct the home she desires, yet because this home is
> a product of her desire and because it appears in the text only though her
> imagination, its status as a real refuge or alternative dwelling place is
> questionable.[329]

This depiction of Anna's home as the repressed representation of an idea that houses her

desire sits comfortably with a Lacanian analysis of the text. Home, for Anna, is very

much a lost and highly desired idea, as illustrated in the tension between the ideal image

of home and the deeper realities of what this signifier houses. Erica Johnson explicitly

suggests that the act of returning to the West Indies is portrayed as being fraught with

danger:

> the only time [Anna] refers to actually connecting or crossing the two places she
> speaks facetiously of *swimming* back to her island […] [which] evokes an image
> of death by drowning, and characterizes the spaces between England and her
> island as one fraught with danger and terror.[330]

As Johnson illustrates, the terror of returning to the repressed memories of home,

specifically to the ruptured relationship with the Other and the unnameable and

irrepressible anxieties this entails, is the issue at the heart of *Voyage in the Dark.*

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[326] For a more thorough discussion of how Rhys romanticises the tropics and the consequences of such idealisation, see Moore, p. 21.
[327] Johnson, K., 'Mapping', pp. 55-6
[328] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 64.
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid., p. 74.

Images of repression abound in the novel, which treats England as a site

associated with repression. Indeed, critical analyses of *Voyage in the Dark* consistently

comment on the images of boundaries and divisions that suffuse the English landscape in

which the narrative is set. Loendorf argues that the recurrent imagery of walls and

barriers throughout the text '[transcend] their physicality and become immaterial',[331]

portraying England as a place defined by invisible boundaries and expectations, such as

laws, rules, order, and a stifling sense of containment. Shortly into the novel, the heroine

recalls in more specific detail her move to England, again invoking the memory with the

image of a falling curtain:

> A curtain fell and then I was here. …This is England Hester said and I watched it
> through the train-window divided into squares like pocket-handkerchiefs; a small
> tidy look it had everywhere fenced off from everywhere else – what are those
> things – those are haystacks – oh haystacks – I had read about England ever since
> I could read – smaller meaner everything is never mind – this is London –
> hundreds thousands of white people white people rushing along and the dark
> houses all alike frowning down one after the other all alike all stuck together – the
> streets like smooth shut-in ravines and the dark houses frowning down – oh I'm
> not going to like this place I'm not going to like this place I'm not going to like
> this place – you'll get used to it Hester kept saying (14-15).

This passage emphasises the neatly segregated quality of the landscape, as well as the

analogous features of the streets, houses, and white people that populate it. Anna's first

impression of England is focused on its compartmentalisation and the repetitiveness of its

features, the order and division of which she finds stifling. The disapproving houses and

the small, mean quality of the city echo the judgmental nature of her cold English

stepmother, Hester, whose voice frames the passage and insists that Anna's opinion about

England is wrong. Loendorf argues that the method of partitioning that is present in

Rhys's portrayal of the English landscape engenders a dynamic that 'transcend[s] the

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[331] Loendorf, p. 30.

geographical sphere and become manifest as a categorisation into good and bad, respectable and disrespectable, virgin and non-virgin, woman and tart, familiar and unfamiliar, indigenous and other'.[332] As such, the walls, divisions, and boundaries encountered in the text serve to '[protect] whatever is on the outside from what might be dangerous on the inside',[333] thereby dividing and delineating what is safe and threatening, welcome and rejected, known and unknown.

Amongst what is threatening, rejected, and unknown throughout the English passages of *Voyage in the Dark* is the sexual and sexuality. While images of sucking, lips, dancing, and sensuality – as well as more phallic images of fangs and teeth – are abundant in Anna's West Indian memories, England is portrayed as a place bereft of sexuality. While sexuality is not absent in the heroine's experience of England, the sexual act, along with any other sordid experiences or unwanted emotions, are largely banished from the text. In the place of sexual intercourse, for example, there is often a literal space that breaks up the narrative:

> When I got into bed there was warmth coming from him and I got close to him. *Of course you've always known, always remembered, and then you forget so utterly, except that you've always known it. Always—how long is always?*
>
> The things spread out on the dressing-table shone in the light of the fire, and I thought, 'When I shut my eyes I'll be able to see this room all my life'. I said, 'I must go now. What's the time?' (32, spacing and italics in original).

Though sexual scenes are not always punctuated by such a pronounced or obvious break in the text, each time Anna engages in sexual activity the act itself is never spoken of, only spoken around, as if the words are sinful or poisonous. This is true throughout the entirety of Rhys's oeuvre, however, in a novel where the plotline centres around its

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[332] Loendorf, p. 24.
[333] Ibid., p. 28.

heroine falling into a life of prostitution, the fact that there is not a single overtly sexual scene in the entirety of the novel may at first seem odd. What is noticeable in the above example, as well as in almost every scene in which it is implied that Rhys's heroines engage in sexual activity, is a kind of textual dissociation wherein the narrative pauses and then returns following the culmination of the act itself. Linett argues that throughout each novel, 'Rhys's protagonists dissociate, usually in sexual situations',[334] indicating a kind of traumatised response similar to Julia's dissociative state when she argues with her Uncle Griffiths. Thus Rhys's texts repeatedly create (or recreate) an atmosphere that 'demonstrate[s] Rhys's prescient understanding of the way in which the mind can split off or dissociate during times of trauma or extreme stress'[335] and a space in which Rhys can confront such traumatic experiences through her characters.[336]

A similar textual dynamic ensues at the end of the novel when Anna decides to have an abortion. When Rhys's heroine realises she is pregnant, she does not state what has happened and can only repeatedly refer to it as 'that'; throughout the novel, neither the heroine's pregnancy nor her subsequent abortion is ever named.

> Like seasickness, only worse, and everything heaving up and down. And vomiting. And thinking, 'It can't be that, it can't be that. Oh, it can't be that. Pull yourself together; it can't be that. Didn't I always. . . . And besides it's never happened before. Why should happen now?' (138)

While such an exclusion could be a purposeful decision on Rhys's part, due the taboo nature of these subjects in the 1930s, there is arguably more to this textual absence than propriety or a respect for literary norms. Pregnancy, children, and death are intimately bound and largely avoided in Rhys's fiction, as are her heroines' statuses as mothers in

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[334] Linett, 'New Words', p. 441.
[335] Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 90.
[336] Ibid., p. 91.

their own right. The inability to mother and the presence of dead children will bear more heavily on Rhys's subsequent and final novels, however, Anna's pregnancy and abortion are important permutations of this theme as well. The negation of motherhood in *Voyage in the Dark* suggests a refusal to enter the role of the maternal, while the death of the heroine's child in *Good Morning, Midnight* demonstrates the inability to access the maternal and assume the role of the mother. In both scenarios, however, the heroines' experiences can only be alluded to or briefly touched upon. Like the heroines' inability to engage with the topic of sexuality, the topics of pregnancy and children assume a state of present absence.

Sexuality, sexual intercourse itself, and the consequences of sexual desire (pregnancy and abortion) collectively assume a position in which they are simultaneously repressed and concurrently present everywhere, highly conspicuous in their absence. In addition to the aforementioned psychoanalytic readings, there are many hypotheses amongst Rhysian scholars as to what the lack of sexuality in *Voyage in the Dark* might indicate. Many of these tend to be feminist interpretations which suggest, as Johnson does, that Rhys's emphasis on division and containment portrays a gendered representation of England's disregard and rejection 'of female sexuality'.[337] Along with the absence of such femininity is a dismissal of anything that is vibrant, colourful or otherwise alive; in (Rhys's) England, all '"living" objects are [considered] dangerous'[338] and are thus systematically repressed. Atherton poses a similar argument, stating that 'the "lack of colour" that Anna is highly attuned to is concerned with the power relations

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[337] Johnson, K., 'Mapping', p. 50
[338] Ibid.

between the sexes, and suggests that the life force, libido itself, is repressed'.[339] As a

result, according to Atherton and Johnson, there is little sexuality or sensuality present in

the novel, particularly in the textual depictions of England. Though we do not possess a

solid understanding of what Anna's character was like in the West Indies, Atherton

observes that in England, it is as if 'Anna cannot come to terms with her sensuality, as

though she had left her desire in Dominica, whilst her body moves in a mechanical

fashion in England'.[340] Both Johnson's and Atherton's readings suggest that the problem

lies not only in the containment of the sexual, but the repression of the feminine more

broadly. Atherton suggests that with the feminine, the colourful, the wild, the sensual,

and desire itself – are collectively negated in England.

> Through this close identification, the landscape becomes engendered: the
> restrained atmosphere of 'respectable' England could be said to symbolise
> masculinity and is therefore the place where the men in Rhys's writing feel more
> comfortable, whereas the West Indies, conversely, could be read as symbolising
> femininity, which from the male's perspective, is perceived as […] the 'dark
> continent', dangerous and savage territory.[341]

Most critics read the divide between England and the West Indies in a similar manner,

splitting the novel into sets of opposites, such as male and female, dull colours and

vibrant, good and bad, light and dark, virgin and whore. As such, *Voyage in the Dark* is

typically read as a novel predicated on a set of relatively clear binary divisions – created

as 'the curtain falls' – in which England is portrayed as a culture of strict propriety, while

the West Indies is interpreted as its opposite, Other, or simply as that which England is

not.

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[339] Atherton, p. 152.
[340] Ibid., pp. 153-4.
[341] Ibid., p. 154.

While the West Indies are undoubtedly more feminised in Rhys's fiction and

England is certainly experienced as more repressive – the above readings are

problematized by the fact that such interpretations embrace and promote the same

simplified dualisms that the novel aims to undermine. In such renderings whereby

England and the West Indies are labelled and separated as opposites, much of the

richness and subtlety of Rhys's third novel is lost. The appeal of a system of binaries is

obvious, as is evidenced by Rhys's first two novels, each of which subscribes to a stark

system of categorisation in which diametrically opposed opposites such as good/bad,

here/there, dark/light reign. The central importance of Rhys's third novel lies in its

capacity to begin looking beyond such carefully ordered designations, to the

inconsistencies of such antipodal thinking and to the spaces that fall between such

diametrically opposed categories as virgin and whore, past and present, light and dark.

Though George points out that 'binarisms are essential for the purposes of definition',

particularly in the case of 'homes and nations',[342] such static black and white options

cannot capture the essence of Rhys's heroines' experience. In *Voyage in the Dark*, these

binary categories are systematically dismantled and broken down over the course of the

novel. At the end of the narrative, these categories collapse and the text embraces a

position of obscurity and ambiguity. This slow disintegration of boundaries inverts (and

renders somewhat meaningless) the categories of the West Indies and England, evoking

the unfamiliar in the known and the strangeness of the familiar. Such a position both frees

Anna from the confines of black and white thinking and collapses the imagined

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[342] George, Rosemary Marangoly, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocation and Twentieth Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 4.

geographical and psychological borders that hold ideas of home and non-home in strict, mutually exclusive categories.

The process by which this disintegration occurs can be traced through the four sections of the novel, which increasingly dismantle the novel's initial structure of binarisms. The heroine compares her initial move to England as a separation – in which a metaphorical curtain falls signaling the start of her voyage – which Anna compares to being born again. She comments on the stark differences 'between heat, cold; light, darkness; purple, grey' (7) that differentiate the experiences of home and away and, at the start, the novel is firmly predicated on such binarisms. One would assume the curtain separating Anna from her past would naturally embed the narrative in her English present and yet, from the very first page, images of the Caribbean begin to creep into the text. After she admits, 'I didn't like England at first. I couldn't get used to the cold' (7), Anna details a lengthy and (by Rhysian standards) descriptive memory of Dominica. From the outset, then, the past is very present, sometimes conspicuously, often subtly. As the novel progresses, Anna's past memories continue to emerge and indeed proliferate throughout the narrative, mixing and overlapping with her new world, until the final section of the novel when the two appear to merge. Though many critics take the narrator at her word and assume the novel is rooted in Anna's English present, Gardiner notes that Rhys's opening lines 'introduce a drama on a stage but does not reveal for a while which side of it we and the narrative are on'.[343] I would take Gardiner's observation a step further and suggest that it is never clear which side of the divide the narrative is on because it simultaneously exists in multiple spatial, temporal, and psychic planes.

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[343] Gardiner, Judith Kegan, 'The Exilaration of Exile: Rhys, Stead, and Lessing', in *Women's Writing In Exile*, ed. by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 133–50 (p. 148).

As with all of Rhys's novels, the question of home – specifically the problems associated with the lack of a stable home – figures prominently in *Voyage in the Dark*. In the same way Rhys's earlier heroines are without either home or identity, Anna's sense of unbelonging and the absence of a consistent place of residence complicates her concomitant attempt to construct an identity. Unlike *Quartet* or *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, however, the constant fluctuation between a Dominican past and English present in *Voyage in the Dark* stands apart as the first of Rhys's works to include a revisiting of the heroine's past, offering a depiction of both the country of origin and the heroine's current dwelling place. Rather than alleviating the struggle to locate either home or self, however, Anna's West Indian past only complicates her present and results in an unsettling realisation that she belongs to neither place. By collapsing past and present, home and non-home, Rhys demonstrates the impossible task of escaping a condition of exile and of reconciling the fragmented parts of one's identity. Thus, despite having a defined country of origin onto which she can project a comprehensive and idealised version of home, Anna is equally as lost and homeless as her predecessors. Though each of Rhys's pre-war heroines are bound in a similar position of exile, a critical reading of *Voyage in the Dark* benefits from the additional and constant juxtaposition of England and the West Indies, which marks the former as considerably more impersonal and unfamiliar. By making room for Anna's past, one can perhaps better appreciate the exilic condition that attends her narrative. The problems of national identity that accompany the colonial past are thus compounded by the protagonist's lack of familial identity, resulting in a seemingly hopeless cycle of exclusion and homelessness.

The anxiety associated with exile can be seen in the narrator's desperate attachment to her Caribbean memories, many of which are romanticised and which highlight her attempt to manufacture an image of home and a sense of belonging. The heroine repeatedly expounds the beauty of her island, which is described as vibrant and lush: '[s]itting there you could see the curve of a hill like the curve of a green shoulder. And there were pink roses on the table in a curly blue vase with gold rings' (61). Kerry refers to these idealised memories of the Caribbean as 'a survival strategy'[344] that is employed to help navigate the foreign territory of England. Seidel corroborates this idea with a similar claim in his observation that, for exiles, '[t]he memory of home becomes paramount in narratives where home itself is but a memory'.[345] In addition to such claims about the island itself, Anna also attempts to affix her own identity in relation to her Dominican homeland. Her repeated and emphatic references to herself as 'a real West Indian' come across as self-soothing reassurances that she has a tangible identity. The repetition of the statement, however, has the opposite effect and instead gives the impression that Anna is almost hysterical. The first time she mentions her West Indian lineage to Walter, he seems to mock her: '"Are you really?" he said, still a bit as if he were laughing at me' (45). After the second and subsequent instances, Walter seems impatient and responds by saying, 'I know my sweet […]. You told me that before' (47). Seshagiri suggests the redoubled insistence of belonging is peculiar here due to the hollow meaning of West Indian identity, which Anna vehemently attempts to secure as a

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[344] Johnson, K., 'Mapping', p. 55.
[345] Seidel, Michael, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 11.

marker of her identity. Thus, Anna's adherence to and refrain of the idea that she is 'a real West Indian' merely 'describes an identity that history has robbed of meaning'.[346]

From a Lacanian perspective, Anna's repeated and persistent claims about the beauty of her island and her status as a 'real' member of the West Indies, fall into the category of master signifiers. We may recall from Chapter One that master signifiers can be thought of as the refrains of the same phrase or sentiment by a speaker that 'are often repeated, in different contexts, sometimes so much that they come to constitute a linguistic tic in the speaker, for whom they have a significance that is nothing to do with the literal signified of the signifiers'[347] and are typically used to 'mask their opposites'[348] and support a unified construction of the ego. We may interpret the heroine's incessant assertion of the superiority of the West Indies, as well as her proclaimed status as 'a real West Indian', not as a longing for home but as a demonstration of the unconscious anxieties associated with home and belonging. When this world of binaries begins to collapse toward the end of the narrative, so to do the master signifiers that had previously propped up the heroine's ego. As a result, the myriad positive associations about the West Indies and the primary master signifier, 'I'm a real West Indian', are exposed as meaningless constructs.

As these concepts do not fully collapse until the very end of the novel, the effects of the disintegration of the heroine's master signifiers regarding national identity and homelessness cannot be completely explored in Rhys's third novel. The author's subsequent two novels, however, feature heroines whose narratives do not rely so heavily on a bolstering up of the ego via master signifiers, rendering the difficult problems of

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[346] Seshagiri, p. 489.
[347] Bailly, p. 61.
[348] Ibid., p. 63.

identity and home more present and conscious problems throughout the remainder of Rhys's oeuvre. In *Good Morning, Midnight,* for example Rhys places the oldest iteration of her semi-autobiographical heroine, Sasha, in Paris, where she is lost and unsettled, without definitions or ties of any kind. In many ways, it is Rhys's most exposed work, and Sasha her most vulnerable character, with neither family, past, or hallmarks of national identity. Only by acknowledging and subsequently breaking down issues of home and belonging in *Voyage in the Dark* is Rhys able to subsequently explore a deeper and more honest portrayal of exile in her fourth work. The final transition of the Rhys woman to the Caribbean setting of *Wide Sargasso Sea* explores the familiar themes of home and exile in a radically different way, in which home is located in writing itself and the maternal is confronted in several new ways.

Part Four of *Voyage in the Dark*, at just over four pages long, systematically works to dismantle the binaries of the text that Parts One, Two, and Three work so desperately to uphold. As she endures the effects of her botched abortion, memories of Carnival in the Caribbean escape into the heroine's mind and onto the page, blending with the traumatic present until Anna feels simultaneously 'giddy' (157) and as if she is 'fall[ing]' (158) in both her memory and the present moment. Despite the manifold attempts to portray England as vastly different – another world, a new opportunity, a chance to feel at home and find love – Brown observes that 'the novel's formal approach to portraying [the metropolitan present and colonial past] ultimately underscores the close links between the two spheres'.[349]

> The reverie […] ties Anna's past once again back into her present, solidifying the link between colony and metropole. Thus, Anna's first disoriented sense that England offers something new and different is thoroughly debunked: as the

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[349] Brown, 'Entanglement', p. 572.

novel's gradual merging of past and present makes quite clear, there is no plausible escape from either the colonial past or the metropolitan present.[350]

Gardiner also argues that the collapse of past and present detailed in the novel exposes the harsh reality that '[t]here is no waking from this nightmare; instead, both sides are a dream; nothing has become familiar, but all remains strange. Differences between past and present, between "there" and "here", exfoliate richly; difference itself is what matters'.[351] Thus, what remains when binaries such as home and non-home, self and Other, black and white are no longer present to help orientate the protagonist or reader is the realisation that such strangeness is familiar and is reflected both internally and externally.

The uncanny experience of strangeness discussed in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is given new psychological territory here; in *Voyage in the Dark* it is no longer simply a matter of England and the external which are foreign and strange, but rather of the ubiquity of strangeness and unhomeliness of everything, including the self. Thus, the repression of the past events of early life and the strangeness their return engenders is reminiscent of the discussion of the uncanny from the preceding chapter. If the uncanny is that which '*ought to have remained ... secret and hidden and has come to light*',[352] the exploration of West Indian imagery at the novel's close points to that which, as Rhys's novels progress, becomes increasingly unearthed and displayed. That Rhys carried exercise books that contained the foundations of *Voyage in the Dark* with her for over twenty years – secret and hidden at the bottom of a suitcase – bears an almost literal resemblance to Schelling's definition. If the novel is Rhys's attempt at a return to the

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[350] Ibid., p. 574.
[351] Gardiner, 'Exhilaration', p. 148.
[352] Schelling quoted in Freud, 'Uncanny', p. 224.

narrative of her troubled early adulthood in England, it is also perhaps an illustration of Freud's theory of the uncanny. In his introduction to Freud's work, Hugh Haughton explains that to explore the uncanny is akin to an exploration of the 'aesthetics of anxiety'[353] and 'wishful fears'.[354] The impulse to understand that which feels familiar and simultaneously produces fear and anxiety is, according the Haughton, present in much art and writing, particularly modern literature: 'The uncanny […] is a paradoxical mark of modernity. It is associated with moments when an author, fictional character or reader experiences the return of the primitive in an apparently modern and secular context'.[355] The return of the heroine's past, particularly the primitive and sexual nature of the West Indian carnival scenes, marks Rhys's first attempt at actively staging the presence of her character's past and, with it, the primitive and uncanny. The novel's history implies a concerted effort first to repress, and then to make sense of the past and the unknown, both of which are portrayed as existing within Anna herself. Thus, *Voyage in the Dark* marks the first point in Rhys's writing where the heroine's past is ostensibly as alive and significant as her present.

The return of the repressed – in the form of Anna's West Indian memories – slowly but increasingly begins to haunt the text. These memories initially occur sporadically and depict Anna's homeland as ideal, beautiful, and in every way distinct from the English landscape of her present. Progressively, however, the West Indian passages become more vivid and frequent, impinging on the consciousness of the narrator and reader. As the memories become more frequent they also become more disturbed.

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[353] Haughton, Hugh, 'Introduction', in *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. vii–lx (p. xli).
[354] Ibid., p. xlii.
[355] Ibid., p. xlix.

When Anna receives a letter from Walter's cousin, Vincent, ending their relationship, she

immediately and inexplicably recalls the following memory:

> … I was walking along the passage to the long upper verandah which ran the
> length of the house in town – there were four upstairs bedrooms two on either side
> of the passage – the boards were not painted and the knots in the wood were like
> faces – Uncle Bo was in the verandah lying on the sofa his mouth was a bit open –
> I thought he's asleep and I started to walk on tiptoe […] I got up to the table
> where the magazine was and Uncle Bo moved inside and the long yellow tusks
> like fangs came out of his mouth and protruded down his chin – you don't scream
> when you are frightened because you can't and you don't move either because
> you can't – after a long time he sighed and opened his eyes and clicked his teeth
> back into place (79).

No sooner does the recollection of this scene enter her mind than the narrator thinks, 'But

what's the matter with me? That was years and years ago, ages and ages ago. Twelve

years ago or something like that. What's this letter got to do with false teeth?' (79).

Questioning the correlation between her present distress and her past trauma, she reads

the letter a second time – which this time is present in the text for the reader to see – only

to be reminded again of the disturbing memory of Uncle Bo's fangs, which she cannot

seem to get out of her mind. Brown suggests that the connection is reminiscent of the Red

Riding Hood story and therefore suggestive 'of kindly appearances belying a horrible

reality',[356] and of something fearful lurking beneath the surface. Importantly, while the

memory itself contains the frightening image of sharp fangs, Anna's statements *about* the

memory only mention 'false teeth', as if she cannot bear the true horror of the reality that

the memory reproduces.

Following this crisis there is a shift in the text, in which the heroine's past

memories are both more frequent and more disquieting. The memory of Uncle Bo's fangs

is followed almost immediately by a memory of the narrator's deceased father, and

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[356] Brown, 'Entanglement', p. 573.

subsequently by a reference to her mother's funeral, both traumatic losses which are never fully explicated in the text. Situated in between these two brief recollections, the following passage appears:

> [t]hen the taxi came; and the houses on either side of the street were small and dark and then they were big and dark but all exactly alike. And I saw that all my life I had known that this was going to happen, and that I'd been afraid for a long time. There's fear, of course, with everybody. But now it had grown, it had grown gigantic; it filled me and it filled the whole world (82).

As the novel progresses and additional memories, dreams, and images seep into the text, it becomes apparent that the familiar elements of the narrator's West Indian home, when uncovered and explored, are just as terrifying as the unfamiliar territory of England. Thus, what was formerly projected outward into Anna's English surroundings is unmasked as residing internally, the fundamental contradictions and anxieties located in what Brown describes as 'deep into the most personal, subjective recesses of the narrator's being'.[357] The idea that home – or at least the residue of home – resides internally and that these experiences form the basis for what is subsequently experienced as strange and unhomely supports Haughton's statement that, from a psychoanalytic point of view, '"The Uncanny" reminds us not only that there is no place like home, but that, in another sense, there is no other place. For Freud, our most haunting experiences of otherness tell us that the alien begins at home'.[358] The experience of exile, as well as the heroine's Creole heritage, complicate the conditions of this paradigm, which render even the more traditionally positive associations of home confused and unreliable throughout the narrative. At the heart of this anxiety, however, is the return of the repressed and with it the emergence of the heroine's past psychic material.

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[357] Ibid., p. 572.
[358] Haughton, p. xlix.

In each of Rhys's novels, there exists an absence that is beyond the speakable bond to home or country. The maternal absence that underlies the problems of identity, belonging, and home plagues each of Rhys's heroines in a unique way. In *Voyage in the Dark*, for example, the heroine is bereft of a sense of maternal nurturing and protection, which is particularly apparent because of her young age. Behind the constant textual allusions to and flashbacks to the heroine's home, is a longing for the absent maternal bond. In her examination of postcolonial relocation and its relation to constructs of home, George suggests that a thorough examination of the term 'home' may yield deeper connotations associated with our collective notions of what such a place would ideally entail.

> [E]xamination of the concepts and structures we recognize as 'home' in the context of global English generates a reassessment of our understanding of belonging – in the English language as much as in spaces we call home. The word 'home' immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection.[359]

Given these correlations, it stands to reason that in Anna's narrative, signifiers such as 'home', 'island', and 'the West Indies' stand in for the more intangible qualities of home that provide paternal care and protection and maternal nurturing and love. Anna's longing for home, then, is not simply a longing for the island itself, but for the fulfillment of the 'intrinsic lack' that haunts her subjectivity.[360]

Due to its inexpressible nature, the problem of absence is rarely addressed directly in Rhys's novels. Following the letter that ends Anna and Walter's relationship and triggers the memories of the heroine's deceased parents, there is a moment in the narrative that comes close to naming – or at least attempting to name – the protagonist's

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[359] George, p. 1.
[360] Murdoch, H. Adlai, 'Rhys's Pieces: Unhomeliness as Arbiter of Caribbean Creolization', *Callaloo*, 26 (2003), 252–72 (p. 257).

grief. Following the recollection of her father, the narrator recalls, 'that time when he

said, "The Welsh word for grief is hiraeth." Hiraeth' (81). The Welsh term 'hiraeth' is in

the language of both the protagonist's father and Rhys's own father and, like the

uncanny, is difficult to translate directly into English.[361] Several writers have attempted to

capture or describe the word in English, including Harrison Solow, who suggests the term

is grounded in a sense of hunger, emptiness, and lack.

> There is, in Welsh, the untranslatable word *hiraeth* (hear-eye-th). Is not
> emptiness, exactly. Is not quite longing. Nor does it exist outside a Welsh heart. It
> is more like the heart that surrounds longing – that organic hungering vessel
> without which emptiness would not exist. I wanted that word 'empty' to say
> something. I wanted to indicate by merest of allusions where this voice comes
> from. It has always come from hunger. It has always come from emptiness. It has
> always come from hiraeth.[362]

While the common understanding of the original Welsh word typically hinges on a

longing 'for better days',[363] Solow emphasises the 'hunger' associated with the term and

the origin from which this desire springs. Solow's more nuanced understanding of the

term incorporates the essential and more psychological components of longing, which are

grounded in 'emptiness' or absence. A similar explanation put forth by Val Bethell,

includes the suggestion that in addition to the desire for home, loved ones, and lost days

of the past, the term 'hiraeth' is defined by a sense of that which is missing and partially

forgotten.

> Hiraeth – the link with the long-forgotten past, the language of the soul, the call
> from the inner self. Half forgotten – fraction remembered. It speaks from the
> rocks, from the earth, from the trees and in the waves. It's always there.[364]

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[361] Williams, D. D. R., 'Old Age Psychiatry in Swansea', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 319 (1999), 267.
[362] Solow, Harrison, 'Bendithion', *Agni*, 2007, 20–36 (p. 32), italics in original.
[363] Williams, 'Psychiatry', p. 267.
[364] *Hiraeth*, 2003 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/arts/yourvideo/media/pages/val_bethell_01.shtml>
[accessed 18 March 2015].

Bethell's understanding expresses not only the desire for something that has been irretrievably lost, but also the suppression of the memory that attends it. Paradoxically, the unnamed, missing, or lost thing that is longed for is simultaneously a constant presence for the individual who experiences hiraeth. Rhys's inclusion of this phrase in the novel offers a rare attempt to explicate both what her heroine longs for and that which causes her unspeakable grief. Importantly, however, the language Rhys employs here does not belong to Anna but to her Welsh father. As Solow points out, hiraeth does not 'exist outside a Welsh heart' and Anna does not identify as Welsh. Despite her ancestral proximity to the word, a true understanding of the concept is just beyond her reach. It is, like all attempts to name the heroine's pain, ultimately incapable of doing so.

The loss that attends this concept bears a striking resemblance to the psychoanalytic conception of the Thing, which also rests upon the desire of something that is beyond representation. The Thing can be understood as 'the object of loss itself: the unsymbolisable and unimaginable reality of loss'.[365] Beyond both representation and imagination, the Thing belongs to the realms of the Real and the Imaginary.[366] Originally a concept developed by Freud, *das Ding*, Lacan built upon the original idea to include a connection with the lost maternal.

> Lacan's innovation was to equate the Thing with the mother – not the real mother, obviously, but the mother-who-is-lost: the absence of mother […] in the absence of real mothers, the Thing, as an imaginary object, persists in the Subject's psyche, and will continue to operate in its own right'. […] If a primary characteristic of the Thing is to be unsymbolised and unsymbolisable, then perhaps the Thing is what is lost at the point of birth: the environment *in utero*, a state in which the baby had no needs, because all its needs were being met by the functioning of the mother. At birth, the change in environment and the development of physical needs (to feed, to excrete) creates a situation in which the baby 'remembers' vaguely that there was another way of being, but nothing of

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[365] Bailly, p. 136.
[366] Ibid., pp. 136, 139.

it, for without anything to compare it with (in the absence of dialectical possibility) it could never be represented. The Thing is therefore by its nature only conceptualized after the event of its loss, and the lost object was never and could never be symbolised. It is thus a representation of an unrepresented object – a representation of pure loss.[367]

The inability of the Thing to exist in the Symbolic flags interesting correlations to *Voyage in the Dark*, which repeatedly inscribes itself as a novel based on an irreconcilable and unnameable loss. The idea that the loss is a state of being that can neither be represented nor recovered, rather than simply a person or an object, holds interesting possibilities regarding the suffering of Rhys's protagonists.[368]

In addition to the commonality of being unrepresentable, the connection to the maternal is deeply significant – and deeply present – in *Voyage in the Dark*. Ostensibly, the only reference to Anna's mother is a brief memory of her funeral:

> …The candles crying wax tears in the smell of stephanotis and I had to go to the funeral in a white dress and white gloves and a wreath round my head and the wreath in my hands made my gloves wet – they said so young to die… (83).

The passing is so vague and the allusion to the mother's death so brief that one could easily miss it. While this is the only time the heroine mentions her mother in the course of the text, there are numerous references to her English stepmother, Hester. The narrator's regular descriptions of Hester, however, belie her role as a true maternal figure; instead she is portrayed as cold, uncaring, and repressed and exists firmly in the Symbolic world of laws and order to which Anna does not feel she belongs. The two characters meet once in the course of the text and part ways after Hester tells Anna that she 'refuse[s] to be

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[367] Ibid., p. 137-38.
[368] This central and encompassing loss that haunts the novel as a whole should not be confused with the multiple losses Anna suffers throughout her 'voyage', which are often specific individuals, such as Walter or Carl, or even events of loss, such as her abortion. The difference here is one of representation: each of the events of the novel that cause Anna grief are quantifiable and describable. In these cases, the pain of the loss can always be associated with an object, person, event or place; as representable objects, these may be variously classified as either manifestations of the Phallus or *objet petit a*.

made responsible for' (57) her stepdaughter and already feels she has done too much for her. After their visit, the heroine writes a letter to Hester, but receives a postcard in return; 'after that I didn't write again. And she didn't either' (63). Though Hester initially seems to act as a very weak maternal substitute, she quickly abandons the heroine altogether, reinforcing a pattern of parental loss.

As both Kloepfer and Murdoch point out, Hester's character, at least physically, is barely present in the narrative. Murdoch observes that Hester 'remains almost preternaturally absent',[369] while Kloepfer theorises that while she is not physically present, her influence remains palpable.

> It is Hester's voice, more than her physical presence, that intrudes into the novel as a representative of a repressive cultural and linguistic structure […] much like the men in the novel in whose systems she willingly participates, she censors and negates Anna's attempts to express what she thinks or feels.[370]

Hester's role is as a morally governing force in Anna's mind, a powerful textual incarnation of the superego, which dictates what is appropriate and what Anna should or should not feel. When the narrator casually mentions she 'hates dogs', Hester responds by informing her of the consequences of such a feeling:

> 'I don't know what'll become of you if you go on like that', Hester said. 'Let me tell you that you'll have a very unhappy life if you go on like that. People won't like you. People in England will dislike you very much if you say things like that' (57).

The Hester's suggestion that the heroine should keep her true thoughts and feelings concealed is present throughout the stepmother's appearance in the text, whether she is present physically or recalled in the narrator's recollections of her. When the two characters meet and Anna attempts to tell Hester about the arrangement of her newfound

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[369] Murdoch, p. 258.
[370] Kloepfer, 'Masquerade', p. 449.

financial security, the latter emphatically insists she does not want to know and expresses concern that Anna may not be 'living in a fit and proper way' (57). When the conversation is interrupted, the narrator describes her stepmother's relief: 'I saw her getting calm. I knew that she was saying to herself, "I'm never going to think of this again"' (57). Hester's lack of acknowledgement of Anna's feelings (and her own), as well as her disregard for Anna's security, confirm that she is not in a position to fulfil the nurturing maternal role the heroine needs. Rather, Hester acts as an informer of social standards and conduct, as well a champion of repression, and serves as the punishing and critical voice of the superego and as an envoy of the patriarchal societal structure of England. Though there is no expression of sadness following the stepmother's desertion, Clarke notes that the 'break with Hester precipitates the heroine's descent into a life of prostitution'.[371] Despite her inadequacy as a parental and, especially, a maternal influence, Clark's observation suggests that even the weak tie to the parental bond that Hester provided seemed to serve the narrator in some subtle way.

The need for a maternal influence is a primary structuring element of Anna's 'voyage', which Simpson suggests is rooted in the absence of the heroine's mother. Though Rhys does not explicitly state the pain her heroine suffers as a result of the missing maternal bond, many critics suggest that the mother's absence is felt throughout the narrative. Simpson, for example, suggests that Rhys 'establishes, through implication' that the mother is 'absent from [Anna's] youngest life'[372] and that this absence, combined with Hester's failing as a maternal replacement, leads the heroine on a succession of attempts to fill the maternal void. Simpson focuses on this problem extensively in her

[371] Clarke, Joseph, 'Caribbean Modernism and the Postcolonial Social Contract in *Voyage in the Dark*', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3 (2003), 1–16 (p. 7).
[372] Simpson, p. 24.

reading of Rhys's third novel and suggests that the text as a whole is an 'expression of the daughter's compulsion to find, again and again, the mother who is not there'.[373] Simpson's reading interprets the loss of the maternal object as one marked by destruction that the protagonist interprets as fundamentally her own fault.

> Anna makes sense of this absence, which would otherwise be inexplicable, by viewing herself as omnipotently capable of damage. But to feel that she has destroyed the object of her deepest need is, in turn, to accede to a horrifying awareness: that she is utterly alone. The awareness itself must be guarded against.[374]

In order to abate the horrific reality of this perceived loss and the consequent alienation it generates, the heroine unconsciously works to fill 'the enormity of the space'[375] left in the wake of the absent mother, again participating in the 'compulsion to repeat' discussed in the preceding chapter. Simpson concludes that this 'infantile strategy'[376] operates in two ways: first, by way of a 'recurrence of needy and needed feminine figures'[377] and second, by 'attracting men to fill the empty space within her'.[378]

The female characters Anna encounters in England are invariably unsuitable as maternal figures and are variously portrayed as living on the margins of respectable society, barely able to care for themselves. One after another, these women make their way in and out of Anna's life, with the exception of Laurie, who is phoned by the landlord to be with Anna after her botched abortion. The sole female presence that does seem meaningful is Francine, the narrator's West Indian cook who enters the text only in

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[373] Ibid., p. 40.
[374] Ibid., p. 24.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid., p. 21.
[377] Ibid., p. 24.
[378] Ibid., p. 21.

Anna's memories of home. The descriptions of Francine are the most maternal in the novel, imbued with a sense of love and comfort:

> The thing about Francine was that when I was with her I was happy. She was small and plump and blacker than most of the people out there, and she had a pretty face. What I liked was watching her eat mangoes. Her teeth would bite into the mango and her lips fasten on either side of it, and while she sucked you saw that she was perfectly happy. When she had finished she always smacked her lips twice, very loud – louder than you could believe possible. It was a ritual. She never wore shoes and the soles of her feet were hard as leather. She could carry anything on her head – a bottleful of water, or a huge weight. […] She was always laughing (58).

This recollection is the closest the narrative comes to the maternal; Francine is portrayed as warm and able to bear the weight of 'anything on her head', suggesting she can care for others as well as herself. Francine's joyful sucking of mangoes associates her to the maternal breast and is an image that comforts Anna. Their bond is ruined, however, by a disapproving Hester, who begins to dislike Francine as she and Anna grow closer. Eventually jealousy leads Hester to send Francine away, effectively ruining any hope that Anna might identify with Francine as a mother figure. Like every other woman in the text, even the loving Francine is ultimately 'insufficient to give her an adequate alternative identity'.[379]

Unable to find representation for the maternal in the more obvious female figures she encounters, Anna attempts to seek a caring source of maternal love in her romantic relationships with men. The first of these characters is Walter, who is older and wealthy and with whom Anna falls in love. Given his age, security, and ability to care for Anna (throughout their relationship but especially when she is ill), Walter simultaneously holds a paternal and maternal significance, providing both financial stability and a nurturing presence.

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[379] Moore, p. 24.

In the preliminary stages of Anna's relationship with Walter, he acts as substitutive maternal presence, providing care for her when she is ill; she thus begins to learn that a woman may turn to men rather than to other women to compensate for basic, unmet needs.[380]

This realisation provides another subset of objects onto which Anna can affix her desire. Though she may have symbolically lost the perfect lost object (the breast), she finds in her relationship with Walter that there are additional objects that may, at least for a time, abate the hunger for the lost object. Taking individuals as objects of desire, however, entails risk, as the heroine learns when Walter ends their relationship. Following her heartbreak in the novel, Anna descends into a life of prostitution and inebriation. The discrepancy here between the heroine's reaction and the unexceptional circumstances that bring it about is indicative of the important function Walter embodies as the lost object of desire. Though this has been a topic of importance in previous chapters – such as in Marya's attraction to Heidler and Julia's loss of Mackenzie – here we see the lost object in an earlier permutation, paralleled by a frantic search for both a parental figure and a succession of failed maternal substitutes.[381]

Perhaps no aspect of *Voyage in the Dark* has divided critics so completely than that of its ending, which Rhys famously intended to conclude quite differently to the version that was published. The original version of Part Four that Rhys included in the

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[380] Simpson, pp. 37-38.

[381] Francis Wyndham, Rhys's friend and literary executor, suggests that the author's split with Lancelot Hugh Smith, on whom Walter's character was based, was an event that irreparably changed her, despite the outward banality of the breakup itself. '[M]ysteriously, ever since the end of her first love affair she had also been cursed by a kind of spiritual sickness – a feeling of belonging nowhere, of being ill at ease and out of place in her surroundings wherever these happened to be, a stranger in an indifferent, even hostile, world. […] She believed that the whole earth had become inhospitable to her after the shock of that humdrum betrayal. All that had happened was that a kind, rather fatherly businessman, who had picked up a pretty chorus girl with a disconcertingly vague manner, decided after a year or so to pension her off' (Wyndham, Francis, 'Introduction', in *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-1966* (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 10-11). Much like Rhys's need to textually revisit and rewrite her experience with Ford in her first two novels, the need to write out the experience of her first heartbreak speaks to the importance of this love affair and its potential substitutive role for a greater and more formative loss.

manuscript of her novel that was submitted to publishers ended not with a doctor saving

Anna from haemorrhaging, but with the main character's death.

> And the concertina music stopped and it was so still and lovely   and it
> stopped   and there was the ray of light along the floor like the last thrust of
> remembering before everything is blotted out and blackness comes….[382]

In its original form, the novel was turned down by multiple publishers: first by Jonathan

Cape, who told Rhys he thought it was too dark and that he could not sell it, and then by

Hamish Hamilton, who Rhys later wrote 'wanted it cut so much that it would become

meaningless'.[383] Eventually, Michael Sadlier at Constable told Rhys he liked the book but

that the ending would have to be changed to suit potential readers. At first she refused,

but finally gave in and spent several weeks editing the section to spare her heroine's life

and suit publication needs.[384] From Rhys's letters, one can see that the decision to accept

Sadlier's publishing ultimatum was a difficult one, the merit and outcome of which are

still critically debated today. Many critics – regardless of which ending they defend –

base their argument on the literary and stylistic merits of their preferred version of the

text. While such aspects are indeed worth consideration, Rhys's desire to kill her

favourite and admittedly most autobiographical heroine[385] and her inability to do so is an

altogether more compelling facet of the novel's history.

Many critics argue that the choice of whether or not to kill her heroine should

have remained with Rhys. Atherton suggests the decision resonates with the patriarchal

tone of the novel and that 'Rhys was coerced into compromising by providing an

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[382] Quoted in Anger, *Life and Work*, p. 295.
[383] Rhys, *Letters*, p. 25.
[384] Angier, *Life and Work*, pp. 294-5.
[385] Ibid., p. 296.

ambiguous ending' and 'like Anna, was denied agency' by 'male intervention'.[386] Other

feminist critics such as Hanna argue that by acceding to Sadlier's editorial demands, the

text itself suffers.

> Comparing both versions of Part IV shows that intricate textual connections are
> lost in the published version of *VID* that reduce complexity, while at the same
> time, information is lost to the reader that affect the clarity of Rhys's total
> design.[387]

Hanna further suggests that in addition to being 'weakened by the cuts Rhys made',[388] the

published version of *Voyage in the Dark* robs the reader of the epiphanic reading Rhys

had intended.

> [The published ending] excises the moment of internal psychological and
> emotional epiphany when Anna's split-self fully integrates as an '*I*' before her
> death. Epiphany refers to the Joycean concept of illumination of character and
> purpose, and integration of a person/construct as spiritual being and text as
> artwork.[389]

While Atherton's argument is less contentious and more difficult to fault – Rhys was

indeed forced to change her work by a publisher who was male – Hanna's position is

more difficult to prove. The suggestion that by the end of the narrative Anna has achieved

an emotional and psychological state of integration is not supported by a close reading

the text. While making many significant strides in emotional development and revisiting

difficult realities, the heroine does not experience the integration that Hanna suggests she

achieves. There is undoubtedly something epiphanic about Part Four of the novel, when

the Anna's West Indian and English realities collide, but it is an epiphany based on an

acquiescence of loss, isolation, and lack, rather than coalescence. Thus, while Anna is

indeed more integrated and emotionally honest than Marya or Julia, what *Voyage in the*

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[386] Atherton, p. 159.
[387] Hanna, p. 134.
[388] Ibid., p. 139.
[389] Ibid., italics in original.

Dark achieves is not integration, but a recognition and acceptance of an underlying psychological fragmentation. Not until Rhys's subsequent novel, *Good Morning, Midnight*, would an acceptance of this fragmentation follow and only in Rhys's final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, does the integration that Hanna describes occur for one of Rhys's characters.

Arguments against Rhys's original ending are typically underpinned by an acknowledgement that the original version containing the heroine's death is neither fitting to Rhys's style nor true to the underlying aims of her writing. Stylistically, O'Connor argues that the new ending Sadlier insisted on 'is in fact superior to Rhys's manuscript version', as it 'contributes more brilliantly to the structure Rhys has developed in the rest of the book – a structure that depends on epicyclic false starts and beginnings'[390] which imitate trauma. Morris also praises the published ending of the novel, calling it 'tight and […] also rich'.[391] Angier argues the same point as O'Connor and Morris from a more personal perspective, stating that although Rhys hated the changes Sadlier imposed, particularly cutting out Anna's death, that ultimately 'she was wrong, and Michael Sadlier was right. For her great technical skill was only half the equation: the other half was her grip on her subject, herself'.[392] Angier cites the problems of the original ending as issuing from the same impulse that Rhys succumbed to in writing her first novel: '[s]he had already been led by her self-pity to bungle the end of *Quartet*: and her self-pity would have bungled this too'.[393] Angier suggests that until Part

[390] O'Connor, Teresa F., *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 128.

[391] Morris, Mervyn, 'Oh, Give the Girl a Chance: Jean Rhys and *Voyage in the Dark*', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 3 (1989), 1–8 (p. 6).

[392] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 294.

[393] Ibid., p. 295.

Four of *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys had 'kept her (self-)pity for Anna under iron control, but in the end she'd let go'; the original ending of the novel and Anna's death, according to Angier, rendered '*Voyage in the Dark* a more clichéd and sentimental story. With Sadlier's change, the last trace of special pleading, or emotional blackmail of the reader, was removed; leaving a pure and perfect Jean Rhys novel'.[394] Though she did not manage it entirely on her own, the final published version of *Voyage in the Dark* sidesteps a regression that nearly set Rhys's work back to the uneven and self-indulgent perspective that claimed her first novel.

Though much critical attention has been devoted to a discussion of which ending is the 'correct' one, less emphasis has been put on exploring the deeper meaning of Rhys's desire to kill off the heroine of her favourite and most (self-proclaimed) autobiographical work. The subjects of suicide and death that attend each of Rhys's novels appear in *Voyage in the Dark* in a more pronounced and obvious way, both in oblique references to death throughout the novel and the original ending that culminates with Anna's death. Rhys's imagery of coffins and rooms closing in on Anna (22, 26) are punctuated throughout the text by covetous longings for death: 'I began to feel awfully miserable, as if everything were shutting up around me and I couldn't breathe. I wanted to die' (59); '[i]t's funny when you feel as if you don't want anything more in your life except to sleep, or else to lie without moving' (97); and Anna's brutally honest summation, '[t]here was a man I was mad about. He got sick of me and chucked me. I wish I were dead' (99). The death wish that attends Anna's narrative is also echoed by many critics who argue that the original ending was 'the kinder one'.[395] 'There is a sense

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[394] Angier, 'Introduction', p. vii.
[395] Hanna, p. 153.

of tremendous peace […] framing Anna's exit to her death by or through or in the grace of light. It is redemption – and relief […] death as a reward'.[396] Atherton's reading is similar, though not as emphatic as Hanna's, suggesting that in her original ending Rhys benevolently 'calls a halt to [Anna's] suffering'.[397] There is also the possibility that in writing Anna's death, Rhys acts out in the pages of the novel what perhaps she longed for herself in life: an escape through death. The element of escape is crucial here, as Anna does not wish to surrender to death so much as she longs for the cessation of pain and for the state of nothingness that death would grant, much in the same way Marya desired a 'friendly dark where she could lie and let her heart burst' (*Quartet* 117). However, as Anna has not yet reached a 'psychically mature position',[398] to borrow Freud's phrase, the text would be almost disingenuous if it were to jump to a point of resolution. Thus, the experience of death that Rhys originally wrote for Anna and that many readers wish for her must wait; quite simply, Rhys's third heroine has not yet earned death.

In place of death, the published ending of *Voyage in the Dark* demands its protagonist's survival: as the narrator laments toward the novel's end, 'I'm nineteen and I've got to go on living and living and living' (94). The portentous lines at the end of the novel seal Anna's fate, as the doctor treating her following her abortion assures her friend Laurie that, '[s]he'll be all right […]. Ready to start all over again in no time, I've no doubt' (159), suggesting Anna will indeed have 'to go on living and living and living'. The novel closes with her thoughts following the doctor's prognosis:

> When their voices stopped the ray of light came in again 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

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[396] Ibid., p. 157.
[397] Atherton, p. 159.
[398] Freud, 'Constructions', p. 257.

about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting
all over again, all over again… (159).

The final, recurrent phrase, 'all over again', spoken both by the doctor and protagonist, is

somewhat ambiguous. Given Rhys's rage at being forced to change her ending, it seems

reasonable to assume much of the hopefulness in the above passage is seeped in irony.

The closing lines seem more an exhausted acceptance of a compulsory survival that

Moore deems, 'simultaneously tiring but exhilarating'.[399]

The ending of *Voyage in the Dark*, though perhaps more traumatic, is broadly

similar to the culmination of Rhys's first two novels, with several important distinctions.

Like Marya and Julia, Anna survives her narrative – this time just barely – and is left

adrift in an unfamiliar land, broken and alone, but alive. Unlike Marya and Julia,

however, the binaries that initially structure Anna's narrative do not withstand the more

troubling realities that are exposed and, ultimately, signifiers such as good/bad,

black/white, Dominica/England, virgin/whore crumble at the novel's end. As a result,

Murdoch argues that Anna is left 'unalterably divided'[400] after being faced with what

Hanna can only describe as 'something undeniably threatening and hostile'.[401] What this

something might be is as yet unclear to Rhys's protagonist and will be explored in Rhys's

subsequent and final two novels. Wrapped in ambiguity and uncertainties, Seshagiri

contends that 'Anna's "voyage" ends uneasily, twisting in a cultural limbo that has yet to

find a self-assured literary voice'.[402] The focus on literary identity here is significant, as is

Seshagiri's use of 'yet', which intimates an eventual resolution of some kind, both for

Rhys's characters and Rhys herself. Angier's position echoes Seshagiri's even more

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[399] Moore, p. 26.
[400] Murdoch, p. 263.
[401] Hanna, p. 142.
[402] Seshagiri, p. 489.

directly, stating in the Introduction to the novel that 'Anna is more than halfway to Antoinette, almost a rehearsal for Antoinette', which propels Rhys ever closer to 'the great resolution of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'.[403] Angier's portentous analysis imbues the same sense of exhaustion and anticipation in the reader that Anna feels when she realises she will survive; for as long as she must 'go on living and living and living', we too will go on reading and reading and reading.

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[403] Angier, 'Introduction', p. vi.

CHAPTER FOUR
Good Morning, Midnight

The reason, fool, she cries is that she's lived!
And that she lives! But what she most deplores,
What makes her tremble even to her knees,
Is that tomorrow she'll be living still!
Tomorrow, every day! – And so will we!
–Baudelaire, 'The Mask'[404]

Despite the usual criticism that invariably follows Rhys's narratives – like its

predecessors, many deem *Good Morning, Midnight* too sordid, depressing, and

uneventful – the novel has also been lauded by many as Rhys's finest literary

achievement. With terrifying candour – and seemingly unencumbered by many of the

psychological limitations of her earlier work – Rhys's fourth novel is an unrelenting, yet

compassionate, meditation on connection and alienation, trauma, and ambiguity. It is

also, perhaps for the same reason, shocking in its bareness and its honesty. Gardiner

refers to the novel as Rhys's 'first-person masterpiece',[405] while V.S. Naipaul deems it

'the most subtle and complete of her novels, and the most humane'.[406] The humanity that

Naipaul describes can perhaps only be fully appreciated by those familiar with Rhys's

earlier works, and thus able to make intertextual comparisons regarding the progress that

has been made to reach this point. Where *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* are

seeped in blame and self-pity, these are largely absent in *Voyage in the Dark* and even

less pronounced in *Good Morning, Midnight.* These subtle but important intertextual

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[404] Baudelaire, Charles, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 43.
[405] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 233.
[406] Naipaul, V.S., 'Without a Dog's Chance', in *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, ed. by Pierrette M. Frickey (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp. 54–66 (p. 56).

changes mark a shift in the maturity of Rhys's writing, particularly in the tone and objective of her oeuvre, which led some scholars, such as Angier, to classify the novel as 'Rhys's greatest victory over herself, her most honest and most moving achievement'.[407] The last of her pre-war novels, *Good Morning, Midnight* offers a startling revision of the misanthropic attitude that underpinned Rhys's early works, resulting in a penultimate novel that is at once aware, balanced, and singularly tolerant in its vision of the other.

Rhys's fourth novel follows ten days in the life of Sasha Jansen, a character in her mid-forties, who has returned to Paris after a long absence. Sasha has made the trip thanks to a female friend who has lent her money in order to escape her life of aimlessness and alcoholism in London. Upon her arrival, the heroine resolves to have an uneventful and sober time in Paris and carefully plans out each day: the venues at which she will eat lunch, have one drink in the afternoon, and eat dinner, as well as the dreamless sleeps she will have each night courtesy of a sedative called Luminal. Sasha spends the majority of her time actively attempting to remain disengaged from others, in particular the man staying in the hotel room next to hers, the *commis voyageur*, whom she despises. Sasha fills her days by sticking to the schedule she has created and avoiding places that might remind her of the past, which, over the course of the novel, we learn includes several humiliating and short-lived jobs, the death of her infant son, and subsequent abandonment by her husband, Enno. Several days into her trip, she becomes reluctantly friendly with a gigolo named René who mistakes Sasha for a wealthy woman. The similarity of their circumstances and social status position the two as oddly kindred spirits and they begin to get to know one another. The two meet again later in the novel and after an evening out, René returns with Sasha to her room. When she realises he

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[407] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 373.

expects to have sex with her, Sasha asks him to leave; René refuses and nearly rapes her. At the last minute he stops, takes some money from Sasha's nightstand, and leaves. When Sasha realises he has only taken several small bills and left her one thousand francs, she silently praises him and wills him to return. A man does come to her door, but it is the *commis* from the next room, not René. The novel ends ambiguously as Sasha pulls the hated *commis* down into her bed while chanting, 'Yes – yes – yes….' (159).

Good Morning, Midnight is, at its core, a novel about loss, personal connection, and collective trauma; it is a hauntingly realistic look at both the individual experience of suffering and 'a devastating critique of a society callously unconcerned with the desperate'.[408] Arnold Davidson calls the heroine's story 'both an idiosyncratic history of the setbacks and sufferings of one individual and the representative fable'[409] – a balance it took Rhys eleven years and four novels to perfect. *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* focused so intently and unevenly on personal loss that a poised look at collective suffering and injustice was rendered nearly impossible. The narratives of Marya and Julia are simply too self-pitying, biased, and indulgent to make a balanced comment on society's failings. Written into Sasha's narrative, however, there is at last a meaningful equipoise between trauma, compassion, and awareness that distinguishes her as Rhys's most mature character to date, capable of acknowledging her own trauma without self-pity or blame, while remaining sensitive to the suffering of others. Through Sasha, Rhys is finally able to depict individual trauma alongside genuine empathy for

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[408] Davidson, Arnold E., 'The Dark Is Light Enough: Affirmation from Despair in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*', *Contemporary Literature*, 24 (1983), 349–64 (p. 351).
[409] Ibid., p. 352.

others, an equilibrium that delivers a complete, compassionate, and, in Naipaul's words, 'humane' novel.

In many important ways, *Good Morning, Midnight* is a continuation of Rhys's previous narratives and thus deals with many of the same difficult issues. Sasha is portrayed as troubled, fragmented, and nomadic and her sordid, aimless narrative is at times difficult for readers to endure. The novel opens with a familiar description of Sasha's hotel room in Paris and a subtle reminder that both she and we have been here before:

> 'Quite like old times', the room says. 'Yes? No?'
> There are two beds, a big one for madame and a smaller one on the opposite side for monsieur. The wash-basin is shut off by a curtain. It is a large room, the smell of cheap hotels faint, almost imperceptible. The street outside is narrow, cobble-stoned, going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse (9).

The transparent familiarity of the room, coupled with the room's suggestion that Sasha being there is '[q]uite like old times', indicates an endless succession of time, where each day is much the same as the one before it. Frost notes that the appropriate answer to the room's question is not simply an either/or response, but 'is both yes and no', as 'what follows will be more of the same, but also new, a pulse of unresolvable opposition'.[410] The position of the hotel on the street (at 'an impasse') is also telling and revisits the recurring theme of circularity, as well as the familiar tendency of Rhys's characters to be 'irresistibly drawn toward the impasse: a deadlock of movement, a heightening of tension'[411]. An impasse is defined as 'a position in which there is no way of escape' and

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[410] Frost, pp. 203-04.
[411] Ibid., p. 188.

also a 'road or way having no outlet; a blind alley, [or] "cul-de-sac"',[412] which suggest

both the inevitability of repetition and a stagnated lack of movement. Frost argues that by

'actively seek[ing] … the architecture of the impasse',[413] Rhys's characters may seem

interminably passive 'in terms of momentum, but [are in fact] active in terms of

narrativizing that experience'. The energy of Rhys's writing, Frost concludes, 'is derived

from these moments of paradox and impossibility, when pleasure and unpleasure are

bound together though narration'.[414] There is also the issue of intertextual repetition,

which Parsons suggests renders the novel 'less a pilgrimage than a constant rewalking of

the past – of Rhys's own life and the subjects and motifs of her earlier novels',[415] both

reinforcing the continued process of working-through and substantiating the idea that

Rhys's metanarrative is perpetually ongoing. The room's comment, in particular – 'Quite

like old times?' – resonates with the notion of continuity between Rhys's works, the

prospect that her heroines are iterations of the same purgative impulse, and the merit of

reading the novels intertextually. The suggestion of a cyclical or continuous narrative

also accords with the transition from Rhys's third novel to her fourth: *Voyage in the Dark*

ends just as Anna is saved from a botched abortion, while *Good Morning, Midnight*

begins with repetitive allusions that Sasha has recently been saved from drowning.

Simpson observes that Sasha 'cryptically remarks that she has been saved from drowning

by someone, somehow, but no elucidation follows',[416] reigniting in *Good Morning,*

Midnight the sense of survival that readers are left with at the end of *Voyage in the Dark*.

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[412] 'Impasse, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/92128> [accessed 8 April 2015].
[413] Frost, p. 204.
[414] Ibid.
[415] Parsons, p. 144.
[416] Simpson, p. 88.

As with many of the opening and closing sections of Rhys's works, the opening

passage of *Good Morning, Midnight* divides readers on the tone of the novel. Some

critics read the protagonist's mood in the above passage, and indeed throughout the

novel, as either detached or indifferent – surmising that the ageing Rhys woman has

finally given up, become immune to her circumstances, or simply learned not to care.

Others argue that the heroine's attitude is defined not by apathy, but by acceptance and

observation; that she is both aware of her surroundings and her circumstances and thus

able to reflect and effectively comment on them. I will endeavour to demonstrate the

latter: that Sasha's character, above all other qualities and labels, demonstrates an

awareness of herself that renders the text unique. The narrator's empathetic and even tone

throughout the novel, which is concurrently free from blame, resentment, and self-pity –

demonstrates the capacity not only for survival, but also for growth and maturity.

In many ways, Rhys's fourth heroine is her most distinct and at times her most

difficult. From the ambiguity of her background, to her given and subsequently dispelled

name, to her 'problematic language and actions', Kristin Czarnecki argues that Sasha

presents 'perhaps the greatest conundrum among Rhys's women'.[417] Sasha's name is the

first concrete example of this autonomy and ambiguity that we encounter. Early in the

novel, we learn that the heroine has 'dispense[d] with her given name of Sophia in hopes

that a new name will change her luck'.[418] Both Maurel and Gardiner see this act not only

as a subtle form of rebirth, but also as an act of self-possession and freedom, 'a

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[417] Czarnecki, Kristin, '"Yes, It Can Be Sad, the Sun in the Afternoon": Kristevan Depression in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight'*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32 (2009), 63–82 (p. 63).
[418] Johnson, Erica, 'Creole Errance in *Good Morning, Midnight'*, *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3 (2003), 37–46 (p. 41).

Promethean way of giving birth to herself',[419] that allows Sasha to '[enter] her narrative

as a self-created character'.[420] Though Rhys's heroines have been nicknamed and re-

named by others throughout her previous novels, not until *Good Morning, Midnight* has

one of Rhys's heroines possessed the wherewithal to name herself. The act of choosing

her own name suggests Sasha fashions her own identity and exists in some respects on

her own terms.[421]

The autonomous act of naming oneself is mirrored by Sasha's unique position of

financial security. Unlike her predecessors, she is the first of Rhys's heroines to be

financially independent and, though still poor, she is not forced to rely on others, most

importantly men, for her continued survival. This seemingly small change momentously

affects the quality of the narrative, in that it removes a component of anxiety which

previously occupied a significant place in Rhys's earlier narratives. Marya, for instance,

initially relies financially on her husband, but is forced to move in with the Heidlers in a

bizarre and unsustainable ménage à trois when he goes to jail; Julia at first survives on an

allowance from Mackenzie and, when that is revoked, on small and humiliating hand-

outs from Horsfield, her previous lover, and her family; Anna makes her living first as a

chorus girl, is then supported by Walter, and finally makes money by prostitution.

Without the struggle to survive economically, either by borrowing from family, begging

from past lovers, or exchanging money for sex, Sasha is economically stable, free from

the stress of pecuniary matters and, most significantly, independent. Removing the more

[419] Maurel, Sylvie, *Jean Rhys* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 54.
[420] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 237.
[421] This act of autonomy is complicated by the root of Sasha's given name, Sophia, which in Latin etymology denotes 'wisdom' or 'knowledge'. Thus, while Sasha is Rhys's first heroine to purposefully claim her own name, imbuing her with a sense of self-possession absent in the narratives of Rhys's earlier protagonists, she simultaneously abandons an ancient name suggesting insight and understanding. ('Sophia, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/184748> [accessed 5 August 2015].)

basic problems of dependence and financial security from Sasha's narrative generates

additional space for Rhys to explore deeper issues of the self, trauma, and relationships,

each of which is present in *Good Morning, Midnight* to an unprecedented degree.

In part, for these reasons, *Good Morning, Midnight* is in some ways Rhys's most

challenging novel and Sasha her most enigmatic heroine. With attention to Symbolic

structures such as language and money minimised, Rhys prioritises an exploration of

trauma and of her heroine's individual subjectivity, resulting in fewer concrete and easily

identifiable structuring principles such as master signifiers. Sasha herself is a paragon of

ambiguity, which many critics attribute to the lack of personal and cultural hallmarks

present in her narrative. Indeed, hardly any specific or conclusive signifiers affix

themselves to Sasha, who lacks familial, cultural, and historical ties such that she is

connected to nothing. Some critics suggest this disconnectedness and displacement

represent disenchantment with the emphasis that is placed on national identity, or what

Johnson describes as Rhys's insistence on the 'fictionality of national identity'.[422] In one

scene, for example, a hotel patron requests to see Sasha's passport when she omits

information on the hotel's form.

> What's wrong with the fiche, I've filled it up all right, haven't I? Name So-and-
> so, nationality So-and-so. … Nationality – that's what has puzzled him. I ought to
> have put nationality by marriage. I tell him I will let him have the passport in the
> afternoon and he gives my hat a gloomy, disapproving look. I don't blame him. It
> shouts 'Anglaise', my hat. And my dress extinguishes me. And then this damn old
> fur coat slung on top of everything else – the last idiocy, the last incongruity (13-
> 14).

Sasha never makes reference to the form or the passport again and it is safe to assume the

patron's request is never met and the information never received. Johnson argues that

Sasha's dismissal of the form and its signifying contents 'parodies its function of

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[422] Johnson, E., 'Errance', p. 42.

ascertaining simple, basic information. Sasha's allusion to the form serves precisely to obscure the very categories of identification through which others wish to know her'.[423] Forms, passports, and nationality are collectively portrayed as the manifestations of ordinary language in its purest and most bureaucratic form. By rejecting the patron's form, Sasha is, in turn, expressing a disavowal of a system that operates by codifying individuals according to their name, nationality, or other markers of basic, binary information which do not meaningfully capture the essence of the individual.

This textual example stands in stark contrast to a similar scene in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, in which, following her unsuccessful attempt to connect with the sculptor, Ruth, Julia doubts her own version of the story of her life history. 'I didn't quite believe myself, either. I thought: "After all, is this true? Did I ever do this?"' (41), after which Julia returns home to search for her personal documents. When she cannot find her photos, letters, marriage book, passport, or her deceased child's papers, Julia becomes frantic and begins to question whether she exists at all, finally comparing herself to a ghost. Revisiting the Lacanian understanding of the *objet petit a*, we may recall its correlation with anxiety. If 'the object cause of desire is also the object of anxiety'[424] then the passport is one of the primary objects in Rhys's fiction that represents her characters' deep-seated anxiety regarding their identity, sense of belonging, and place in the world. For Julia, the anxiety bound up in the lost passport – the universal and Symbolically agreed upon marker of identity – is one of existence; without it she cannot tell whether or not she truly exists. Julia's desire to be belong to society is evidenced in her distress when she cannot find her 'paperwork', while her repeated attempts to communicate her

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[423] Ibid., p. 39.
[424] Bailly, p. 127.

story, first to Ruth, then the Horsfield, demonstrate her need to be defined and validated by others. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, however, Sasha seems unconcerned with the absence of her passport and describes filling in her name and nationality with a dismissive 'So-and-so'. She is not only unfazed by the absence of the document, but actively refuses to grant the hotel patron the information he requests. Her definition of herself and her sense of reality does not seem to be grounded in the possession of a passport, nor does she seem concerned with proving her identity to the patron. The anxiety surrounding the object is markedly diffused here compared to Julia's reaction in Rhys's second novel, illustrating the move away from the previous investment in and pursuance of the object of desire and the progress that has been made in Rhys's heroine's attainment of a more stable sense of her own identity.

Sasha's rejection of Symbolic structures is also evident in the trajectory of her narrative, as well as the surrealist qualities of the narrative tempo and voice. Each of Rhys's narratives is somewhat divested of context and chronology, but no work feels so bereft of these as *Good Morning, Midnight*, which repeatedly undermines the linearity of ordinary language. Johnson describes 'the chronology of Sasha's life [as] fragmented and unclear',[425] while Simpson focuses on the effects these ambiguities have on the reader's experience of the text, noting that Rhys's fourth novel is 'an alogical text'[426] that 'frustrates at every turn any readerly desire for reasoned, intellectual understanding'.[427] The difficulty of reading the novel, according to Simpson, is primarily due to the narration, which vacillates between states of inebriation and dreaming: 'as a narrating voice, she recurrently offers herself to the reader in states of dreaming, drunkenness, or

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[425] Johnson, E., 'Errance', p. 40.
[426] Simpson, p. 90.
[427] Ibid.

narcotized unconsciousness; and accordingly the novel produces hallucinatory and surreal, disorienting effects'.[428] In states of drunkenness, hallucination, and dreaming, Sasha's narrative is no longer firmly grounded in the world of the ordered meaning of the Symbolic. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys aims to go *beyond* the Symbolic in order to more effectively capture the unspeakable nature of trauma and mourning that define such experiences. While the novel may indeed, as Simpson suggests, '[pose] the most strenuous challenges to those who crave in an aesthetic encounter some form of epistemological certainty',[429] it concurrently offers a richer understanding of Sasha's inner life for readers who can tolerate the portrayal of trauma and sense of uncertainty Rhys creates.

The 'alogical' quality that Simpson describes is present not only in the tone, characters, and the jumbled chronology of the novel, but also in its title as well, which is taken from a poem by Emily Dickinson. In the poem, the speaker anthropomorphises Midnight and Day as two opposing entities and describes the process of returning to the darkness of Midnight that is associated with 'home'.

> 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–Goodnight–Day!
>
> I can look–can't I–
> When the East is Red?
> The Hills–have a way–then–
> That puts the Heart–abroad–

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[428] Ibid., p. 88.
[429] Ibid., p. 87.

You–are not so fair–Midnight–
I chose–Day–
But–please take a little Girl–
He turned away![430]

The correlation between home, darkness, and the feminine in Dickinson's poem stand in contrast to their opposites: not-home, 'abroad', 'a sweet place', light, and the masculine and are reminiscent of Rhys's preoccupation with opposing sets of binaries. Gardiner observes that, in Dickinson's poem, '[t]imes of day and degrees of light appear as places, persons, and states of mind'.[431] The majority of Dickinson's imagery is fairly straightforward: comprised of pairs of clearly juxtaposed opposites (light/dark, home/abroad). However, the salutations offered to the Morning and Midnight figures are inverted, resulting in the seemingly illogical greetings, 'Good Morning–Midnight' and 'Goodnight–Day!' Within the newly collapsed terms, Gardiner suggests that the speaker 'seems eager for "home," a refuge that is defined in opposition to "him."'[432] Such a reading however, ignores the fact that the speaker actively seeks out the Day and only begrudgingly returns home after being rejected by him: 'Day got tired of Me', 'Morn didn't want me'. Though in the instance of the novel's title, it is difficult to separate the implications of Dickinson's poem from Rhys's purposes in borrowing from it, the rejection by the masculine Day and the return to a feminine darkness seem valuable correlations when considering Rhys's appropriation of the poem for her novel's title.

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[430] Dickinson, Emily, *Emily Dickinson (Everyman Poetry)*, ed. by Helen McNeil (London: Orion, 1997), p. 29.
[431] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 234.
[432] Ibid.

Throughout the novel, *Good Morning, Midnight* works to '[collapse] categories of opposition'[433] by way of combining seemingly contradictory ideas. Gardiner suggests this position is evident in the title, which 'indicates its main theme and the structural expression of that theme: apparent oppositions collapse when brought into close juxtaposition'.[434] Bound together structurally by a comma, rather than a dash, as in Dickinson's poem, Rhys's title draws attention to the incommensurability of 'Morning' and 'Midnight', while simultaneously merging the terms. The unusual combination of opposites here is neither random nor alogical, but rather indicates a deeper purpose of examining and exposing polarising choices as false. 'The rhetorical effect of Rhys's fiction', according to Gardiner, 'is to clap our ears with these imploding polarities',[435] such that binaries such as '[s]ad and happy, public and private, "made up" and natural grow confused'.[436] Gardiner hypothesises that opposing sets of binary choices such as these are evinced as erroneous and reductive in Rhys's portrayal of Sasha, who more fully understands and accepts contradictions in others as well as herself.

> Repeatedly Rhys shows that a refusal to understand the position of the other creates the other as a necessary and menacing opposition […]. Sasha understands the position of both halves and forces us to understand them, also, in order to be able to read her. She is simultaneously old and young, rich and poor, stupid and bright, desiring and chaste, repellent and desirable, English and French, a mother and not a mother, a good woman and a bad one. Society polarizes; it splits people. It reduces the categories of choice to alternatives set in columns like those on the menu. Rhys persistently underscores this sense of life choices destroyed.[437]

Good Morning, Midnight demonstrates that there is no meaningful way to capture the reality of an individual or one's narrative when the only available terms are reduced to

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[433] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 246.
[434] Ibid., p. 234.
[435] Ibid.
[436] Ibid., p. 236.
[437] Ibid. pp. 238-9.

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polarised choices such as 'good' or 'bad', 'stupid' or 'bright'. Rhys's long-standing

preoccupation with binaries finally comes to a head in her fourth novel, in her insistence

that such definitions exist contemporaneously, despite what contradictions and

inconsistencies may arise.

Though fragmentation is evident throughout Rhys's oeuvre, nowhere is the source

of that fragmentation as transparent as in Rhys's later novels, *Good Morning, Midnight*

and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. While the latter deals predominantly with family trauma, *Good*

Morning, Midnight introduces the trauma of losing a child. Angier suggests that over the

course of Rhys's oeuvre, one can track the progression of the descent into deeper and

more unconscious levels of the psyche.

> Through the three earlier novels we have watched the heroine's subconscious
> rising to her surface, consciously resisted and feared. That voyage from dog to
> wolf has been their subject; is has also been Jean's style. With each step her
> narration has become more inner, more allusive; and with each step her meaning
> has become more hidden imagery, as in a dream. I'm sure she was not in rational
> control (though she was always an artistic control) of much of this imagery: the
> ones which work out their logic from book to book, for instance – the dog and the
> wolf, the ghastly ghostly 'neighbour', the woman moving unstoppably up the
> stairs. And by the time we get to *Good Morning, Midnight* much of this individual
> imagery, too, bears the stamp of the unconscious […]. This is because with each
> book she was pushing herself closer to facing the wolf, and because in *Good*
> *Morning, Midnight* she faced it.[438]

Though Angier uses the word subconscious, which is not a psychoanalytic term, the

import of her statement – that Rhys forces her heroine to come into contact with the more

traumatic realities of the past – remains useful in the context of a psychoanalytic reading.

Linett echoes Angier's argument, stating that when Rhys wrote '*Good Morning,*

Midnight she came close enough to seeing those parts of her psyche that were hidden and

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[438] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 387.

marked by trauma'.[439] This shift in Rhys's fourth novel – which is inconspicuous when the work is read in isolation – signals a movement towards a prioritisation of the internal and an increased capacity to acknowledge and address trauma.[440]

The most obvious traumatic event that Rhys writes into Sasha's life is the death of her son, which is compounded by other losses that inform the deeper trauma of the narrative. The memory of this past experience, flashbacks of which recur throughout the novel, and the unnameable suffering that attends it is also the primary focus of critical readings that address trauma in the novel. In context with the rest of Sasha's narrative, this loss is one amongst many, each adding to a cumulative sense of isolation and abandonment. In addition to the death of her baby, Sasha's husband abandons her (following the death of their child), her parents are absent entirely from her narrative, the rest of her family disowns her, she has no friends, and does not clearly belong to any country. Of all of Rhys's heroines, Sasha's narrative is the purest and most pronounced in its depiction of the devastating effects of alienation, as abandonment and loss come at her from every conceivable angle.

One of the most subtly devastating of these losses is the absence of the heroine's family. While none of Rhys's protagonists have a stable support system in place, Sasha's character is actively disowned by her London relatives. Czarnecki points out that '[w]e do not know whether Sasha's mother abandoned her' only that 'her relatives in London despise her, indicating deep familial ruptures'.[441] In the brief memory that describes her

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[439] Linett, 'New Words', p. 446.

[440] Linett and Angier both make further reference to Rhys's own experience of trauma in relation to Sasha's narrative, specifically the death of Rhys's infant son, William Owen Lenglet, in 1920. As this study aims to avoid citing parallels between Rhys and her characters or conflating the narratives of the two, the import of Linett and Angier's statements, for the purpose of the present study, lie in their remarks on Rhys's ability to represent trauma in her work, rather than the specificity of Rhys's own traumatic experience.

[441] Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 66.

family, Sasha describes returning to London five years prior, after the death of a female family member that left her with a small weekly inheritance. In London, she speaks with an unnamed male relative who is portrayed as particularly 'cruel' and 'shrewd' (36). Before he delivers the news of her inheritance, the man tells Sasha that her family regards her as dead and asks her why she has not committed suicide. 'We consider you as dead. Why didn't you make a hole in the water? Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?' (36). The final detail of the memory is of the man's refusal to call Sasha by her chosen name. 'It's so like him, I thought, that he refuses to call me Sasha, or even Sophie. No, it's Sophia, full and grand' (36-37). The man's disavowal of Sasha's chosen name and insistence on a name she does not identify with completes the family's rejection of her. Sasha describes the significance of the abandonment as 'the end of me, the real end. […] The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang' (37).

The absence of the heroine's family of origin, particularly her mother and father, mirrors her own missing husband and son; in any direction she may look, there is no longer a family lineage either behind or before her. Sasha's inability 'to sort out her ancestral memory'[442] creates a sense of isolation unparalleled in Rhys's earlier works as well as in her final novel, for while the heroine's family is barely mentioned, they are simultaneously present everywhere. In *Quartet*, for instance, Marya is married to Stephan throughout the novel, lives with Heidler and Lois, and has a romantic relationship with Heidler. Much of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is focused on Julia's time with her sister and her mother, before her mother's death. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna's stepmother figures prominently and memories of both her parents surface at various points

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[442] Konzett, Delia, 'Ethnic Modernism in Jean Rhys's "Good Morning, Midnight"', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3 (2003), 63–76 (p. 70).

throughout the novel. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, published twenty-seven years after *Good Morning, Midnight*, is Rhys's only novel set in the Caribbean and the most explicit in its depiction of family, particularly maternal, trauma. The complete absence of family in *Good Morning, Midnight* lends a peculiar quality to Sasha's isolation, in which her character cannot search for connection either up or down her family tree; rather, she exists in a pure state of familial isolation, which is only exacerbated by her lack of friends and country.

Following the tradition of Rhys's female protagonists, one might expect Sasha to react in a self-pitying, vengeful, or cruel way in response to the immensity of her suffering. However, despite the totality of the loss that she experiences, Sasha does not act out in the same fashion as Rhys's previous heroines, either against others or herself. Instead, as Czarnecki observes, 'Sasha accepts without question the indignities and sorrows of her life',[443] which, according to Maurel, 'consistently deal with loss, pain and cruelty'.[444] As a result, Czarnecki argues '[t]here is little self-pity in Sasha's tale, for she expects to be miserable and meets disappointment with resignation and even aplomb'.[445] Nor is Sasha a particularly cruel or angry character. Though she briefly considers acting coldly towards René – 'a little in return for all the many times I've been hurt' (62) – she abandons the idea quickly and is ultimately kind to him instead, recognising elements of herself in him. This increased capacity for humanity, identification with the other, and acceptance of life's hardships, marks Sasha as Rhys's first heroine to move from a state of melancholia to a healthier position of mourning.

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[443] Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 67.
[444] Maurel, p. 75.
[445] Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 68.

The distinction between mourning and melancholia is subtle but significant, and of utmost importance if one is to appreciate the progression of Rhys's narratives. Freud defines both melancholia and mourning as 'a reaction to the real loss of a loved object',[446] which can be either 'a loved person, or […] some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, [or] an ideal'.[447] A position of melancholia, however, is both more confused and stagnant.

> [T]he occasions which give rise to the illness extend for the most part beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed, which can import opposed feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence.[448]

The ambivalent hateful feelings attached to the melancholic position belong to the unconscious and the repressed,[449] which can be 'turned round upon the subject's own self' and result in a 'circuitous path of self-punishment'.[450] In contrast to melancholia, 'mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live'.[451] One might think of melancholia as an ongoing and stalled reaction to a loss that disrupts the individual's ability to move through a difficult experience. Citing 'Mourning and Melancholia' and 'Our Attitude Towards Death', Diane Jonte-Pace understands Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia as 'two different reactions to loss'.[452]

> The first is a reaction that includes a refusal to mourn, an extended or incomplete process of mourning, and a conflicted demand for immortality. The second is a

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[446] Freud, Sigmund, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916)*, trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), XIV, 243–58 (p. 251).

[447] Ibid.,p. 243.

[448] Ibid., p. 251.

[449] Ibid., p. 257.

[450] Ibid., p. 251.

[451] Ibid., p. 257.

[452] Jonte-Pace, Diane, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion, Misogyny, and the Uncanny Mother in Freud's Cultural Texts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 134-35.

less conflicted reaction in which the loss is acknowledged, worked through, and resolved. In the first case, the case of melancholia, ambivalence toward the lost object extends and intensifies the process of mourning. At the same time, a demand for immortality results in an inability to allow mourning to follow its painful, but necessary course to resolution. In the second case, identified as mourning in both texts, the demand for immortality is abandoned and the mourner accepts transience, loss, grief, and pain. Mourning is about acknowledging mortality and transience. Melancholia, these texts suggest, is about the demand for immortality.[453]

In addition to providing a concise account of Freud's mourning and melancholia texts, Jonte-Pace outlines the crucial point of divergence between the two positions which lies with the ability or inability to acknowledge and accept loss, marked by either an acceptance of transience or the continued demand of the immortality of the loved object.

The inability to fully grieve and the ambivalence characteristic of the melancholic position are consistent with Rhys's earlier novels, each of which addresses loss and suffering in different but equally melancholic ways. Sasha's narrative, however, seems to allow a greater capacity for a position of mourning free from melancholia. The losses that her character suffers – such as her husband's abandonment, the death of her son, her family's disownment, numerous failed career attempts, and the absence of friends and country – are acknowledged and addressed rather than railed against, creating a narrative of emotional transparency. Though these losses are perhaps not fully understood either by her character, Rhys, or the reader, the upset that they cause does not appear to be directed inwards or displaced onto other objects or individuals. In other words, though Rhys's heroine may experience the world itself as dejecting or disappointing, the losses her character has experienced are extrinsic to her experience of herself, which, according to Freud, is an important marker in the shift between melancholia and mourning. 'In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego

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[453] Ibid.

itself'.[454] By portraying Sasha's suffering as the result of existence itself, rather than a personal failing or result of something within her, Rhys shifts the burden of the problem to an external locus, which is closer to an 'existential nothingness, a despair of being'.[455]

The increased capacity for mourning evidenced in *Good Morning, Midnight* should not be confused with the formation of a coherent or integrated identity. Rhys's heroine in *Good Morning, Midnight* still struggles to trust others, evidenced in her relationship with René, and often hides from the world when she feels threatened. She keeps track of her day meticulously and works according to a schedule to avoid moments where the world or her memories might overwhelm her; when her suffering becomes too great, she cries, sleeps, drinks, or hides.[456] Sasha's psychological position throughout Rhys's narrative ultimately suggests there is a great deal of healing to do and that the mourning process is still extant, particularly in relation to the mother-child relationship. The maternal dynamic is problematized by the fact that the loss of motherhood is multidirectional, in that both Sasha's own mother and her dead baby are missing from her life.

> Clinging to an incomplete mourning for her mother, Sasha also suffers an incomplete mourning for her baby and her own lost maternity. With dried-up breasts and a silent child, she knows neither the physical, psychological nor linguistic pleasures of motherhood. Her infant does not communicate with her outside the womb and dies well before separating from her to achieve identity and language. Her own subjectivity becomes difficult to achieve, then, because it is never sensed and responded to as it should be – by her child.[457]

The lack of mothering and the maternal, both in regard to Sasha's mother and her absent child, is thus the primary source of mourning in the text. Czarnecki notes this process is

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[454] Freud, 'Mourning', p. 246.
[455] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 238.
[456] Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 64.
[457] Ibid., p. 75.

'incomplete' (though, by definition, mourning relies on its incompleteness; once complete, one is no longer in mourning). As Freud's text reminds us, 'when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again'.[458] This is certainly not the case for Sasha, who Rhys portrays as still deeply in mourning for her deceased child. Whether this process is ever completed for Sasha's character is, of course, impossible to say. However, the novel's ending, discussed later in this chapter, offers some indication that Sasha is beginning to move toward a position in which she seems increasingly comfortable investing in relationships.

Equally significant to Rhys's representation of trauma and mourning in *Good Morning, Midnight* is the recognition of repression that accompanies both throughout the text. The novel contains multiple indications that Sasha actively and constantly attempts to suppress difficult psychic material, particularly memories of her past experience. Rhys's narrative offers a unique and lucid depiction of repression in which her main character constantly attempts to keep such troubling material at bay. We may recall here Freud's explanation that '*the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*'.[459] The purpose of repression, Freud further explains, is quite simply to avoid unpleasure, which may manifest in feelings of anxiety or psychic pain.[460] For individuals such as Sasha, who suffer multiple losses, displacements, and abandonments, Rhys portrays repression as an unavoidable corollary of everyday functioning. The more one is pained by the world, the more repression seems a necessity to survive in it. Rhys makes this position explicit in Sasha's

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[458] Freud, 'Mourning', p. 245.
[459] Freud, 'Repression', p. 147, italics in original.
[460] Ibid., p. 153.

narrative, which is marked by repeated attempts to keep upsetting feelings at a safe distance.

With startling perspicuity, *Good Morning, Midnight* depicts its heroine's struggle to repress her troubling, unconscious thoughts and feelings from her conscious mind. The narrator refers to these troubling internal thoughts as her 'film mind…. ("For God's sake watch out for your film-mind…".)' (153), the memories of which are borne of the traumas that she 'continually replays' as if on 'a film loop'.[461] Analogous to the intrusion of traumatic memories, Gardiner describes the protagonist's film mind as 'continuous, fluid, alive, and painful'.[462] Rhys's insistence that this personal reel of deep pain is omnipresent in Sasha's being, if not always consciously present, is reminiscent of Freud's understanding of the constant activity of repressed material.

> [W]e are inclined to […] forget too readily that repression does not hinder the instinctual representative from continuing to exist in the unconscious, from organizing itself further, putting out derivatives and establishing connections. Repression in fact interferes only with the relation of the instinctual representative to *one* psychical system, namely, to that of the conscious.[463]

What is repressed, therefore, is never truly absent, merely stored away from consciousness. Freud also describes the process of repression as a cyclical one, characterised by a persistent effort to counter the unpleasurable sensations which have been banished to the unconscious.

> The process of repression is not to be regarded as an event which takes place *once*, the results of which are permanent, as when some living thing has been killed and from that time onward is dead; repression demands a persistent expenditure of force […]. We may suppose that the repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious, so that this pressure must be balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure.[464]

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461 Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 64.
462 Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 238.
463 Freud, 'Repression', p. 149, italics in original.
464 Ibid., p. 151, italics in original.

The unrelenting barrage of repressed material and the commensurate need to parry it is consistent with Rhys's portrayal of her heroine's ongoing internal struggle.

Perhaps for this reason, Sasha values distractions in the way one would cling to a lifeline. Her schedule of seemingly trivial and monotonous events save her from the 'relentless cycle of empty hours'[465] that threaten to fill themselves with unwanted memories, thoughts, or ideas. As the novel opens, Sasha states, 'I have been here five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in a night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life' (9). Later, she reiterates the importance of '[p]lanning it all out. Eating. A movie. Eating again. One drink. A long walk back to the hotel. Bed. Luminal. Sleep. Just sleep – no dreams' (15). In addition to her daily itinerary, the significance of inhibiting her dreams through Luminal[466] is an unequivocal attempt to keep her unconscious at a distance. As dreams are amongst the most prominent and useful methods of accessing the unconscious, it is telling that Sasha actively avoids hers. In addition to blocking out her dreams, Sasha is meticulous about filling the time and keeping to her schedule throughout the narrative.

> The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance—no gaps. No trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting up in your head, no 'Here this happened, here that happened'. Above all, no crying in public, no crying at all if you can help it (14).

The gramophone record is reminiscent of her 'film mind' – both of which Sasha actively tries to avoid as much as possible by minimizing 'aimlessness' and free time. Gardiner observes that such tactical arrangements serve 'to fill in the present and repress memory

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[465] Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 66.
[466] The proprietary name for phenobarbital, a narcotic sedative commonly used as an anticonvulsant in the treatment of epilepsy. ('Phenobarbital, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/142324> [accessed 18 May 2015].)

of the past',[467] as gaps in time and thought represent very real threats that must be guarded against. When she cannot avoid these by means of distraction, Sasha 'sleeps, drinks or otherwise anesthetizes herself, immobilized by perceived and actual threats to her wellbeing'.[468]

In addition to more self-evident and active instances of repression such as these, the return of repressed material is present on a larger, textual level as well. As the battle between the heroine's conscious and unconscious wages on for the first and second sections of the novel, Angier notes that Part Three is comprised purely of the memories and feelings Sasha attempts to shield herself from:

> Like all good poetry, the telling of *Good Morning, Midnight* mirrors what is told. Sasha is trapped and divided: and so is her narrative. She is dazed by drink, besieged and battered by memories: and so is her language. Her memories flash through the narrative just as they do her experience; so do her dreams, fantasies, fears, images, jokes. Memory takes over more and more, despite her resistance: and so it takes over the narrative too, until Part Three is memory only.[469]

This textual return to her past – which includes the narrative of her marriage, pregnancy, the death of her son, and her husband's abandonment – suggests that, despite her best efforts at repression, the narrator's past has returned to haunt her. Part Three emphasises both the power of disenfranchised memories and the futility of attempting to avoid or disown them. Part Three of the novel also contains, as Angier points out, a 'poignant […] story-within-a-story'.[470] Following the death of her son and immediately preceding her husband's abandonment, Rhys includes a brief scene in which the heroine and her husband attend a party, which Angier suggests contains displaced evidence of guilt regarding the death of the child.

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[467] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 238.
[468] Czarnecki, 'Sad', pp. 68-9.
[469] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 386.
[470] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 387.

The cork of a champagne bottle pops. Why worry? Our luck has changed. The fat man and I are in a corner by ourselves. He says: 'Life is too awful. Do you know that story about the man who loved a woman who was married to somebody else, and she fell ill? And he didn't dare go and ask about her because the husband suspected her and hated him. So he just hung about the house and watched. And all the time he couldn't make up his mind whether he'd be a coward if he went and asked to see her or whether he'd be a coward if he didn't. And then one day he went and asked, and she was dead. Doesn't that make you laugh? She was dead, you see, and he had never sent one word. That's an old story, but doesn't it make you laugh? It might be true, that story, mightn't it?' (117).

This story-within-a-story is indeed rife with an undercurrent of both ambivalence and guilt, as the unnamed woman dies in hospital while her loved one neither comes to her side or asks after her. Angier proposes that the unconscious material of this passage – particularly the experience of guilt – belongs to Rhys, rather than to Sasha. Though either is possible, Angier's argument ventures into the territory of psychobiography; I would argue where the narrative sense of guilt emanates from matters less than the fact that it is included in the text and kept carefully shrouded from entering either Rhys's or Sasha's narrative directly.

The remainder of this brief scene entails a second story-within-a-story, which also bears markers of repressed material. The subsequent tale the fat man recounts to Sasha is about his business partner's wife, who was so unhappy she attempted suicide, but failed, leaving her recovering in hospital from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The fat man tells the narrator that at first, the woman's husband was terribly distraught:

He was in an awful state, thinking how unhappy she must have been to try to kill herself. But that was a week ago, and now he's just made up his mind that it's all a nuisance and that she made a fool of herself, and he stopped feeling sorry for her. Isn't life droll? (118)

Though initially both the unnamed woman's suicide attempt and the pain that brought it about are taken seriously by her husband, within a week she is considered a 'nuisance',

mocked by her own husband, and her pain trivialised as the topic of cocktail party conversation. In both the story of the dead woman and the suicidal woman, the fat man emphasises the humour in each situation, suggesting society does not tend to take matters of emotional suffering very seriously. The immediate thoughts that Rhys ascribes to Sasha following the fat man's monologue are also significant in relation to the cycle of trauma and repression:

> Well, there you are. It's not that these things happen or even that one survives them, but what makes life strange is that they are forgotten. Even the one moment that you thought was your eternity fades out and is forgotten and dies. This is what makes life so droll – the way you forget, and every day is a new day, and there's hope for everybody, hooray… (118).

Sasha seems able to identify with a type of emotional pain that Rhys suggests society quickly dismisses. The passage concludes on a bleak note with the final insistence that 'there's hope for everybody, hooray…', which is characteristic of Rhys's darkly ironic humour in her fourth novel. Rhys's text suggests that for women like those described here and for Sasha, there is very little hope indeed. The observation that such defining moments merely fade away and are forgotten (or repressed) is rendered almost as disturbing as the actual trauma itself.

Several aspects of *Good Morning, Midnight* have thus far been outlined which contribute to its status as 'an alogical text',[471] particularly Rhys's representation of trauma and repression, neither of which follows a linear, logical, or quantifiable trajectory. The language that Rhys employs throughout the novel mirrors Sasha's state of inner confusion and psychological turmoil as well, again undermining the possibility of a 'reasoned, intellectual understanding'[472] of the text. Rhys develops and accomplishes this

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[471] Simpson, p. 90.
[472] Ibid.

parallel in several ways. First, there is a clear stylistic preference throughout the text for short words (often one syllable) and short sentences (often one word). Much like *Voyage in the Dark*, passages in *Good Morning, Midnight* typically come in short bursts and are comprised of words as short as possible: 'In and out of the room – Lise, Paulette, Jean. Alfred the Turk. I watch them, and I never quite know them, but I love Lise' (111). Most of the words here are one syllable, pared down to the bare minimum in Rhys's typical economic style that does not waste a single letter.

In addition to style of the novel itself, writing that unnecessarily emphasises 'long words' is mocked in a brief textual anecdote about 'a very rich woman' (139) that Sasha once worked for as a scribe, writing out inane stories that the woman would envision. When the woman's husband expressed his dissatisfaction with the work Sasha produced, it was because he thought the writing should contain 'long words' rather than 'words of one syllable' which get 'monotonous' (139). Sasha recalls her attempt to oblige him as she reflects on her task of writing about a Persian garden using the longest words possible:

> … Persian garden. Long words. Chiaroscuro? Translucent? … I bet he'd like cataclysmal 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…. (140).

Rhys's own style – and the heroine's in this scene – is very much the opposite of the rich couple, who Rhys portrays as Sasha's opposites: wealthy members of organised society who use ordinary language to impress rather than to find common ground or make meaningful connections with others. Simpson notes that 'this commentary on the absurdity of a Sybaritic narrative that is as overwrought as the sentiments it expresses […] tacitly invites her reader to note the effective silences and restraint of *Good*

Morning, Midnight',[473] which more compellingly demonstrate her characters' inner worlds.

The ability of literature to convey meaning in spite of its reliance on language and the Symbolic brings up a crucial point of ambivalence in Rhys's writing. Angier describes Rhys as 'a writer who distrusted words. She used the fewest and the shortest ones she could, as though she were trying not to use words at all'.[474] Instead, Angier argues, the author 'put[s] her meaning in what she does not say'[475] and as such her novels must be read with attention to 'looks' and 'feelings', rather than 'words, which belong to the powerful'.[476] The honing of this aesthetic is perceptible throughout Rhys's oeuvre, but is particularly apparent in Sasha's relationship to language compared to that of Rhys's previous heroines. Marya, for instance, is portrayed as passive and unwilling to speak; her constant silence and her portentous advice, '[d]on't say anything' (73), renders her unable to take ownership of her own decisions. As she remains uninitiated into the Symbolic, Marya must rely on those who are, such as Stephan or Heidler, and in the process loses her voice and her autonomy. Maurel argues that while 'Marya is a blank page in the sense that she is passively written upon, "authored" by those who hold the pen',[477] this dynamic shifts in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and in Rhys's subsequent texts.

> Rhys turns the trope into an instrument of dissent and a defiant statement. If Julia Martin is a blank page, it is because she will not be written upon. Blankness then opens up a world of infinite possibility […]. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*

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[473] Ibid., p. 108.
[474] Angier, Introduction, p. viii.
[475] Ibid., pp. viii-ix.
[476] Ibid., p. ix.
[477] Maurel, p. 28.

elaborates another conception of blankness as a potent act of resistance meant to circumvent semantic entrapment.[478]

Following this change in Julia's narrative, the linguistic binaries that structure Rhys's third novel and Anna's narrative give way completely at the end of *Voyage in the Dark*. Thus, by her fourth novel, Rhys is freer to explore the deeper recesses of trauma beyond the Symbolic. As each novel relies on language, what seems to differentiate Rhys's later work is the manner or style in which language is used. By drawing on literary tools such as imagery, repetition, and metaphor, *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are more often able to sidestep the parameters set by the Symbolic, if only for a moment, by using language in a manner other than that of the dominant discourse. By using words carefully, purposefully, and evocatively Rhys manages to transcend the boundary from the everyday 'social world and its historical contexts' to a place of the mysterious and 'numinous'[479] in which her writing is able to able to convey something more meaningful.

Rhys's tendency towards brevity is a familiar facet of her oeuvre, famously learned from the author's mentor, Ford Madox Ford; however, it is not the only device that renders the text 'alogical'. This tool is magnified by several additional narrative devices employed throughout the novel, perhaps the subtlest of which is a linguistic mimesis of sorts, in which a circularity of language causes objects to collapse back on themselves, rendering them illogical, if not completely meaningless. The following example from Part Three of *Good Morning, Midnight* illustrates both this circularity and the disintegration of such order.

> Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel. To the Hotel of Arrival, the Hotel of Departure, the Hotel of the Future, the Hotel of Martinique and the Universe. … Back to the hotel without a name in the street without a name. You press the

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[478] Ibid.
[479] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 196.

button and the door opens. This is the Hotel Without-a-Name in the Street Without-a-Name, and the clients have no names, no faces. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room. The room says: 'Quite like old times. Yes? … No? … Yes' (120).

The passage reads like an unravelling; the narration starts out neatly and safely ('Eat. Drink. Walk. March. Back to the hotel') and then begins to come undone until the heroine is overwhelmed by language. Nearly everything in the passage is in some way circular. The return to the hotel semantically appears in the style of a march, a procession of single-word sentences, one after the other; the hotel is named and renamed until the name itself finally disappears into irrelevance – it is, after all, 'the same room' no matter where it is located; even the conversation with the room regarding whether the present is like the past starts and finishes at the same point. In instances such as these, the circularity of Rhys's language either leads nowhere or back to its starting point, thwarting the natural succession of language that leads from signifier to signified and undermining ordinary language.

In addition to the author's proclivity for brevity and the linguistic circularity she employs, Rhys utilises a third tool that works to disrupt the signifying chain. The movement between different languages in *Good Morning, Midnight* is a constant reminder that the Symbolic fails to capture, in a meaningful way, the depth and complexity of the Imaginary. Erica Johnson argues that '[t]he complexity of Sasha's cultural identity emerges most clearly in her use of different languages, and her frequent estrangement from English, her first language'.[480] Johnson cites a passage from the novel wherein Sasha meets two kind Russian men who ask her why she looks so sad; Johnson is particularly mindful of Sasha's subsequent internal association of the word 'tristesse',

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[480] Johnson, E., *Home,* p. 44.

or sadness, and her movement between languages. 'Tristesse, what a nice word! Tristesse, lointaine, langsam, forlorn, forlorn….' (40). While the narrator recognises the words to describe sadness are 'nice', none of them – in any language – can capture the true melancholy of her experience about which the two men inquire.

> Translating sadness into distance into slowness into forlornness, Sasha skips through linguistic registers of national alliance, a displaced traveler through language as well as through countries not her own. The meaning of her original 'sadness' shifts as she reflects on her situation in French, German, and English, respectively, producing an overall sentiment of stagnation and alienation from a single word.[481]

Johnson's reading discerns the importance of translating and the discrepancies that arise between translations and cultures, which is subtly built into the fabric of Sasha's meditation on 'tristesse'. The difficulty of connecting with others via the signifiers of ordinary language is therefore exacerbated when there are multiple registers of language at play.

Another passage that similarly invokes foreign language as a narrative tool occurs in the heroine's horribly uncomfortable recollection of being called into the office of her former boss, the aptly named Mr Blank. Imagining he is about to inquire about her foreign language skills, she panics:

> I at once make up my mind that he wants to find out if I can speak German. All the little German I know flies out of my head. Jesus, Help me! Ja, ja, nein, nein, was kostet es, Wien ist eine sehr schön, mein Herr, ich habe meinen Blumen vergessen, aus meinen grossen Schmerzen, homo homini lupus, aus meinen grossen Schmerzen mach ich die kleinen Leider, homo homini lupus (I've got that one, anyway), aus meinen grossen Schmerzen homo hominid doh ré me fah soh la ti doh…. (21).

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[481] Ibid.

In this thought process, English, German, Latin, and musical tones collide.[482] As Sasha

attempts to connect and organise what she wishes to convey, words and languages merge

and are rendered meaningless and ultimately she cannot deliver what she presumes Mr

Blank wants.

> The novel does not imply that Sasha is silenced – rather, she is unable to articulate
> the particular perspective that the novel provides readers through her focalised
> narrative. 'I didn't even think it', she acknowledges. Her frustration and
> humiliation are experienced affectively – she blushes. At least in the moment in
> which she feels shame, however, she lacks the ability to put her feelings into
> words. The text marks the gendering of labour exploitation by marking the
> inability of Sasha – as a victim of it – to voice her experience directly. Indeed, this
> becomes a primary mode of signalling to readers how exploitation is experienced
> as an affective phenomenon: felt but unexpressed, referenced but not
> articulated.[483]

Ordinary language, this time in multiple registers, once again fails Rhys's heroine, who

eventually regresses to a preverbal state of musical scales. Johnson points out that

'although English appears to be her first language, Sasha approaches English as she does

other languages: as a tenuous system in which signifier and signified may or may not be

linked'[484]; throughout *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys seems keen to draw attention to

the instances in which they are not. Johnson suggests that Sasha's 'traverse across a

modern language, an ancient language, and finally the tone syllables that precede

language altogether also charts the movement of linguistic consciousness back through

time'[485] and connects her to a preverbal language she later describes as 'a language that is

no language. But I understand it' (50). The suggestion that a non-language is more

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[482] The inclusion of lines from Heinrich Heine's poem, 'aus meinen grossen' and 'Schmerzen mach ich die kleinen Lieder', which are scattered throughout, reference the speaker's pain and allude to Sasha's. (The lines translate roughly to 'Out of my great hurts / I make little songs'.)

[483] Su, John, 'The Empire of Affect: Reading Rhys After Postcolonial Theory', in *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First Century Approaches*, ed. by Erica Johnson and Patricia Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 171–89 (p. 176).

[484] Johnson, E., 'Errance', p. 40.

[485] Johnson, E., *Home,* p. 45.

comprehensible than an actual language, such as English, German, or Latin, both echoes the fantasy of nonverbal communication – 'that communication can and will occur in some blissful, nonverbal mode'[486] – and expresses a deep distrust of ordinary language.

This attitude in regard to language is reminiscent of Rhys's earlier texts; however, in *Good Morning, Midnight* there is less rage and anger about the failure of language than resigned disappointment, again indicating an intertextual progression. Rhys's use of foreign language and preverbal sounds seems to suggest that all languages – not merely English – are flawed, or at least inexact, by their very nature. This idea is also present in the passage in which the heroine describes her belief that words and thoughts are chained and weighted:

> 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…. (88).

The shackles and bonds of Rhys's imagery are reminiscent of a restrained prisoner, though in this case what is obstructed is language that accurately reflects Sasha's internal experience. Gardiner observes that in passages such as these, Rhys demonstrates both an acknowledgement of her character's predicament and a textual solution. 'The pressures of dominant definitions are extremely compelling. At times Sasha tries to be "extremely respectable" herself. At such times she tries to behave like other people, that is, to behave like a cliché', but the cliché is exposed as 'a prison, and every time Sasha attempts to find love or freedom, she flies into its bars.'[487] Unlike Rhys's previous heroines however, Rhys's fourth protagonist manages to circumvent language and 'breaks the bars

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[486] Simpson, p. 107.
[487] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 240.

separating the fiction from its audience, the author from the character'.[488] Simpson

suggests that by 'refusing to align herself with either realm' Sasha is able to '[move] in

narrative modes between language and nonlanguage; as narrator she negotiates both the

Imaginary and the Symbolic'.[489]

Gaps, ellipses, spaces, sections, and the considerable gulf between what is thought

and what is spoken throughout the text repeatedly demonstrate that what is absent is as

significant as that which is present. As such, absence itself takes on a much more

meaningful role in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Simpson suggests that, more than Rhys's

previous novels, the style of Rhys's fourth text '[invites] a close attentiveness to echoes

of the unsaid'[490] and to that which is missing or absent. What to make of these various

gaps and spaces, however, is far less obvious than the prevalence of their occurrence.

Gardiner suggests that the ellipses in Rhys's work read 'as though she is quoting herself

incompletely, deliberately leaving gaps that we must fill in'.[491] Gardiner's argument takes

the inconsistencies of the novel at face value, suggesting the text is 'colloquially precise

in its vagueness'[492] and there is nothing to indicate that Rhys's style represents anything

other than an accurate reflection of colloquial speech. Other critics, however, insist the

gaps and echoes of the text bear a more significant meaning. From a psychoanalytic

perspective, for example, Simpson argues that the constant 'narrative pauses and

stammerings'[493] of the text leave a space in which 'the Other of the text' 'may

emerge'.[494] Simpson's idea that the text allows space for the Other is evidenced not only

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[488] Ibid.
[489] Simpson, p. 107.
[490] Ibid., p. 87.
[491] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 236.
[492] Ibid.
[493] Simpson, p. 107.
[494] Ibid., p. 91.

in literal textual anomalies such as gaps and ellipses but in the humanity and curiosity of the Other/other that permeates and defines Rhys's fourth novel. If the Other is indeed located in an echo or a gap, beyond ordinary language, Rhys's heroine at last seems interested in exploring what this otherness might mean or entail. This position is evidenced in the text when Sasha muses that the kind, 'melancholy' Russian she meets 'seems more the echo of a thing than the thing itself' (56). Though Sasha is unsure what 'the echo' may be, there is something desperately important about that which is beyond the 'thing itself'.

Over the course of her first four novels, Rhys breaks down the idea of loss to reveal the fundamental and irrecoverable absence at its core. Because the language in *Good Morning, Midnight* tends to either break down or circle back on itself, the text continually returns to an aesthetic defined by emptiness, absence, and lack. Indeed, throughout Rhys's oeuvre there is a sense that something very important is missing that is always just beyond each heroines' reach. In *Quartet*, this is portrayed by the gaping hole Heidler leaves when he abandons Marya; in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, absence is represented as a missing moment of epiphany and the hole left in the mother's wake; while in *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna acutely experiences absence as the lack of home and national identity. Each novel prior to *Good Morning, Midnight* represents loss as an object that can be represented by a signifier or series of signifiers; not until Rhys's fourth novel is the subject of loss itself – indefinable, irreparable, unfathomable – so openly acknowledged. While Rhys's previous heroines continuously searched for some 'thing' that did not materialise, Sasha seems to accept that it never will. There is thus a stoical acceptance of loss inherent in *Good Morning, Midnight* that is absent in Rhys's other

texts. Unlike her predecessors, Renk suggests that Sasha 'realizes there is no one and nothing who can or will help her […]. She then concludes that her consolation is continual suffering. […] No one, no God, no human intervenes, her breasts dry up and her baby dies'.[495] While Renk's summation of the narrative may seem quite bleak, the awareness of the ubiquity of loss leads both to an acceptance of transience and a more psychically mature position of mourning.

Focusing so intently on loss may, at first, seem truly sombre – for Sasha to resignedly accept it as her fate, perhaps darkly nihilistic – and yet there are many cues throughout the narrative that point to a hopeful resolution, particularly in a renewed capacity for connection. Hidden in and amongst the many relational ruptures of the novel are multiple instances of attempts at communication and a burgeoning desire to build new relationships. These are present most poignantly in the connections made throughout the text, both amongst other characters and with the reading audience. When the novel opens, the narrator is utterly alone; she repeatedly insists she has 'no friends' (131) and is portrayed as alienated 'from her relatives, who wash their hands of her once and for all'.[496] Czarnecki suggests that the implications of Sasha's familial abandonment suggest that because she has 'no one to whom she can articulate her feelings, she holds them within her psyche close to the surface, where they turn over helplessly'.[497] Moran further explains the effect her family's rejection seems to have on Sasha's desire to have friends, loved ones, and even acquaintances:

> Haunted by memories of rejection, loss and abandonment, Sasha tries to become an automaton, immune to the threat of further humiliations; she imagines any

[495] Renk, Kathleen, '"I Can Make a Hell of Heaven: A Heaven of Hell" Jean Rhys's Heresy', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3 (2003), 143–50, (p. 147).
[496] Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 66.
[497] Ibid., p. 76.

future human involvement as opening her up to the possibility of drowning in a dark river of pain.[498]

As the story unfolds, however, Sasha meets multiple people with whom she engages, including two Russians, Serge the painter, and René. Although the heroine struggles to connect to others and her relationship with René ends badly, an effort is eventually made to engage with and understand others, eventually evidenced by the famously obscure final scene of the novel.

The reader-text relationship takes on particular importance here as well, for as readers we are privy to the heroine's internality. Parsons suggests that Rhys's style, particularly the use of interior monologue, intends for readers to experience and share the protagonists' 'feelings of alienation and incomprehension',[499] in turn giving these feelings an outlet by which they might be unburdened. Unlike the more unsettling reader-text dynamic that has characterised Rhys's previous novels, including the 'masochistic aesthetic' and 'sadistic elements' of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*,[500] the reader-text relationship of *Good Morning, Midnight* is significantly less strained, more congenial, and is imbued with a sense of familiarity and even kinship as the narrator more forthrightly acknowledges the audience. Gardiner writes extensively on the reader-text dynamic in Rhys's fourth novel and argues that while initially 'it is not clear […] who is talking to whom', it soon becomes apparent that Rhys's 'readers are implicated'[501] in the construction of the narrative, present both to fill in the gaps of the text and witness the suffering of its protagonist. Gardiner observes that throughout the text, 'the narrator continues talking to us, turning out to us from the fictional mirror with the monitory,

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[498] Moran, 'Feelings', p. 193.
[499] Parsons, p. 140.
[500] Smith, R.M., p. 130.
[501] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 236.

"mind you."'[502] Gardiner and Simpson both suggest that the basis of the reader-text

relationship is founded on the need for a witness to help bear the speaker's suffering.

Simpson argues that throughout Rhys's fiction words are invariably 'the guarantors of an

absence that is manifestly also present, and they trace a "nothingness" by seeking in the

other, the auditor, an answering validation as a remedy for the speaker's sense of

emptiness and need'.[503] The gaps and silences of the novel, therefore, serve a dual

purpose: they speak to the inherent 'nothingness' of the narrator's experience, while also

seeking in the reading 'other' a resolution to the experience of emptiness. In other words,

'the desire for an audience is born out of the sense of existential aloneness',[504] which the

reader is meant to partially ameliorate. Because Rhys's heroine assumes and 'speaks to,

our faithful, patient, and continued silent presence',[505] the engaged reader may find

herself in the unique position of both witness and silent collaborator.

This reliance on the reader has multiple implications. First, it again collapses the

distinctions of opposites, this time breaking down the traditional external vantage point

readers typically enjoy. As such, the reader is forced from a comfortable position of

observation to a more active role requiring both empathy and self-reflection. In contrast

to most authors, who keep their readers at a distance, Gardiner observes that

> Rhys will not let us save ourselves from her hero's pain by ironic distance or
> superior pity […]. She repeatedly enjambs the safe distinctions we try to maintain
> between ourselves and her characters. They are neurotic; we are sane. They drink;
> we stay sober. Yet perhaps we too have arranged our little lives, and she forces us
> to recognize the kinship between our irony and Sasha's.[506]

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[502] Ibid., p. 237.
[503] Simpson, p. 90.
[504] Ibid., p. 107.
[505] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 237.
[506] Ibid., p. 247.

The reader must not only experience Sasha's painful reality, 'floundering amidst the streets and rooms of Paris',[507] but also must examine his or her own in the process. Gardiner's description of the reader's initial distance and eventual association with Rhys's heroine is somewhat reminiscent of an analytic relationship, which is precisely the dynamic Simpson argues is engendered by the text.

> Because Sasha's narrative is incongruous and disjointed, it requires of its audience the suspension of disbelief and open willingness that (ideally) characterize an analyst's stance in relation to the free associations and dream reportage of her analysand. In working subtextually to identify the sources of Sasha Jensen's difficulties, the reader of *Good Morning, Midnight* must also listen closely, like an analyst, to the reverberations of its silence. I stress the analogy between reading and analysis because this novel, more than any other fiction that Rhys wrote, relies for its effects on interchanges between the narrator's and the reader's states of unconscious awareness.[508]

As such, the act of reading Rhys's fourth novel is an active rather than a passive experience.

> Sasha's narration speaks the preeminent dilemma of expression; the reader, like the analyst attuned to her analysand's verbal difficulty, is presented with multiple vagueness and insufficiencies in Sasha's language. As she narrates, Sasha demonstrates the tension that inheres in constructing the words to be read by another that thereby mark one's self-alienation.[509]

Like the analyst, the reader is not only the witness of Sasha's traumatic flashbacks, but must also remain aware of the subtext, silences, and gaps housed within the narrative in order to piece together an understanding of her experience. An informed reading of the novel, therefore, requires patience and empathy, as well as an adjustment to Rhys's sparse and realistic style that underscores the difficulty of communication. The reader-text relationship in *Good Morning, Midnight* is distinctive from Rhys's previous novels

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[507] Parsons, p. 140.
[508] Simpson, p. 89.
[509] Ibid., p. 91.

in that the relationship is both recognised and utilised; the text itself is created in the process as the reader fills in the gaps left by the narrator.

This collaboration between text and reader is indicative of a previously latent desire for interaction that is also present amongst the characters of the novel. Initially, Sasha is described as content to be alone in her 'arranged […] little life' (9) and, at times, she even seems to prefer her isolation and solitude, exemplified in her memory of secluding herself following her family's aforementioned abandonment:

> Well, that was the end of me, the real end. Two-pound-ten every Tuesday and a room off the Gray's Inn Road. Saved, rescued and with my place to hide in – what more did I want? I crept in and hid. The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang. Now I no longer wish to be loved, beautiful, happy or successful. I want one thing and one thing only – to be left alone. No more pawings, no more pryings – *leave me alone….* (They'll do that all right, my dear.) (37).

Ostensibly, Sasha has purposefully isolated herself, having crawled knowingly into a nondescript hotel room to a life so solitary it resembles death. Importantly, however, this scene exists in Sasha's memory of England rather than her current narrative in Paris. Despite her supposed desire to be alone, throughout the course of the text Rhys's heroine continues to make connections. These attempts, unfortunately, are continually thwarted by various difficulties, chief among them the barrier of language. The continued problem of how to communicate one's story with another human being is addressed throughout the novel and is particularly apparent in Sasha's relationship with René.

The relationship between the Sasha and René is a complex one that addresses the fundamental impossibility of truly knowing the other. When the heroine first meets René, her first thought is to exact her revenge on him in response to the many times she has been let down by others. She softens towards him quickly, however, and the two become friendly, exchanging stories and commiserating about the difficulties of life. This kinship

leads some critics, such as Davidson, to suggest that Sasha and René are, in fact, simply reflections of each other.[510] Gardiner, however, contends that such a simplistic observation does not capture the entirety of the dynamic Rhys intended and that while, in many ways, René is 'Sasha's double',[511] he is also very much 'her opposite […]. He is a dangerous magic mirror into which she looks, her antidote and her oppressor'.[512] The concurrent sense of familiarity and otherness is an unfamiliar dynamic in Rhys's fiction, where characters are forever considered radically separate and distinct; René is the same 'in that he is poor'[513] but as Gardiner points out, he is also male and therefore radically different. The gap left by both critics is perhaps the most interesting parallel between the two characters: René is a gigolo, a point that, if reading *Good Morning, Midnight* intertextually, becomes highly significant. The role of prostitution has figured prominently in Rhys's previous texts, but for the first time within this dynamic, a female protagonist is on the opposite side of the interaction, in a position of power, the one with the 'voice that gives orders' (151). Most critics focus on the penultimate scene of the novel (in which René nearly rapes Sasha) and forgo a discussion of the relationship that precedes it. However, it is imperative to consider the circumstances under which the relationship develops in order to understand how it ends.

The penultimate and final scenes of the novel are perhaps the most renowned and certainly the most critically scrutinised pages of the text. As with her previous works, there is no deviation from the ambiguity with which Rhys ends her narrative, rendering a definitive reading of the novel's conclusion difficult. After the heroine and the gigolo

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[510] Davidson, 'Dark', p. 359.
[511] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 242.
[512] Ibid.
[513] Ibid.

spend their evening 'jabbering' (132), joking, and reminiscing about a shared

acquaintance, he walks her to her hotel, lets her go upstairs, and then follows her to her

room. At first Sasha is elated, but quickly takes offence at something René says and

requests that he leave. He refuses and, before she knows it, they are 'struggling on the

small bed' (151): 'he is lying on me, holding down my two spread arms. I can't move.

My dress is torn open at the neck. But I have my knees firmly clamped together' (151). In

the end, René does not force Sasha to have sex with him and instead leaves quietly after

she asks him to take one thousand francs and save himself the trouble of raping her. He

barely speaks and it is unclear whether he is offended, turned off, or simply done toying

with her. After realising he has not taken her money, Sasha is crushed that he has gone

and silently pleads for him to return, repeating '[c]ome back, come back, come back…'

(157). René never does return; instead, the dreaded *commis voyageur* from the next room

enters.

> He stands there, looking down at me. Not sure of himself, his mean eyes
> flickering. He doesn't say anything. Thank God, he doesn't say anything. I look
> straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last
> time. For the last time…. Then I put my arms round him and pull him down on to
> the bed, saying: 'Yes – yes – yes….' (159).

The final refrain of Sasha's yeses mimics Molly Bloom's famous monologue in Joyce's

Ulysses, but in a singularly bizarre context that has continued to confound readers and

critics alike.

The final scene of *Good Morning, Midnight* is unique in a variety of respects and

readers are understandably divided regarding the meaning of the narrative's ambiguous

closing. Particular critical discrepancies arise around whether Sasha's final act of

willingly pulling the *commis* into her bed represents a triumph or a defeat, while other

critics argue that the act is representative either of meaninglessness, death, or disappointment. While recognising the difficulty of ascertaining the definitive meaning of Rhys's text, Czarnecki interprets the heroine's final act as negative, arguing that unlike the Joycean scene Rhys mimics, 'Sasha's embrace of the *commis* is no epiphany akin to those in high modernist texts. It is death-like, manifest in the *commis*'s pale shroud and stiff limbs as she lies there' as if dead.[514] As such, Czarnecki suggests that the repeated yeses are not indicative of 'assurance and resolution but emptiness'.[515] Konzett similarly suggests that the novel's ending merely 'parodies a redemptive modernism' that 'should not be construed as more than a deflationary closure'.[516] The conclusions of both Czarnecki's and Konzett's readings are neither overstated nor necessarily inaccurate, however, both interpretations do follow a somewhat linear analysis: if the *commis* is despised, and the novel concludes with Sasha pulling him into her bed, then Sasha's narrative is, by extension, either disappointing, empty, or meaningless. It is an easy logic to follow, but perhaps too literal and reductionist to apply so strictly to Rhys's work.

A more optimistic reading of the novel's final scene is held by several critics, including Davidson, who states that while many see a scene that 'constitute[s] Sasha's most humiliating defeat',[517] he reads the heroine's final act as a 'victory'.[518] Underpinning Davidson's argument is a more psychological reading that recognises the theme of union with the other in the final act of the novel.

> [Sasha] recognizes the figure in the mirror, the commonality of all ostensible antagonists. She thereby judges her own previous judging to see that she and *commis* are equally – the wording here is significant – 'another poor devil of a

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[514] Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 80.
[515] Ibid., p. 71.
[516] Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms*, p. 160.
[517] Davidson, 'Dark', p. 349.
[518] Ibid., p. 362.

human being'. It is a simple enough recognition but under the circumstances it is also transcendent.[519]

Davidson repeatedly refers to this scene and the novel's final act as 'transcendent'[520] on the basis of Sasha's recognition of herself in the *commis* and of their common humanity. (We may recall here Naipaul's statement that *Good Morning, Midnight* was Rhys's most 'humane' novel.[521]) Simpson notes that throughout the novel, the *commis* is depicted 'as gravely threatening and, most notably, unavoidable',[522] while Czarnecki observes that Sasha 'does not know who or what he is, only that he frightens her, peering out his door and hissing insults'.[523] By accepting the *commis*, 'Sasha's final act […] brings oppositions into contact'[524] and '[s]he accepts the burdens of a full humanity',[525] however unpleasant or strange it may seem. As Simpson argues, the ending of *Good Morning, Midnight* can be read as 'accepting into consciousness, at last, the trauma that she has repressed; and perhaps she is even ready to forgive'[526] those who have hurt her. Renk, as well, suggests that the novel's meaning hinges on Sasha's transformation, which is marked by acceptance and wisdom.[527]

A more balanced theoretical stance lies in the approach adopted by affect theorists, such as Ardoin, who recognise the difficulty of reconciling Sasha's actions with her feelings for the commis.

> The revisioning and opening-up work of the later cycle forces us to ask of the protagonist's decision to enter into the unhappiness of a doomed relationship at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight, is* that unexpected? *Is* it the wrong choice?

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[519] Ibid., p. 363.
[520] Ibid., pp. 353, 363.
[521] Naipaul, p. 56.
[522] Simpson, p. 98.
[523] Czarnecki, 'Sad', p. 77.
[524] Ibid., p. 78.
[525] Gardiner, 'Good Morning', p. 249.
[526] Simpson, p. 99.
[527] Renk, p. 148.

Or is happiness – as well as our reasons for choosing or refusing it and our proclivities for even recognising (in fact, insisting upon) that choice – more complex than even the earlier book imagined? Is our world shaped by expectation or experience? Can we *choose* to be unhappy? Why would we think to do so?[528]

Instead of prescribing an answer, Ardoin poses a series of questions around the method and motives for actively embracing unhappiness – a position that is central to the study of affect theory. Emery suggests Rhys's ending to *Good Morning, Midnight* purposefully negates the social expectation of happiness, disclosing 'Rhys's critique of happiness as social duty'.[529] The disjointed culmination of the novel indeed feels less jarring in the world Ardoin and Emery describe, where Rhys's character actively and knowingly embraces unhappiness for the purpose of social commentary.

The binary evoked throughout Rhys's novel between Sasha and the deathly figure of the *commis* is undermined in the novel's closing scene, in which Sasha welcomes the man that she hates and fears into her bed. By joining her heroine in the most intimate way with the *commis voyageur*, Linett suggests that Sasha is able to 'endure the horror he represents'.[530] The *commis* is variously represented by a priest figure, a ghost, and even a complementary image of Sasha's dead baby,[531] each of whom is shrouded in white and in some way connected with death. The breakdown of the binary herein, however, is not as straightforward as a rupture between life and death. Because the *commis*, as Linett points out, 'does not intend to kill her… it is unclear in what symbolic sense Sasha can be said to embrace death'.[532] Linett's argument, and mine, instead interprets the acceptance of

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[528] Ardoin, p. 247.
[529] Emery, Mary Lou, 'Foreword', in *Rhys Matters: New Critical Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), pp. xi–xiii (p. xiii).
[530] Linett, 'New Words', p. 456
[531] Ibid., p. 452.
[532] Ibid., p. 457.

the *commis* as an acceptance of that which was previously denounced, avoided or

unwanted.

> [W]hat happens at the end of the novel is that Sasha is unable to continue her project of 'arranging her little life' so as to suppress her painful memories: conscious ones of losing her baby and other losses and humiliations, as well as repressed memories that half-surface in moments of temporal confusion and dissociation…. She begins to relive the traumatic past she has been dodging throughout the novel. Releasing her hold on the boundaries that are supposed to keep her safe but continually break down anyway, Sasha submits to the fated repetition of trauma.[533]

The 'return of trauma'[534] here – which is evinced in the steadily increasing return of

repressed memories throughout the narrative and which culminates in the bedroom scene

with the *commis* – marks an extremely important turning point in Rhys's oeuvre. Similar

to the manner in which *Voyage in the Dark* concludes with the breakdown of 'home' and

'not-home', *Good Morning, Midnight* breaks down the divide between what is

psychologically permissible and what is kept at bay, thus enabling the conscious and

repressed elements of its heroines psyche to coexist. 'Sasha's acceptance of the *commis*

represents submission, a capitulation not to death but to the reenactments of trauma, to

the endless cycles of pain within which she is trapped.'[535] The end of Rhys's fourth novel

marks the first narrative occasion in which a Rhys heroine embraces and accepts her

traumatic past, paving the way for her masterpiece, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and a more

conscious return to the previously repressed elements of the Caribbean and the maternal.

While there is perhaps no universal reading or conclusive way to interpret the

culmination of the novel, the majority of critics are reluctant to approach the ending in a

purely nihilistic way; most agree that the ambiguity of the ending communicates

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[533] Ibid.
[534] Ibid.
[535] Ibid., p. 458.

something, even if they do not agree what that might be. And yet the beauty of Rhys's endings lies precisely in its unwavering ambiguity: where 'Yes – yes – yes….' might equally mean 'No – no – no….', 'Yes – no – maybe….', or something else entirely. Despite his strong opinion regarding the last scene of the novel, Davidson acknowledges Sasha's final words are 'an ambiguous affirmation' which could equally mean 'yes to the morning and yes to the night'.[536] Perhaps to propound any definitive reading of the novel's ending is inadvisable and not in keeping with Rhys's artistic purpose; and yet the instinct to make sense of Rhys's work remains. Czarnecki argues that this impulse to assign meaning leaves critics 'divided regarding Sasha's actions, for while we laud modernist literary texts for their ambiguity an open-endedness, deemed representative of human and narrative complexity, the impulse persists to find closure'.[537] Simpson also affirms the difficulty engendered by the text's ambiguity and notes that, '[f]or the reader of *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha's final words punctuate the entire experience of reading this novel: it is enigmatic, it is multilayered, and the narrator will not assist in providing a clear and singular "meaning"'.[538] The value of 'oppositional texts', such as Rhys's, in which the narrative is 'a problem without a solution, or whose solution is dissolution',[539] lies in the singular ability of such texts not only to elude finite interpretations, but also to challenge the reader to assess their own reactions, preconceptions, and beliefs both about the text and their own experience. 'These texts are negative, anticathartic, and politically ineffectual, defying the idea that pleasure – or

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[536] Davidson, 'Dark', p. 364.
[537] Czarnecki, 'Sad', pp. 76-7.
[538] Simpson, p. 99.
[539] Chambers, Ross, *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 159.

literature – must have a particular use-value'[540]. Though critics may not agree on the

meaning of *Good Morning, Midnight*, either as a whole or on in regard to its ending,

Simpson argues that even those who conclude that 'in Sasha's actions and interactions no

progress is effected' must concede that 'movement is evident in [Rhys's] narrative art'.[541]

 The 'enigmatic' and 'multilayered' quality that Simpson refers to is evident in the

heroine's awareness of both herself and others, a position of maturity that Rhys's

previous protagonists collectively lacked. While Sasha is perhaps the most ambiguous of

Rhys's heroines – she exists without family, friends, job, country, or a history – she is

perhaps also the most cohesive.

> [Rhys] creates a heroine who realizes that, even if her life is inevitable and
> unchangeable, she can assert some identity by being aware of her situation […].
> The women alone in the city in the earlier novels are on a naturalistic, Zolaesque
> degenerative slide into poverty, drunkenness, and inept prostitution, with neither
> the determination nor the resoluteness to prevent it. In *Good Morning, Midnight*
> Rhys is attempting to do something different.[542]

Parson's argument highlights that in her conception of Sasha, what Rhys accomplishes is

undeniably subtle, but also fantastically important: unlike any previous Rhys heroine,

Sasha exercises self-awareness and empathy while understanding 'that truth is neither a

tangible, physical reality nor can it be revealed by a process of unmasking'.[543] This

awareness is portrayed in Sasha's statement after René leaves her: '[w]ho 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).

The recognition that the Other/other will constantly elude her, just as her suffering will

constantly haunt her, is what marks Sasha as Rhys's most mature character and *Good*

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[540] Frost, p. 166.
[541] Simpson, p. 106.
[542] Parsons, pp. 131-2.
[543] Johnson, K., 'Mapping', p. 58.

Morning, Midnight as her most accomplished novel to date. It would be over two decades

before Rhys would publish her next and final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, widely

considered her masterpiece and the most definitive example of the progression of Rhys's

oeuvre, in which her character finally earns death.

CHAPTER FIVE
Wide Sargasso Sea

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.
> –Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile'[544]

> 'It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home'
> –Adorno's imperative[545]

Of all the spaces one can occupy, perhaps none is wrought with more complications, illusions, and grief than the space one calls one's home. It is invariably this initiatory place of one's narrative that houses the individual's history, early memories, and formative relationships, as well as any traumas borne of these. Thus, housed within one's past and one's understanding of home is often a confused sense of belonging and alienation, which is highly dependent on the quality and specifics of this narrative. The meaning and implications of home, homelessness, and exile have been highly relevant themes of the preceding chapters. This chapter will continue to examine the idea of homelessness, but from within the context of the home rather than outside it. While the novels outlined in the previous chapters explored exile *from* one's home – set upon foreign shores and in faraway cities – this chapter will seek to examine exile from within,

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[544] Said, Edward W., 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (London: Granta, 2001), p. 173.
[545] Adorno, Theodor W., *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (Verso, 2005), p. 39.

from the site of the first psychological rupture, as well as the subsequent consequences of this split.

Set in post-emancipation Jamaica, Rhys's fifth and final novel is perhaps most famous in relation to its hypotext, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, as well as for its revisionary take on Brontë's madwoman in the attic. Rhys, who was frustrated with Brontë's one-dimensional and decidedly 'English' portrayal of Bertha Mason, decided to write a history for Rochester's mad Creole wife, which would explain how she came to be in the attic and the mélange of factors that drove her to madness.[546] *Wide Sargasso Sea* follows its heroine, Antoinette Cosway, from her childhood in the Caribbean, through adolescence and marriage, to her eventual madness in Rochester's attic, and finally to her fiery and climatic death in the torching of Thornfield Hall. Deterministic though it may be, as Bertha's death is set in the predetermined literary confines of Brontë's work, Rhys's novel forces readers to consider a more fully realised existence of Bertha Mason, 'that draws us into the lived experiences we might not otherwise see'.[547] Consistent with her previous novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* continues to remind readers that, as Antoinette states, 'there is always the other side, always' (82). Rhys's final novel is the first of her works to incorporate multiple narrators and perspectives, while simultaneously tracking the development of its protagonist's identity in relation to the process of mirroring that occurs in her formative relationships.

Part One of *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes place near Spanish Town, Jamaica, shortly after the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, and chronicles the childhood and adolescence of its heroine, Antoinette Cosway. Part One is narrated from Antoinette's point of view and

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[546] Rhys, *Letters,* p. 297.
[547] Winterhalter, Teresa, 'Narrative Technique and the Rage for Order in *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Narrative*, 2 (1994), 214–29 (p. 228).

recounts several of her formative relationships, including her friendship with a young black girl named Tia and familial relationships with her stepfather and emotionally absent and mentally ill mother, Annette. The mother's condition is exacerbated by the death of her mentally disabled son (Antoinette's brother, Pierre) when their home, Coulibri, is burned down by the local black community. Following the fire and her mother's resulting madness, Antoinette spends the next several years in a convent, during which time her mother becomes increasingly ill and eventually dies. Part Two of the novel is narrated by a man who is never named but represents the Rochester character from Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rochester's narrative constitutes the bulk of the novel and begins immediately following his marriage to Antoinette as they embark on their honeymoon in Dominica at one of the Cosway family homes, Granbois. Part Two recounts the couples' initial attraction to and projections towards each other, followed by what becomes an increasingly contentious and mutually disappointing relationship. Eventually, Rochester's jealousy and paranoia – which originate from his own emotional discomfort but are exacerbated by claims from Antoinette's embittered illegitimate brother – lead him to act out: first openly cheating on Antoinette with one of her servants and then wholly subjugating Antoinette, renaming her Bertha, and taking her from her Caribbean home. In Part Three of the novel, which spans less than ten pages, Rhys's text rejoins Brontë's narrative in the attic of Thornfield Hall. This final section is briefly narrated by Grace Poole and the remainder recounted by the mad Bertha Mason from her attic prison. Renamed and imprisoned in the attic of Thornfield Hall, Rhys's heroine is finally seen in her fully transmuted form, consumed by madness and a desire to burn down the

'cardboard house' (118) in which she is trapped, an act which presumably takes her life in the process.

Unlike Rhys's other novels, which are situated within relatively brief and time-bound plots, typically spanning days, months, or, less often, years, *Wide Sargasso Sea* follows its heroine from childhood to death. In doing so, Rhys's final novel offers the most comprehensive history of any of Rhys's characters, distinguishing itself from her previous works in a subtle yet important way. In the Introduction to the first edition of the novel, Francis Wyndham suggests that Antoinette's character is simultaneously distinct from Rhys's previous heroines and 'a logical development of' them, as each Rhys heroine is 'alienated, menaced and at odds with life'.[548] Wyndham's observation outlines both the familiarity of Rhys's final heroine as well as her fundamental difference. While Marya, Julia, Anna, and Sasha are portrayed as strangers in strange lands – in which they are met with cultural misunderstandings, hardships, and indifference, both by the people they encounter and the foreign place itself – the crucial distinction of Rhys's final novel is that its heroine's alienation begins *within* the context of her native land, which commences in childhood. Antoinette is, as Adorno's quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, not at home in her home – a place which is defined by a succession of unsuccessful and stagnating encounters in which mirroring does not take place and in which identity cannot be formed.

As Rhys's letters suggest, *Wide Sargasso Sea* was amongst the author's most laborious literary efforts, with versions of the novel dating back to more than twenty

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[548] Wyndham, Francis, 'Appendix: Introduction To the First Edition (1966)', in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 130.

years prior to its eventual publication.[549] Rhys's editor Diana Athill attests to the extent

of the author's editorial scruples and the preciseness of her work, explaining that 'it took

[Rhys] ages to admit that *Wide Sargasso Sea* was finished; always there was one little

tiny bit left to do, one little tiny, tiny bit that wasn't yet quite right'.[550] Among the many

edits and iterations is an early version of the novel – which Rhys burned in a rage – titled

'Le Revenant'.[551] Derived from the Latin word, *reveniens*, which translates roughly to 'a

returning',[552] the original title has multiple implications and a variety of associations, the

first being to Rhys herself and the author's hiatus from and return to writing. Indeed, the

author was presumed dead by many following the publication of *Good Morning,*

Midnight, marking Rhys herself as something of a revenant. Beyond her resurrection as

an author, however, there exists a multitude of textual and contextual associations to 'le

revenant' embedded throughout the novel. Rhys's text marks not only her return to

writing, but a return to and a re-envisioning of Brontë's canonical work and, in turn, a

rewriting of Bertha Mason's story, whose character's history was previously told only in

the 'snarls and yells' of *Jane Eyre.*[553] *Wide Sargasso Sea* also marks a return to the

Caribbean of Rhys's own history. With this shift in locale, Rhys subjects her heroine to

the perils of a partially imagined, partially historical, and partially autobiographical

history, enmeshing the realities of colonialism with pseudo-autobiographical elements of

the author's memory of her homeland, family, and childhood. Finally, there are the literal

and textual associations to 'le revenant', seen primarily in the recurring motif of the

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[549] Rhys, *Letters*, pp. 39-40.
[550] Athill, Interview
[551] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 371.
[552] 'Revenant, N. and adj.2', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
<http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/164711> [accessed 29 August 2015].
[553] Smith, Angela, 'Introduction', in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. vii.

return from the dead, the themes of zombies and zombification, and Rhys's repeated postulation of the possibility of multiple deaths.

The OED defines the French word *revenant* as a 'person who returns after a long absence (1690)' or a 'spirit returned from the dead (1718)'; modern definitions elaborate on these to include somewhat more spectral associations: '[a] person who returns from the dead; a reanimated corpse; a ghost' as well as a 'person who returns to a place' or one '[t]hat has returned from, or as if from, the dead; resembling or reminiscent of a ghost'.[554] David Buchan and Edward Ives suggest the term 'revenant' is distinct from the word 'ghost' in that the former suggests 'a corporeal creature, a substantial person acting like a human being because he or she is to all appearances a human being, though one returned from the Otherworld'.[555] The distinction between a ghost – who remains 'Otherworldly' – and a revenant – who ventures to but *returns* from the world beyond, will bear heavily on Rhys's text, which is littered with references to zombies, the living dead, and other contemporaneous states of life and death.

Prior to examining the meanings of this ubiquitous metaphor in the text, it is necessary to understand and explore Rhys's own status as a revenant in greater depth. Following the publication and cold reception of *Good Morning, Midnight*,[556] Rhys disappeared from writing and the public eye and in the 1940s and 50s lived an obscure and hermitic life in various English towns and villages. Though she was presumed dead by many – indeed the BBC reported she had died tragically during the Second World War – her work was famously 'rediscovered' by Selma Vaz Dias in 1949, when Vaz Dias

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[554] 'Revenant', *OED.*
[555] Buchan, David, and Edward D. Ives, 'Tale Roles and Revenants: A Morphology of Ghosts', *Western Folklore*, 45 (1986), 143–60 (p. 145).
[556] Angier, *Life and Work*, p. 373.

located Rhys to obtain permission to perform a dramatic reading of the author's fourth novel.[557] The fact that Rhys was so removed from society that she was presumed dead marked the author herself with a ghost-like quality. Angela Smith suggests that 'Rhys seemed to many of her contemporaries to be a revenant, someone who returns to a familiar place, like Lazarus, from the dead. […] She seemed to have disappeared while she was still living'.[558] Rhys was aware that she had been forgotten, in part due to her own self-imposed reclusiveness following *Good Morning, Midnight* and the outbreak of WWII. When she did re-emerge, Rhys remained uncomfortable and somewhat frightened at the idea of being 'a spectral figure, impersonating her dead self',[559] someone who existed between worlds and constantly teetered between survival and destruction, life and death. Rhys's experience as a revenant and the accompanying anxiety this comparison induced may help explicate its strong thematic place within the text.

At one point in the text during the honeymoon, Rochester finds a working definition of the Caribbean word 'zombi' in a copy of *The Glittering Coronet of Isles*. The chapter titled 'Obeah' defines the word as 'a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead. A zombi can also be the spirit of a place' (67). Significantly, it is after reading this book that Rochester systematically begins his quest to 'break up' Antoinette, almost as if the lines of the aforementioned book had supplied him the directions to carry out the process of zombification. Christophine recognises this conduct and accuses him of causing the protagonist's zombielike, catatonic state: '[t]here are mornings when she can't wake, or when she wake it's as if she's still sleeping' (100). While the heroine may be physically living, she is, for all intents and purposes, neither

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[557] Smith, Angela, 'Introduction', in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. vii.
[558] Ibid.
[559] Ibid.

alive nor herself. Rochester later confesses to these accusations, thinking, 'I did it too. I saw the hate go out of her eyes. I forced it out. And with the hate her beauty. She was only a ghost. A ghost in the grey daylight. Nothing left but hopelessness' (110). Stephanie Branson suggests that while 'it is not traditional for the living heroine of a gothic tale to be its main ghost', in Rhys's final novel, 'the barriers between life and death are broken down in a world in which magic reigns',[560] rendering the categories of life and death confused. Mona Fayad argues that by dominating Antoinette in the manner Rhys portrays, Rochester robs her of her very existence, in effect turning her into a ghost that he controls.

> She becomes a ghost, dead/undead, the zombie that Rochester had been afraid would be *his* fate. And by that, she assures the possibility of his continued existence. Thus appears the final creation, the 'Marionette Antoinette'. Having effectively killed her ('I drew the sheet over her gently as if I covered a dead girl'), he brings her back to life but now in another form.[561]

The marionette quality Fayad describes, along with Rochester's renaming of Antoinette, will be discussed in greater detail presently, but for now stands to illustrate the suggestive trope of zombification that bears heavily on Rhys's final narrative.

While the heroine's death is predestined in a kind of literary determinism – as the fate of Bertha Mason is embedded in Brontë's text – her transformation from autonomous, living woman, to Rochester's mad, zombie-like wife is also linked to another type of determinism: heredity. Before Rochester encounters the book from which the above definition is supplied, the majority of the references to zombis/zombies are made in relation to Antoinette's mother, Annette. After the house fire that kills the

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[560] Branson, Stephanie, 'Magicked by the Place: Shadow and Substance in *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Jean Rhys Review*, 3 (1989), 19–28 (p. 25).
[561] Fayad, Mona, 'Unquiet Ghosts: The Struggle for Representation in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 34 (1988), 437–52 (p. 448).

heroine's brother (and Annette's son), Pierre, Antoinette goes to live in the convent, where she often thinks of and prays for her mother: '[m]y mother, whom I must forget and pray for as though she were dead, though she is living' (31); '[t]his is for my mother, I would think, wherever her soul is wandering, for it has certainly left her body' (32). Walking up the hill on her way to the convent, the heroine is taunted by a girl who cruelly and unknowingly foretells her tragic fate: '[l]ook the crazy girl, you crazy like your mother. […] She have eyes like zombi and you have eyes like zombi too' (27), thus inscribing Antoinette with what Faizal Forrester describes as 'the narratives of madness and soul death'.[562] The distinction between death in the collective sense and the 'soul death' Forrester purposes seems to advance another of Rhys's themes tangentially related to the zombie motif: that of multiple deaths.

As the previous chapters have outlined, Rhys's preoccupation with death and dying are patently evident throughout each of her narratives. Within these tropes, various manifestations of death are represented, including suicidal ideation, physical death, depression, doubles/splitting, and abortion. The multitude of deaths that Rhys's heroines endure, which is merely alluded to in Rhys's early works, is plainly evident by the culmination of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. To die simply – once, and only in the traditional, physical understanding of the word – is portrayed as an act of relief in Rhys's oeuvre, and one that she does not grant her pre-war heroines. Rhys repeatedly reminds us that for those touched by loss, trauma, abuse, or neglect, the idea of what death entails is not always so straightforward. While Rhys's earlier novels provide snippets of these pre-deaths, or multiple deaths – the end of each novel typically leaves the heroine on the

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[562] Forrester, Faizal, 'Who Stole the Soul in *Wide Sargasso Sea*?', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 6 (1994), 32–42 (p. 36).

brink of death or is ambiguous regarding the heroine's continued survival – nowhere in Rhys's oeuvre is the theme of multiple deaths as explicit as in her final novel.

The first example of this motif is found early in the novel, following the fire that burns down the Cosway's home. Antoinette's brother is killed in the process and when she wakes and hears this news from her Aunt, the heroine thinks to herself, '[h]e died before that' (25), but is too tired to speak the words out loud. The heroine's logic here is presumably due to her brother's mental and physical incapacity, which renders him unable to walk or speak, and therefore lacking certain basic functions prior to his death. Antoinette also recounts various versions of her mother's death, which confuses her husband. When Rochester questions her regarding the conflicting stories, Antoinette maintains both answers are correct: that her mother died 'not long ago' but also 'when I was a child' (81), unyielding in her belief that '[t]here are always two deaths, the real one and the one people know about' (81). Here, the couple find some of their only common ground, as Rochester replies, '[t]wo at least' (81), appearing for once to grasp his wife's meaning.

The other character that suffers multiple and arguably the most tragic of deaths is Antoinette herself, the most obvious of which is brought about by Rochester and his cruel and systematic appropriation of her humanity. At the beginning of their honeymoon, Antoinette tells Rochester how content she is with him, and that she could die just then, while she was happy:

> 'If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don't believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die'.
> 'Die then! Die!' I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers' (57).

While Antoinette's statement ('If I could die. Now, when I am happy') harkens to Othello,[563] Rochester's statement refers most obviously to the 'little deaths', or orgasms that the couple share on their honeymoon; however, when considered in conjunction with Rhys's zombie motif and the recurring theme of layered or multiple deaths, the statement has a sinister quality as well. If the act of physically dying is the final death, one may wonder what constitutes a non-literal death and what the meaning might be of those which precede it. In other words, what aspects of the individual may die when the individual continues to live?

Returning briefly to Forrester's argument and the distinction between one's literal death and one's 'soul death', several possibilities begin to emerge. Notwithstanding Antoinette's father, who has already died when the novel begins, the remaining characters that comprise the Cosway family each experience a literal death and a 'soul death'. Though Pierre literally dies in the fire, Antoinette suggests that his soul death occurred prior to his physical death. Her rationale is not entirely clear, but the heroine seems certain – perhaps because he could not walk or speak – that Pierre was in some way dead already. Likewise, Antoinette seems to consider her mother's real death as the inception of her madness following the fire and the death of Pierre. Annette's 'soul death', therefore, is linked to her mental instability and the death of her sanity. The heroine's own death is not dissimilar: between Part Two and Part Three we see her transform from Antoinette, Rochester's new bride, to Bertha, Rochester's property and mad prisoner. The commonality between the soul deaths that befall the three Cosway characters seems to be one of agency and, by extension, identity. Pierre, who has never

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[563] The lines spoken by Othello to Desdemona, 'If it were now to die, / 'Twere now to be most happy' (Oth. 2.1 181-82), anticipates a systematic destruction similar to that in Shakespeare's narrative, in which Othello murders his wife in an act of jealousy and rage.

been a speaking subject, lacks agency by chance; Annette loses hers by way of insanity; and Antoinette is robbed of hers when her husband subsumes her identity.[564] Rhys's final novel makes clear that the loss of one's agency – whether it is the ability to speak, the loss of one's sanity, or the loss of one's freedom – is a kind of death in itself.

The act of returning is rarely a simple or linear process in Rhys's fiction, just as the theme of the revenant is not a straightforward concept. Another return that permeates the novel is the intertextual influence and use of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys revisits Brontë's text to reassess her forebear's one-dimensional depiction of madness in the context of the author's own understanding of a childhood in the Caribbean. In bringing Bertha back from the dead, Rhys herself must return in a way to her Dominican upbringing. As a result, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is something of a hybridised narrative that melds fact and fiction, defies time and place, and rewrites a life for a character whose fate is preordained. As Emery points out, the novel 'conflates the history of the islands with a personal tragedy'[565] that is partly based on Rhys's own complicated relationship to her Caribbean home. To write of Rhys's home is to talk around a concept, rather than a tangible location as such. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, Rhys's heroines are commonly defined by their lack of home and family and, by extension, portrayed as missing an element of their identities. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is where the genesis of these issues – which include family, racism, and a complex socio-historical context – are finally given the space to be textually explored. By returning her final heroine to her own Caribbean homeland, which had only been alluded to in previous novels, Rhys more fully

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[564] In the final section of the novel, there is room to make a case for Bertha's redemption, and some critics argue her final act is a reclaiming of her identity and returning to a more authentic self; this idea will be revisited at the end of the chapter.
[565] Emery, 'Politics', p. 425.

examines the foundations of exile and homelessness that resonate so strongly beneath the surface of her earlier fiction. The result is a highly personal and provocative exploration of the meaning of belonging, the failure to feel at home, and the implications these have for the formation of identity.

Many critics have commented on Rhys's textual formulation of home and exile and the consequences these have for her heroines, who spend their lives homeless, wandering, and searching for somewhere, someone, or something they seem to have lost. Lucy Wilson describes the basic condition that configures this problem for each of Rhys's novels and their respective heroines as follows:

> The question of identity in Jean Rhys's life and fiction is inextricably bound to the condition of exile that shaped her perceptions and those of her characters. Rhys was truly a woman without a country. England, where she lived for most of her adult life, was a cold, unreceptive place for the writer. […] The question of Rhys's West Indian roots is even more problematic. The daughter of a Welsh father and a white Creole mother, Rhys felt exiled even before she moved to England because she was cut off from the black community in Dominica. Thus Rhys suffered from what Amon Saba Saakana describes as 'the mental condition of double alienation'.[566]

Wilson's reading rests on the belief that Rhys's own experience of double alienation influenced her preoccupation with place. The concept of double alienation demystifies the misconception that those who expatriate are the beneficiaries of two (or potentially multiple) places to call home, when in fact they are often alienated from both. Murdoch's exploration of Caribbean identity in the context of Rhys's fiction reaches a similar conclusion, in that the duality and unhomeliness that characterises Creole identity predicates Rhys's themes of unbelonging. These essential features of difference and a lack of belonging that lead to an internalised sense of exile haunt the entirety of Rhys's oeuvre and, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, are finally brought to light. The experience of exile

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[566] Wilson, L., 'European', p. 68.

from within the space one regards as home is captured in the opening lines of the novel: '[t]hey say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks' (5). The 'trouble' in this passage refers historically to the profound racial tension between blacks and whites in post-emancipation Jamaica. The first line of the novel outlines the racial divide in the Mid-Nineteenth Century West Indies, while the second sentence indicates the Cosway family's status as outsiders within their own race. The very term Creole is, according to Murdoch, 'an inherently unstable category, shot through with the ambiguities and essentialisms of its origins in the colonial period'.[567] While the most common definition of a Creole is a white person born in the Caribbean, Murdoch explains that the term is far more complicated than most people consider.

> [A] creole subject or culture may be black, white, East Asian, colonial or metropolitan, or, for that matter, the product of myriad ethnic and linguistic influences and cross-fertilizations. In other words, if the creole figure can be located only as one among several possibilities, or even, in some cases, several possibilities at once, then this Caribbean ethnoculture creoleness embodies multiple sites and strategies of doubling, difference and dislocation on the cultural and performative planes.[568]

The heroine attempts to express the difficulty of this doubly marginalised status to her husband: explaining why Amélie, like the other blacks in Jamaica, labels her a 'white cockroach' (64), while the English refer to her family as 'white niggers' (64). The frustration and suffering borne of her confused and dislocated culture are clear and she confesses to Rochester, 'between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why I was ever born at all' (64). The 'intrinsic doubleness'[569] of Creole identity thus leaves Antoinette and those like her detached not from one race but from two, without a culture, community, or home with which to identify.

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[567] Murdoch., p. 254.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Ibid., p. 252.

Wide Sargasso Sea examines the importance of place in the formation of one's identity as well as its effects on one's desire. The struggle to establish a place of one's own is a manifestation of the desire for subjecthood, which George argues 'can become as urgent as keeping oneself alive'.[570]

> Rhys's Caribbean *terragraphica* plays out as a trope of desire and site of loss in that she conveys a deep longing for Dominica yet always from the perspective of characters who have lost or are in the process of losing physical contact with a homelike Caribbean place.[571]

Antoinette is not only left bereft of a site in which she might be able to determine her identity, but is also subject to a loss few can understand and filled with a desire for belonging that can never be fulfilled.[572] The status of belonging and the desire for home is an important distinction between Brontë's text and Rhys's. While both novels in different ways deal with representations of home and exile,[573] Brontë's heroine is never denied her status as an Englishwoman or considered an outcast of the country she identifies as home. As we may recall from Chapter Three, pre-modern definitions of home, according to George, 'immediately [connote] the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection'; as such, one's conception of home is 'manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels'.[574] The traditional definition of home is therefore not directly applicable to Rhys's heroines, apart from their lack of home and Rhys's portrayal of the concept as an antiquated Victorian ideal that is actively subverted in her post-modern depiction of homelessness. By 'destabilizing the imperial idea of home', Rhys is 'faced with a scenario in which

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[570] George, Rosemary Marangoly. *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocation and Twentieth Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 18.
[571] Johnson, E., *Home,* p. 29.
[572] Ibid.
[573] Hope, Trevor, 'Revisiting the Imperial Archive: *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and the Decomposition of Englishness', *College Literature*, 39 (2012), 51–73 (p. 54).
[574] George, pp. 1, 9.

home becomes an elusive possibility, either lost or desired'.[575] The desire for home in Rhys's fiction is perhaps less conspicuous than the quality of lostness with which the concept of home is imbued. For an object to be lost, however, as we may recall from the previous chapters, is often highly correlative to its desirability. The distinction here, however, is that what has been lost in Rhys's fiction has at last been made conscious. Thus, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the illusion of 'home' no longer functions an *objet petit a*, as Rhys has traced the object back to its origins and uncovered the true meaning of the desire that is associated with it: namely, the maternal. The theme of lost origins – home, family, mother – is thus finally confronted in Rhys's final novel, marking the continued progression of perhaps her most primary theme and culminating in what resembles an acceptance of its loss.

Throughout Rhys's oeuvre one can detect each heroines' desire for home and a place of her own, a theme in accordance with much twentieth-century fiction, in which 'home is a desire that is fulfilled or denied in varying measure'.[576] What distinguishes *Wide Sargasso Sea* from many modern and postcolonial novels is the contemporaneous *desire for* and *acceptance of* the impossibility of a stable and definitive geographical home, as well as the failure of the maternal. In her final novel, Rhys not only 'calls into question the principles of "belonging"',[577] but also demonstrates that 'it is no longer possible to claim an original geographical territory or homogenous peer group as the shelter and origin of […] cultural [identity]'.[578] The belief that home is an impossibility

[575] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 17.
[576] George, p. 2.
[577] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 36.
[578] Konzett, *Ethnic Modernisms*, p. 5.

and exists only, to borrow Raymond Williams's phrase, as 'a memory and an ideal',[579] is precisely the unromanticised notion of home that Rhys's text underlines. Rhys's position stands in stark contrast to the hypotext on which *Wide Sargasso Sea* is based; George points out that traditional '[v]isions of home are celebrated in novels such as […] *Jane Eyre*. However the idyllic domestic tableau in almost any Victorian novel is usually secured and contrived out of an exclusion of repressed and disruptive factors'.[580] Rhys's texts, particularly her final novel, disrupt pre-modern narratives such as *Jane Eyre*, which are predicated on the repression of unsettling or unwelcome material. If novels such as *Jane Eyre* exist at the expense and exclusion of more uncomfortable, repressed material, a novel such as *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by comparison, seems to actively pursue an exploration of these repressed elements. The unhomeliness of Rhys's narratives is indicative of her capacity to explore the more deeply layered elements of the psyche that a text such as *Jane Eyre* pointedly avoids.

The problem of not feeling at home in one's home is compounded in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by the heroine's experience of parental abandonment, including her detached and unloving mother and the absence of her father. The lack of positive parental involvement is most notable in the absence of mirroring that Annette ultimately does not or cannot offer her daughter, which precipitates considerable obstacles for the protagonist's formation of self, as well as grave consequences for her subsequent relationships. Continuing in the tradition of Rhys's pre-war novels, in which her 'heroines are either motherless or daughters of unresponsive mothers',[581] Antoinette

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[579] Williams, Raymond, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 281.
[580] George, p. 70.
[581] Reventós, María Dolores Martínez, 'The Obscure Maternal Double: The Mother/Daughter Relationship Represented In and Out Of Matrophobia', *Atlantis*, 18 (1996), 286–94 (p. 289).

experiences loss despite the presence of a maternal figure. O'Connor points out that while in *Quartet*, *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, the mother figure is absent, in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Wide Sargasso Sea,* the 'heroines' negative and almost masochistic relationships with their mothers are explored in painful detail'.[582] Reventós writes extensively on this dynamic in Rhys's texts and describes the 'matrophobic' mother-daughter relationship as one which is characterised by narcissistic abuse of the daughter and which results in a hostile, blaming relationship. Reventós argues that in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* 'the mother is a classic matrophobic example of a rejecting and disappointing mother' and that '[e]ven in Rhys's autobiography *Smile Please*, the portrait of her mother throughout the section devoted to her is so matrophobic that it induces feelings of hostility even in the reader'.[583] Even without relying on a psychobiographical reading, as Reventós does, it is plain to see that the theme of the absent (either literally or emotionally) and abusive mother results in a textual 'incorporation of [the] mother's rejecting voice',[584] which is present throughout Rhys's oeuvre and particularly prominent in her final novel.

The mother in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is ostensibly quite similar to the maternal figures – present or absent – that precede her in Rhys's fiction. Much like Julia's mother in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie,* who favours Julia's sister, Annette seems to have 'some love to give but she gives it exclusively to her son Pierre'.[585] The emotional distance between the protagonist and her mother in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is contrasted and underlined by the mother's love for Pierre. Before she goes mad, Annette admonishes

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[582] O'Connor, p. 27.
[583] Reventós, p. 289.
[584] O'Connor, p. 31.
[585] Reventós, p. 290.

and silences her daughter for disturbing Pierre and desperately attempts to save her son

from the fire, with no apparent regard for her daughter's well-being.[586] Early in the novel,

the heroine describes her mother's dismissal of her, as well as her preference for Pierre,

when she attempts to touch her mother's forehead:

> A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep – it might have been cut with a knife. I hated this frown and once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. She wanted to sit with Pierre or walk where she pleased without being pestered, she wanted peace and quiet. I was old enough to look after myself. 'Oh, let me alone'. she would say, 'let me alone', and after I knew that she talked aloud to herself I was a little afraid of her (7).

The mother's abuse is in the form of neglect rather than bullying or maltreatment and of a

passive rather than an active nature. By ignoring her daughter and failing to display the

attention and affection she deserves, the maternal relationship is defined by loss rather

than love[587] and, like Rhys's other heroines, Antoinette's narrative results in a 'discourse

of maternal exclusion'.[588]

Divested of a mother, Antoinette is robbed not only of the most basic formative

relationship and the emotional support it should provide, but also of a means of

formulating an identity. The process of mirroring is worth expanding upon, as is Lacan's

formulation of the mirror stage. The latter can be defined as the point at which in infancy

(typically between six and 18 months), the Subject assumes an image, typically by

conceiving its reflection in a mirror or reflective object. This is both an orienting point of

identification, as the child is granted an *imago* of the totality of her being, as well as a

rupture in the self, as such an identification of one's exterior image is by definition

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[586] Fayad, p. 441, Branson, p. 22.
[587] McGarrity, Maria, 'Impossible Sanctuary: Geography, Sexual Transgression, and Flight In Plantation and Big House Novels', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 11 (2002), 29–57 (p. 38).
[588] Reventós, p. 289.

alienating.[589] The image now associated with the Subject allows the child to conceive of

herself as a unified whole, despite the complexities and disunities of her inner experience

that fail to accord with the person she sees. 'The mirror stage is thus a high tragedy: a

brief moment of doomed glory, a paradise lost'.[590] To conceptualise the mirror stage as a

specific point in time, however, is to ignore a crucial component of its import, as well as

the mother's role therein. As Bowie explains: '[t]he mirror stage (stade du miroir) is not a

mere epoch in the history of the individual but a stadium (stade) in which the battle of the

human subject is permanently being waged'; such a process is continually carried out in

the child's relations to its own body and the people and things around her.[591] The initial

manner in which a child continues to experience mirroring is, perhaps not surprisingly, in

her interactions with the mother, upon whose desire the child's desire is predicated.

> The child would like to be the sole object of its mother's affections, but her desire almost always goes beyond the child: there is something about her desire which escapes the child, which is beyond its control. A strict identity between the child's desire and hers cannot be maintained; her desire's independence from her child's creates a rift between them, a gap in which her desire, unfathomable to the child, functions in a unique way.[592]

The Subject's desire, as we might recall from previous chapters, is always the desire of

the Other/other, and in *Wide Sargasso* Sea we finally witness this dynamic in its most

primordial form: the desire for the mother.

It would be difficult to comment on this stage explicitly within *Wide Sargasso*

Sea, as Antoinette's narrative does not capture the pre-Oedipal portion of her infancy.

The unreturned love of the emotionally absent mother, as well as her daughter's desire

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[589] Lacan, Jacques, *Ecrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2002), pp. 4-6.
[590] Gallop, Jane, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 85.
[591] Bowie, p. 21.
[592] Fink, Bruce, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 59.

for her love, however, is apparent throughout the text, as are a multitude of relevant themes that illustrate the problem of unsuccessful mirroring. Using the numerous references to mirrors and mirroring others – such as literal mirrors, reflections, and looking glasses, as well as the unsuccessful mirroring she experiences from others, such as her mother, stepfather, Tia, and her husband – one can begin to appreciate the heroine's sense of fragmentation and disunity. The most significant of these, however, is the initial source of mirroring from the primary other, the mother. Lori Lawson's understanding of Antoinette's decentred sense of self, like Simpson's, hinges on the mother-daughter relationship and its failure to instil a workable notion of femininity or identity. From a Lacanian perspective, Lawson explains that 'Antoinette's condition may in fact be understood in terms of Lacan's psychology of the "Mirror Stage,"' as she 'is ostracized by her mother, and therefore unable to formulate this primary identification' in which she would become aware of herself and begin the process of self-definition in dialogue with the Other/other.[593] Fayad describes the situation similarly, noting that Annette 'cannot reflect Antoinette. She has established her alliances clearly. It is Pierre's face that the mother mirrors and not Antoinette's, despite the male's handicap, while Antoinette is made to feel somehow inadequate, lacking'.[594] Simpson suggests that 'Rhys creates a mother […] who is genuinely incapable of offering love to her daughter, who repeatedly fails to mirror Antoinette's attitudes and behavior, and who thereby demonstrates how a child's sense of her own reality may be steadily eroded'.[595] One may wonder, based on these damning descriptions of Antoinette's mother, the reason for her

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[593] Lawson, pp. 20, 22.
[594] Fayad, p. 440.
[595] Simpson, p. 116.

daughter's attachment to and exoneration of her. Simpson explains this incongruous

attachment as follows:

> The child's seemingly perverse attachment to her unsustaining parenting is a function of the will to retain that little that she unknowingly felt; that object relation, however barren, that is her way of experiencing other people. If we recall Fairbairn's assertion that bad objects are better than no objects at all […], this retention of a withholding experience of other(s) has its own clear logic, for it provides the child with an inner world of somebodies rather than a stark landscape of utter loneliness.[596]

The heroine, like any child, clings to the hope and possibility that her mother's desire will

befall her; that she will love her daughter in a manner that would afford Antoinette the

possibility of a more unified and self-assured identity.

The protagonist's situation is complicated by the lack of a paternal figure in her

early life who, early in the novel, we learn has 'drank himself to death' (13). When

Antoinette's mother eventually remarries, it is to Mr Mason, who is portrayed as a

rational Englishman – 'so sure of himself, so without a doubt English' (18) – ignorant of

the West Indies and, by extension, unable to understand his wife, Antoinette, or their

family. There is very little textual attention afforded to Mr Mason's character, and most

references are somewhat belittling. One night, for example, as the heroine is bidding Mr

Mason and her mother goodnight, she calls him 'white pappy' out loud (though she still

refers to him as Mr Mason in her head) and thinks to herself, '[i]n some ways it was

better before he came though he'd rescued us from poverty and misery' (16). Antoinette's

verbal derision and her private thought can be interpreted in several ways. One might

read this statement – that life was better before Mr Mason came into their home – as a

grievance at having to vie for her mother's attention with yet another individual. Indeed,

from Antoinette's perspective, her stepfather and Pierre seem quite literally to possess the

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[596] Ibid., p. 120.

object of her mother's attention, the Phallus, while Antoinette, is made to feel 'inadequate' and 'lacking'.[597] Deeming her stepfather 'white pappy' might also designate Mason as an outsider rather than a possible paternal figure to whom Antoinette can turn – which, as Reventós points out, would be the natural alternative for the daughter in a matrophobic dynamic.[598] In Antoinette's case, however, there is no paternal place for her to focus her attention and as such no 'paternal authorization', which again 'puts the origin of the subject in question'.[599] And so Antoinette reaches yet another psychological impasse in her search for the necessary mirroring that might lead to the germination of her identity, initiate her to the Symbolic order, or draw her into the Oedipal conflict.[600]

Mr Mason represents a long line of paternal figures in Rhys's oeuvre who fall into the substitutive role of the paternal but are forever found lacking in a fatherly capacity. The focus on the maternal is so prominent in Rhys's fiction that very little attention is afforded to the paternal, either within the works themselves or critically, and the older male characters that populate Rhys's narratives tend to remain in the background. The death or absence of the father is a recurring theme throughout the novels. In *Quartet* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, both Marya and Sasha's fathers are missing entirely from their narratives (it is unclear whether they are dead or simply absent), while in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* each heroine's father is dead before their narratives begin. Throughout the novels, a long line of fatherly substitutes enter the texts, either in memory or in person, including Uncle Griffiths in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Uncle Bo in *Voyage in the Dark*, the unnamed male relative in *Good*

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[597] Fayad, p. 440.
[598] Reventós, p. 287.
[599] Patke, Rajeev S., 'Method and Madness in *A Question of Power* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 4 (2005), 185–93 (pp. 189-90).
[600] Lawson, p. 22.

Morning, Midnight, Mr Mason in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and a number of older men with whom Rhys's heroines are romantically involved, including Heidler, Mackenzie, Horsfield, Neil, Walter, and Carl. Thus, actual fathers are forever absent in Rhys's novels and the figures that might replace them forever disappointing.

With no hope of finding help within her immediate family, Antoinette begins to look for a reflective other in the world around her, both in literal reflective (but inanimate) objects, such as mirrors, pools, and looking-glasses, as well as in individuals she encounters. The former, as Robinson argues, is not only the single most recurring motif in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but also the primary 'organizing principle of the novel's form'.[601] Unable to begin the process of ordering and developing her autonomous self, Antoinette repeatedly looks to mirrors and looking-glasses for some vestige of her identity, drawn to them 'by her Desire for identification'.[602] In the convent, where she is sent after the house fire at Coulibri and her mother's ensuing madness, Antoinette remarks: '[w]e have no looking-glass in the dormitory, once I saw the new young nun from Ireland looking at herself in a cask of water, smiling to see if her dimples were still there' (30). In Part Two, Rochester repeatedly remarks on his wife's propensity to look in the mirror: 'I used to think every time she looked in the glass she must have hoped and pretended. I pretended too' (83). At the end of Part Two, when Rochester decides he will imprison Antoinette in Thornfield Hall, her mirror is one of the primary objects he plans to rob her of: 'Now I'll do it. She'll not laugh in the sun again. She'll not dress up and smile at herself in that damnable looking-glass' (107), which illustrates both his

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[601] Robinson, Jeffrey, 'The Gorgon's Eye: Visual Imagery and Death in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Another Life', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 4 (1990), 46–64 (p. 53).
[602] Lawson, p. 22.

awareness of his wife's need for mirrors and his cold intent to rob her of any form of mirroring that he can.

Considering her lack of alternatives, the heroine's strange preoccupation with mirrors and looking glasses is not only understandable, it is laudable in its perceptivity. Unfortunately, each of these attempts at self-definition via a mirrored image is as useless as the last; as Patke observes, '[a]ll the mirrors Antoinette looks into in order to imagine a self for herself are distorted or cracked'.[603] The distorting quality of the mirrors Antoinette encounters imitates the inaccurate mirroring that results from the 'unhomely spaces' Rhys's heroines inhabit.

> [Rhys's] Creole heroines confront hostile, disfiguring images of themselves…
> even when they face their own gaze in a mirror. That they have no recourse to
> accurate self-perception even by looking into a mirror speaks to the power of the
> unhomely spaces in which they live to undermine their powers of self-expression
> and senses of belonging anywhere in the world.[604]

Johnson's observation reminds us that identity formation is a multifaceted process comprised of layered and complex elements, including geographical, cultural, societal, familial, and relational components, each of which contributes to a sense of self-definition. To perceive of oneself as in harmony with any of these may help integrate a sense the identity. For Antoinette, however, each of these elements is as unyielding and fragmenting as the next, to the extent that even literal mirrors offer no recourse to seeing herself accurately.

In the absence of a mother, an alternative figure within her family, and even a truly reflective literal mirror, the heroine begins to search for a reflective other in individuals outside her family. Perhaps the most critically scrutinised of these interactions

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[603] Patke, p. 189.
[604] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 29.

is the heroine's relationship with Tia, her young black friend. The first scene the two

characters share is while swimming at the river together: Tia bets Antoinette that she

cannot do an underwater somersault – 'I never see you do it […] Only talk' (9) – and

Antoinette sets her clothes and money on a rock in an attempt to prove her friend wrong.

Antoinette succeeds and Tia loses the bet, but takes Antoinette's money anyway.

Antoinette momentarily objects, then accepts this turn of events, telling Tia:

> 'Keep them then, you cheating nigger'. I said, for I was tired, and the water I had swallowed made me feel sick. 'I can get more if I want to'.
> That's not what she hear, she said. She hear all we poor like beggar. We ate salt fish – 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 didn'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 (10).

While the heroine ruminates on Tia's verbal assault, which reinforces her placelessness

and marginal status, Tia runs off with Antoinette's dress, leaving her naked and penniless

by the bathing pond. The second encounter between the two girls occurs the night the

Mason's house is burned down and is again marked by an unsuccessful and violent

meeting of self and other. With her brother dead, her home in flames behind her, and her

mother on the brink of psychological collapse, Antoinette sees Tia for the last time in the

crowd of black West Indians and runs to her.

> Then, not so far off, 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 I 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 if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass (24).

In this final scene between the young women, the barriers between self and other are blurred such that the heroine cannot differentiate herself from Tia. Her inability to locate an appropriate mirror image in this instance has not only emotional, but violent physical consequences as well.

Because she has neither had the benefit of experiencing a primary identification with her mother, or an induction to the Symbolic order via a paternal figure, Antoinette is unprepared to deal with the Other/other in the outside world. Her interactions with Tia illustrate the detrimental effects of the protagonist's formative experiences and lack of mirroring, as well as the implications this has for her future relationships. Lawson observes that 'it is in Tia that Antoinette encounters her first "other"',[605] an identification that is as devastating as it is odd, given Tia's maltreatment of the heroine. If the process of differentiating the essential split between self and other begins with the articulation of mirroring and doubling,[606] Blais suggests that Antoinette's relationship with Tia is indicative of a ruptured primary identification.

> This is a curious identification. Unlike her future husband, Antoinette does not shut out even the hostile other, Tia, but identifies with her. For Antoinette, the rather solipsistic self/other dialogue of the mirror stage can only produce ghosts, images of herself as not there.[607]

Lawson also notes Antoinette's inability to differentiate 'the essential separation between Tia and herself',[608] which has violent and shocking consequences.

> She runs towards Tia, seeming to perceive her as a mirror reflection of herself. Tia, in response, hurls a rock at Antoinette and injures her head. Still unable to

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[605] Lawson, p. 22.
[606] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 95.
[607] Blais, Joline, '"Qui Est Là?": Displaced Subjects in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*', *College Literature*, 20 (1993), 98–118 (p. 105).
[608] Lawson, p. 23.

perceive the difference essential to identification, she stares at Tia as if at a reflection.[609]

Antoinette needs Tia to mirror her, to reflect her identity back to her in some semblance of order and unity. Instead what she receives is another confused and disordered reflection, 'another mirror image which reflects only irreparable loss', along with the realisation that '[a]ll of these doors will forever be closed to her, all of these possible mirroring bonds forever shrouded or shattered, sending back, at best, fragmented images of the self'.[610] As such, Antoinette remains unable to progress the tenuous position of her self-development any further, having not only encountered an unreceptive other in Tia, but also a violent and painful reminder of her undifferentiated self.

The confusion inherent in the girls' relationship is one of undifferentiated identification, or what Lacan termed 'transitivism', which is defined as 'the captivation by the image of the other'.[611] Lawson notes that this state is 'indicative of the child in the pre-mirror, or early mirror stage' that possesses 'only a confused and fragmented sense of self'.[612] Because Antoinette is never mirrored in her childhood or adolescence, she remains uninitiated and stuck at the threshold of the mirror stage.[613] She can neither derive a sense of identity from her mother nor her (dead) father and further attempts to identify with others are repeatedly thwarted, frustrating her attempts at self-definition and leaving her endlessly confused about who she is. Here we may again recall Antoinette's statement, 'between you I often wonder *who I am* and where is my country and where do I belong and why I was ever born at all' (64, italics mine). The question of the heroine's

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[609] Ibid.
[610] Scharfman, Ronnie, 'Mirroring and Mothering in Simone Schwarz-Bart's Pluie et Vent Sur Télumée Miracle and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea'*, *Yale French Studies*, 1981, 88–106 (p. 101).
[611] Lacan, *Ecrits*, pp. 19-20.
[612] Lawson, p. 23.
[613] Ibid.

identity is inextricably bound to questions of parentage, culture, and country, none of which offer Antoinette any indication of her place within the world.

The heroine's aim to progress through the mirror stage is further problematized by her marriage at the beginning of Part Two. In the now familiar cycle of emotional abuse, her experience with Rochester's character seems to be the definitive marker of the impossibility of her quest for identity. The section begins as the protagonist's narrative authority is subsumed by Rochester, who narrates Part Two and whose perspective thus exercises control over the bulk of the novel. His voice, demeanour, and point of view, portrayed as so perfectly English and so anti-West Indies, echoes the patriarchy and the binarisms inherent in the ordered, Western sociocultural systems present in all of Rhys's novels. Like the Englishmen in Rhys's pre-war novels, Rochester represents a system in which rationality is the dominant discourse and injustices – particularly those towards women – are either overlooked or condoned. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, this figure is given not only a voice, but also the task of narrating Rhys's masterpiece. Rochester's voice eclipses that of his wife and for the entirety of Part Two of the novel, he speaks for her and of her as an object of property rather than an autonomous human being. Kimmey suggests Rochester's position is one predicated not only by his personality and culture, but by English law, which at the time would have seen 'Antoinette's legal identity […] given over to the unnamed husband'.[614] From the husband's perspective, 'speaking her name is his right; [as] she can neither speak in his name, nor in her own'.[615] Kimmey's historically contextualised reading illustrates the increased difficulty of women's self-definition under the parameters of nineteenth-century English law. The heroine's

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[614] Kimmey, Deborah A., 'Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: Metatextuality and the Politics of Reading in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Women's Studies*, 34 (2005), 113–31 (p. 122).
[615] Ibid.

difficulties, therefore, are informed not only by her specific familial circumstances, but also the cultural norms and attitudes of her time.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar's exhaustive study of the cultural expectations and limits imposed upon nineteenth-century female authors – suggestively titled after Brontë's Bertha Mason – they propose that the mirror in the Victorian literary context, both metaphorically and literally, is equated with the voice of male approval in a patriarchal society.[616] While Rhys's novel is not Victorian, it is predicated on such a novel and thus imbued with similar undertones of male authority and notions of patriarchy. When Antoinette is married, she has just left the convent (a place devoid of mirrors) and is still held at the threshold of the mirror stage, desperately in search of an other to validate and help shape her identity. Robinson argues that, like Tia and Annette, 'Rochester, too, is a mirror upon which Antoinette places the burden of determining her being'.[617] Antoinette submits to her marriage as another means of searching for identity,[618] but ultimately 'encounters a cold, hard surface'.[619] According to the argument put forth by Gilbert and Gubar, Rochester's refusal to grant Antoinette the identity and humanity she so craves (and later by denying her basic human rights), says as much about the cultural context of their situation as Rochester's individual character, which is so often demonised in critical readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. I will shortly return to this last point and attempt to recontextualise Rhys's portrayal of Rochester (as well as her mother) in a more balanced and less condemnatory manner than is generally interpreted by critics. First, however, it is useful to examine the method by which the

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[616] Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 38.
[617] Robinson, p. 53.
[618] Emery, 'Politics', p. 427.
[619] Robinson, p. 53.

heroine's identity is changed, negated, and then wholly rewritten, both by Rochester in

Wide Sargasso Sea and by Rhys intertextually.

The most basic way in which Antoinette loses her identity is through the process

of naming. The heroine begins life as Antoinette Cosway, but is designated the new

surname Mason after her father dies and her mother remarries. As Antoinette Mason, she

has already lost half of her original identity and been robbed, quite literally, of the Name

of the Father. When Rochester renames Antoinette Bertha at the end of Part Two, the

heroine's name is wholly transformed from its original, leaving her as Bertha Mason, the

madwoman in the attic, devoid of any remnant of her past identity. This is no doubt an

oversimplified description of the process of naming that takes place in *Wide Sargasso*

Sea, but it is useful to map the basic progression by which the heroine's identity is

subsumed by others. Bertha Mason's assertion from her attic in Part Three that '[n]ames

matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the

window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking glass' (117), artfully captures

the importance Rhys places on names in her work. In addition to renaming his wife

Bertha, Rochester also repeatedly refers to Antoinette as a 'marionette', suggesting she is

akin to a puppet worked by strings, no doubt a condition he is (consciously or

unconsciously) working to ascribe to her.[620] Lawson argues that Rochester's

objectification of his wife is a key facet of his larger attempt to erode her identity.

> [Rochester fails] to perceive Antoinette as anything more than an object […] in
> his escalating attempts to make her an amenable object, a 'Marionette' named
> Bertha, a 'dead girl', and finally a 'mad wife', that most defenseless of females
> subjected to patriarchal possession.[621]

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[620] Anderson, Paula Grace, 'Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: The Other Side/"Both Sides Now"',
Caribbean Quarterly, 28 (1982), 57–65 (p. 58).
[621] Lawson, p. 24.

Tracking the progression of names, roles, and stereotypes that Rochester forces his wife to embody, Antoinette is not only systematically altered to become Bertha but also, in the process, is fashioned to resemble an inanimate object (a marionette), a 'dead girl', and finally a 'mad wife'. Upon closer inspection, this sequence is highly reminiscent of the aforementioned process of zombification: Antoinette initially exists as a living, breathing woman, but is symbolically killed off by her husband, only to come back to life as the madwoman in the attic.

The process of naming occupies a recurring and unresolved motif in Rhys's fiction; nowhere, however, is this theme as central, prevalent, or well developed as it is in her final novel, which more fully addresses the elements of possession and control associated with the process of naming. Porter's belief that 'to name, as we know, is to magically possess',[622] rings true throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, particularly in respect to Antoinette's character, who is possessed by multiple others. Kimmey's argument expands on the mechanisms of possession and appropriation that are at work in the act of naming.

> In most linguistic traditions, naming is an exercise of appropriation. Those who guard the realm of the symbolic or dominant discourse impose meaning on (and construct meaning for) those at the borders of the discursive community. They who are relegated to the margins are refused direct access to self-definition. Such oppression may appear to be abstract, but its effects are palpable.[623]

Rhys's text illustrates both the tradition Kimmey describes, as well as the magical and uncanny quality that underlies Porter's statement. Rochester, who is a 'bastion of the Symbolic order',[624] attempts to appropriate language from the heroine in an attempt to re-establish the superiority of the Symbolic order her represents.[625] To name someone, as

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[622] Porter, p. 550.
[623] Kimmey, p. 117.
[624] Lawson, p. 24.
[625] Scharfman, p. 103.

well as to withhold language from them, is to overtake and lay claim to their humanity, as Rochester does to Antoinette. Kamel compares this process to slave-owners renaming their slaves and the erasure of identity that accompanies this act.[626] The novel's post-emancipation West Indian setting makes this theme, and particularly its reversal, especially poignant; Rhys runs the risk of portraying her character as the victim at the expense of ignoring the historical context of victimisation in which her family has taken part. Instead, the reversal of the heroine's position from a family of slave owners and victimisers to victim and slave herself is somehow heartfelt, even apologetic, for the atrocities of colonial rule. Instead of coming across as petulant or uncaring, *Wide Sargasso Sea* evokes the ubiquitous nature of the colonising impulse and the range and permutations in which its effects are felt.

Many critics have pointed out that the nature of Rochester's persecution of the heroine occurs in a very systematic and deliberate way. Robinson suggests that because the husband fails to accept his wife's separate existence and identity as an individual, he can therefore only conceptualise her as an object that he owns and over which he maintains control.[627] Thomas describes Rochester's appropriation of his wife as 'animated by a desire to claim exclusive possession of her […]. Rochester insistently uses the possessive pronouns "my" and "*mine*": "my lunatic. She's mad but *mine, mine*"; "[m]y lunatic. My mad girl"'.[628] This desire is also emblematised, as is so often the case in Rhys's fiction, by the localities in which the events take place. The couple's honeymoon, in which the majority of their interactions take place, is on a wild Dominican

[626] Kamel, Rose, '"Before I Was Set Free": The Creole Wife in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 25 (1995), 1–22 (p. 12).
[627] Robinson, p. 55.
[628] Thomas, p. 107.

island that attracts yet simultaneously overwhelms and frightens Rochester. 'It was a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, "What I see is nothing – I want what it hides – that is not nothing"' (54). The discomfort Rochester experiences in the West Indies is palpable throughout the novel; the place is not his and he feels neither at home nor at ease there. Unable to explore, accept, or enjoy this alien place or his alien wife, Rochester feels he must shape her into something that he can control: Bertha. Blais explains that, '[b]y calling his wife Bertha, the man in *Wide Sargasso Sea* distances Antoinette to a place where he has symbolic control over her, a *there* he can dismiss at random'.[629] The 'there' in which Rochester places his wife is represented both metaphorically in Part Two, in his re-naming Antoinette and labelling her as mad, and more literally in Part Three, when he imprisons her in the attic of Thornfield Hall. Thus, before they embark to England across the Sargasso Sea, Rochester has already assigned Antoinette to a 'symbolic attic of madness where he can retain control'[630] and in which he can more easily dismiss her native otherness that he does not understand.

The multitude of names to which Antoinette is subjected are perhaps less obvious, but no less important than the one she ends up bearing in the attic of Thornfield. The demeaning names and labels that are levelled at the heroine, as well as the multiple attempts to rename her, serve to undermine her attempts at self-definition. Among the subtlest but more important of the heroine's plethora of names is the one she receives at birth, which is given to her by her mother, Annette. By bestowing her daughter with such a similar name to her own, Antoinette must share a version of her mother's name instead

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[629] Blais, p. 102, emphasis in the original.
[630] Ibid., p. 103.

of possessing a unique name of her own. Though not identical, Annette and Antoinette are the English and French versions of the same name, respectively,[631] and as such, Kimmey suggests the similarity 'creates an interchange of names between the mother and daughter'.[632] Scharfman also points out that the two character's names are more deeply intertwined as well, with Antoinette being a combination of Annette and 'toi', the French word for 'you'.[633] Thus, Antoinette = Ann 'toi' ette. In a very literal sense, the only name Annette can muster for her daughter is an informal pronoun combined with a narcissistic image of herself. Because 'toi' is situated between the two syllables of the mother's name, Antoinette is, in some fashion, embedded in her mother's narrative, including what Forrester describes as the inherited 'narratives of madness and soul death'.[634] Such a position again works against the heroine's attempts to define and differentiate herself.

The lack of autonomy that defines much of the heroine's narrative and her history of naming can also be seen in the use of pronouns that Rhys employs in each of the three sections of the novel. Several critics, including Winterhalter and Fayad, point to the lack of the first person singular pronoun, 'I', throughout the majority of Part One, which is narrated by Antoinette. The lack of the first person singular pronoun points to a missing autonomy and the as yet undifferentiated experience of self and other.[635] In contrast, following Antoinette's imprisonment and transformation into Bertha, Part Three of the novel is riddled with the narrator's use of the word 'I'. Mapping the use of pronouns in Part One and Part Three seems to indicate that something has transpired in the intervening text in terms of the heroine's sense of identity. Considering Part Two is

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[631] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 87.
[632] Kimmey, p. 118.
[633] Scharfman, p. 103.
[634] Forrester, p. 36.
[635] Winterhalter, p. 438.

narrated by Rochester, with only minimal textual intrusions from the heroine, this seems a curious development. How does Antoinette/Bertha finally accomplish the incorporation of an incredibly elusive identity in the midst of losing her freedom, her home, her voice, and even her name? The answer, I believe, lies in the textual and authorial voice with which Rhys concludes her final novel, as well as the intertextual nature of her oeuvre.

Despite being narrated by the same character, the differences between Parts One and Three are staggering. Antoinette Mason née Cosway narrates the first section in a more or less linear fashion, which explains both her complicated cultural and familial history, as well as her lack of identity. The latter is underlined by the absence of the heroine's name (which is not mentioned until several pages into the novel) and the lack of the first person singular pronoun. The final section of the novel, by comparison, stands at only ten pages long and is narrated for two pages by Grace Poole and eight by Bertha Mason, the latter of which reads like a jumble of hallucinations, flashbacks, and dreams. The confused and somewhat hysterical quality of Bertha's final narration is typically attributed to her madness, induced by her husband's cruelty and her imprisonment in Thornfield's attic. However, upon closer inspection of Bertha's narrative in the attic, there is a sense of autonomy and determination inconsistent with the earlier sections of the text as well as Rhys's earlier works: Bertha comes across as single-minded, purposeful, self-aware, and even self-possessed, if a bit confused. It is, perhaps, the first instance in Rhys's oeuvre that a heroine has been in possession of a true identity. Contrary to most critics, who feel Rochester subsumes and erases Antoinette's identity, Gregg argues that what Rochester in fact accomplishes is cleaving her identity in two: '[i]n renaming Antoinette Bertha, the husband does not succeed in changing her, but in

splitting her identity. This split subjectivity becomes the fate that she must confront'.[636]

Gregg further suggests that the loci of the various subjectivities, names, and 'I's' that are

inscribed in Rhys's texts are 'site[s] of exploration and a process of becoming'.[637] Thus,

in the attic of Thornfield, Antoinette/Bertha is not one or the other, but both women,

having finally accepted the duality of the two warring parts of her identity. I will return to

this idea in more depth later in this chapter, but it is worth pausing at this point to explore

a final dimension of naming that occurs and is sometimes overlooked in *Wide Sargasso*

Sea: that is, the denying of names altogether.

It is generally accepted that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a novel populated by characters

that are either 'named, unnamed, and nameless'.[638] While critics generally focus on the

naming and re-naming of Antoinette's character, Rhys's characters without names are

perhaps equally remarkable. While Antoinette suffers a deluge of names, her husband

lacks one completely, as Rochester's character is never named in Rhys's novel. Rather,

he exists in the text primarily through implication and association with Brontë's text.

Gregg aptly points out that 'the husband', as many critics call him, in a way does not

exist at all. 'His narrative appears to be dominant; yet it is his nothingness which the

novel insists upon. He enters as a nameless person'.[639] In electing to oversupply

Antoinette with names, while denying her husband any name at all, Spivak suggests that

'Rhys denies to Brontë's Rochester the one thing that is supposed to be secured in the

Oedipal relay: the Name of the Father, of the patronymic'.[640] Thus, the unnamed

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[636] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 98.
[637] Ibid., p. 51.
[638] Kimmey, p. 118.
[639] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 100.
[640] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1985), 243–61 (p. 252).

Rochester in Rhys's narrative lacks the security of the very element he so heartily

embodies in Brontë's novel. In a rather covert manner, Rhys reverses the cultural and

gendered dynamics of Brontë's world and pushes Rochester to the margins.[641] Devoid of

a name or any physical description,[642] Rochester is lost in the sensual and irrational West

Indian world of Rhys's novel, robbed of an identity by Rhys just as his character robs

Antoinette of hers.

The issue of naming touches nearly every character in the novel. Tia, Amélie,

Christophine, and the other emancipated slaves all lack surnames, as does Aunt Cora; Mr

Mason, by contrast lacks a first name; and 'Daniel Cosway suffers from a simultaneous

lack and excess of proper names'.[643] Gregg attributes this lack and confusion of names to

the historical context in which the novel is set, stating, the 'exploration of the semiotic

and ontological status of names is carried out in the novel through a retelling of

history'.[644] From a postcolonial standpoint, this seems a valid interpretation; a more

psychoanalytically grounded reading, however – by no means mutually exclusive to

Gregg's – may characterise the recurring and multifarious theme of naming as Scharfman

does in that 'the scarcity of identifiable selves seems to be mirrored by this confusion of

proper names'.[645] As names are intrinsically linked in Rhys's texts to identity and the

formation of the self, by denying names or bestowing them, one is concurrently

contributing to or diminishing the identity of the other, depending on the manner in

which the name is supplied or displaced. In writing Bertha Mason a life and a history,

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[641] Kimmey, p. 121.
[642] Caroline Rody points out that Rhys not only fails to bestow Rochester a name, but any physical description as well, leaving him doubly undefined. (Rody, Caroline, 'Burning Down the House: The Revisionary Paradigm of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*', in *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure*, ed. by Alison Booth (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993), pp. 300–325 (p. 303).)
[643] Gregg, *Historical*, p. 87.
[644] Ibid.
[645] Scharfman, p. 103.

Rhys assumes control and grants Bertha Mason an identity, yet denies the same to countless others, both as a method of dispossessing the dominant discourse and commentating on the history of colonisation and subjugation associated with denying or assigning names to marginalised people.

To this end, Rhys's text embodies various points of view and in doing so offers a greater degree of humanity not only to Bertha but to a range of characters, including Annette and Rochester. By utilising what Simpson deems 'a medley of voices'[646] – including that of Antoinette, Christophine, Rochester, Daniel Cosway, Grace Poole, and finally, Bertha – one can better understand and contextualise the actions of characters whose behaviour may otherwise seem incomprehensible. Winterhalter explains that because '[n]o single voice steers us through *Wide Sargasso Sea'*, Rhys is able to avoid 'facile identification with any speaker's point of view'.[647] This, in turn, 'interrupts the categorical tidiness of character identity (so often used to support "recuperative" readings of her novel) by displaying that "selves" are always in dialogue with […] current desires and the other alien contexts into which they are cast'.[648] If one considers the context of her characters' histories, Rhys's final novel is by far the most empathetic and psychologically mature of her fiction. By narrating from both Rochester's and Antoinette's perspective, for example, Erwin suggests that 'the multiplicity of voices' works to occupy both points of view;[649] Rochester may still be the epitome of the possessive colonising force he embodies, but he is simultaneously portrayed as a product of his upbringing and culture, thereby rendering him a somewhat more sympathetic

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[646] Simpson, p. 129.
[647] Winterhalter, p. 214.
[648] Ibid., p. 216.
[649] Erwin, Lee, '"Like in a Looking-Glass": History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea'*, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 22 (1989), 143–58 (p. 155).

character. Thus, the use of multiple, shifting perspectives serves not only to decentre the notion of a unified ego or self in its principle character,[650] but to reconfigure the text as one that needs multiple narrators to explain the various modes of possession and dispossession which occur and the sociohistorical context of the colonising impulse.[651]

A similar argument can be made for the characterisation of Annette, who by all accounts is a fairly inadequate and disappointing maternal figure. Rhys's text manages to avoid being matrophobic in its consideration of her, however, by again recounting the sociohistorical context by which her character is shaped. Reventós suggests that Annette's abuse and neglect of her daughter, particularly 'her inability to give enough love and attention',[652] is partially the product of the post-emancipation West Indian setting of the novel. Reventós argues that by focusing on the troubled mother-daughter relationship in terms of its history and social context, the blaming discourses that would otherwise, and typically do, emerge in such abusive and neglectful narratives are mitigated. In this way, the maternal is contextualised and linked to the geographic and the harsh sociopolitical climate of mid-nineteenth-century West Indies.[653] While a reader might be able to make this observation and note that the traumatic histories of mother and daughter are intrinsically linked,[654] the novel is unique in that Rhys's heroine appears to bridge this connection for herself. Reventós suggests that Antoinette 'interprets maternal rejection as an effect of the mother's social rejection. In her discourse, her mother is an object of pity, never the brunt of attack or criticism'.[655] Though this may very well be a

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[650] Emery, 'Politics', p. 419.
[651] Kamel, p. 13.
[652] Reventós, p. 289.
[653] McGarrity, p. 38.
[654] Burrows, Victoria, *Whiteness and Trauma: The Mother-Daughter Knot in the Fiction of Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kinkaid, and Toni Morrison* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 44.
[655] Reventós, p. 290.

means to rationalise and displace the cause of her mother's rejection as deriving from an

external cause, thereby repressing more psychologically damaging alternatives (i.e. that

Antoinette is not good enough, not loveable, etc.), the fact remains that Antoinette's

narrative is not hostile.

> Rhys's own feelings of maternal and social unbelonging are represented in every
> one of her works. But it is only in her last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, that the
> daughter's exile from maternal love and attention is explicitly subordinated to the
> sociocultural exile that affects the mother as much as the daughter.[656]

As with its inclusion of other characters' histories and perspectives, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

again proves markedly different than Rhys's previous novels regarding its consideration

of the maternal figure. The blaming quality so endemic in her early work – particularly in

Quartet and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* – is all but absent here, replaced by a measured,

if resigned, acceptance that individuals are shaped by their circumstances and often

unable to mirror or validate others as a result. Ingman has argued 'that the moment of

liberation for the daughter comes when she is able to see her mother as subject, as

another suffering, vulnerable, occasionally joyful, woman'[657]; I suggest this moment can

be found in Rhys's final novel and in Antoinette's objective and compassionate portrayal

of Annette.

The impulse towards blaming in Rhys's early fiction is replaced here by a more

mature and integrated textual attitude towards others and the self. There is not a denial

either that trauma occurs in *Wide Sargasso Sea* or that Antoinette's character endures

multiple losses,[658] so much as a recognition and working-through of these conditions. The

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[656] Ibid.
[657] Ingman, p. 47.
[658] Rovera suggests that Antoinette's psychological state results from the trauma and tragedy she endures, which Rovera lists as consisting of 'her father's death, the plantation set on fire by newly-emancipated slaves, her little brother's deadly burns, her disconsolate mother's alienation and confinement and, last but

depiction of the Rhys woman as marginalised and traumatised is not, as we have seen, a problem specific to *Wide Sargasso Sea*,[659] however, it is the first textual example in Rhys's oeuvre in which one of her heroines so actively addresses her search for identity and unity of self. While the recognition of otherness is present in each of Rhys's novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the only novel that contemporaneously contains a character's understanding of the subjectivities of others while addressing her own organised search for identity and self. It is the increased capacity for empathy and understanding that renders *Wide Sargasso Sea* (and also to a slightly lesser degree, *Good Morning, Midnight*) more balanced and less haunted by repressed anger. Thus, the blaming tendency that permeates Rhys's earlier work is largely absent in Antoinette's narrative; not so much lost as replaced by a more mature and integrated textual attitude towards others and the self, what Freud might call a 'psychically mature condition'.[660]

With *Jane Eyre* as its hypotext and literary foundation, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has variously been described as a 'counter-narrative',[661] an 'anti-novel',[662] 'antidotal fable',[663] and even 'the ultimate zombie text'.[664] It is also, as we have seen, a novel about

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not least, her own arranged marriage to Mr Rochester'. (Rovera, Catherine, 'The "Seeds of Madness" in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: The Novel and Its Avatars', *Commonwealth*, 32 (2009), 110–20 (p. 112.)) To this one could also add the verbal abuse she suffers from Tia and the other islanders and Rochester's bizarre abuse, as well as the mental breakdown and death of her mother and her own imprisonment and madness in the attic of Thornfield Hall.

[659] Here, perhaps more plainly than any other point in her oeuvre, we can appreciate Rhys's depiction of her heroines as both in search of others and as the embodiment of otherness themselves. According to Graham, Rhys's works are populated solely by heroines who represent the very epitome of the other – invariably female and foreign, with obscured identities, thoughts and actions that mark them as such (Graham, p. 2.) Radford draws a similar conclusion, noting that the madwoman in the attic is, at least from a Western perspective, the personification of otherness (Radford, p. 117.)

[660] Freud, 'Constructions', p. 257.

[661] Kimmey, p. 114.

[662] Kamel, p. 1.

[663] Patke, p. 190.

[664] Smith, R.M., p. 122.

'the tragic loss of a place […] and the need to re-enter "lost" origins',[665] as well as 'the narrative of a daughter's cumulative trauma'.[666] Employing and inhabiting Brontë's work allows Rhys a place not only in which to more deeply explore the issues embedded throughout her oeuvre, but also a place from which she can define herself in terms of her authorial and literary position. Smith and Rody independently suggest that Brontë occupies a maternal role in Rhys's writing and imagination, while Simpson argues that this relationship afforded Rhys the space to finally complete 'the novel she needed to write'.[667] In a way, then, Rhys is herself 'the rebellious daughter'[668] in relation to what Patke affectionately deems her 'literary foster-mother',[669] 'dependent yet resistant' on Brontë's text.[670] Brontë thus provides a framework for Rhys's work (including context, characters, and even many of the central problems Rhys addresses), upon which the novel and its author are dependent. By necessity of this position, Brontë also represents a backdrop of control and oppression against which Rhys must define herself, her characters, and her writing. In the same way Antoinette is 'forced to spend her life searching for that mother who will provide her with her own reflection'.[671] Brontë acts as a maternal figure and container with whom Rhys can create 'a "daughterly" relationship of legacy and rebellion'.[672] While the idea of intertextuality has been central for many critics in discussing Rhys's final novel, only in several studies has the relationship between Rhys and Brontë been explored in any depth.

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[665] Curtis, Jan, 'The Secret of *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 31 (1990), 185–97 (p. 187).
[666] Burrows, p. 45.
[667] Simpson, p. 136.
[668] Smith, R.M., p. 124.
[669] Patke, p. 190.
[670] Ibid.
[671] Fayad, p. 440.
[672] Rody, p. 301.

In addition to providing the maternal structure that Rhys's work so desperately needed, there is a darker element to this relationship as well. Rhys's text takes issue with many of the foundations of Brontë's narrative, including antiquated formulations of madness and stringent ideals of femininity, which problematise the intertextual literary relationship. Rich notes that while 'Rhys's relationship to Brontë has an unusually overt and conscious element […] it bespeaks a buried self as well'.[673] This is perhaps where the notion of the zombie text arises and why 'what we are finally left with at the conclusion of Rhys's novel is […] a curious containment of inhabitation, a looping textual return *inside* the other to a resting state of almost foetal dependence'.[674] While Smith's haunting allusion to the mother-daughter bond as one defined by a zombielike inhabitation of the other rings true, it is unclear exactly which text is inhabiting the other. Patke's reading suggests that it is Rhys's text that 'feeds cannibal-like on Brontë's compromised femininity'[675] and Smith's reading similarly describes *Wide Sargasso Sea* as 'nestling parasite-like within the narrative body of the other'.[676] Burrows, on the other hand, argues that it is *Jane Eyre* rather than *Wide Sargasso Sea* that acts as 'the revenant text that ideologically haunt's Rhys's novel'.[677] A more accurate hypothesis may be that both texts, in different ways, inhabit each other, creating a cyclical tale that repeatedly invokes the other. By joining her text with Brontë's in this way, Rhys creates a relationship in which the two are continuously stuck in a pattern of 'decontextualization and

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[673] Rich, Adrienne, '*Jane Eyre*: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman', in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (London: Norton, 1995), pp. 89–106 (p. 117).
[674] Smith, R.M., p. 120, emphasis in original.
[675] Patke, p. 190.
[676] Smith, R.M., p. 128.
[677] Burrows, p. 42.

recontextualization',[678] forever leading to uncertain conclusions and multiple textual vantage points.

By affixing her text to Brontë's, Rhys is able to create a pattern in which the characters and realities of both texts are continuously reimagined and ambiguous. Williams-Wanquet explains that in re-writing a sacred canonical text, a novel such as *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges the 'philosophical foundations from within'[679] Brontë's narrative. What Rhys accomplishes, then, is not simply a prequel or the interpellation of a minor character, but a fundamental overhaul of the philosophical and psychological parameters of Brontë's hypotext. In addition to offering a modern analysis of the Victorian ideals of Brontë's novel with which Rhys took issue, her primary objective was grounded in explaining the 'other side' and the circumstances from which the madwoman in the attic might have arisen.[680] In creating a history for such a marginalised character, Rhys is forced (and thereby forces her readers) to examine not only the method by which Bertha is marginalised, but the reasons and particularities that lead to her imprisonment. By questioning the rules that govern *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* opens the door to a number of questions that Brontë was either unwilling or unable to explore. The list of material which has been considered suppressed in *Jane Eyre* is plentiful, with critics commonly pointing to issues of sexuality, colonialism, and patriarchy, to name a few. The primary example, however, is of course the issue of madness, which Brontë's text locks in an attic and which Rhys's text radically unleashes.

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[678] Williams-Wanquet, Eileen, 'Towards Defining "Postrealism" in British Literature', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 36 (2006), 389–419 (p. 413).
[679] Ibid., p. 394.
[680] Rhys, *Letters*.

Though invariably divided on its meaning, most critics agree that Rhys's construction of Bertha/Antoinette's history is indeed an exploration of a madness which is inherited from Brontë's text.[681] The culmination of the heroine's experience, however, and what is to be made of both her madness and her death, is not nearly so straightforward in Rhys's novel. Many critics, particularly those who address the text from a cultural or historical perspective, interpret Bertha's madness and death as resulting from the debilitating effects of oppression, culminating in what Fayad describes as 'her inability to assert her existence as subject'.[682] Fayad's understanding of the culmination of Bertha's narrative illustrates the dangers of interpreting her death as Rhys's own artistic creation and also of assuming Bertha's death is the same in both Brontë's work and Rhys's. By tying the end of her novel to Brontë's, the agency and freedom that Rhys is afforded in the first two sections of *Wide Sargasso Sea* stands in contrast to the limitations inherent in tying the end of her text to Brontë's. Although Rhys successfully writes a life, a background and, to a degree, a rationale for why the madwoman in the attic is mad, she is unable to provide Bertha an alternative ending, as 'one has already been written for her'.[683] In keeping with the zombie theme, the text remains 'a haunted place, spooked by a predestination', a 'beginning to a protagonist who is already dead',[684] and subject to 'a trajectory that the narrative has promised to fulfill from very early on'.[685] Thus, a measured consideration of the attitude towards and understanding of

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[681] Several critics have suggested the possibility that *Wide Sargasso Sea* gave Rhys the space to write about and displace her own madness, which she had never before addressed in any fictional or non-fictional work (Athill, 'Introduction', pp. ix-x).
[682] Fayad, p. 442.
[683] Forrester, p. 37.
[684] Ibid., p. 38.
[685] Erwin, p. 153.

madness in each text may prove useful in distilling each author's approach to the theme of madness.

Defining madness, both in Rhys's terms and in Brontë's, leads to a broad discrepancy in its conception. *Jane Eyre*, for example, depicts Bertha as dangerous and severely mentally ill; a nonsensical, dishevelled 'monster' and 'lunatic […] both cunning and malignant'.[686] Designations of madness, lunacy, and mental illness are used interchangeably and with damning connotation in Brontë's text. The distinction between madness and sanity, as well, is extremely black and white; after Rochester's marriage to 'the madwoman in the attic' is exposed in *Jane Eyre*, his character explains the difficulty of his situation in the West Indies and the point he considered suicide.

> [M]y ears were filled with the curses the maniac still shrieked out; wherein she momentarily mingled my name with such a tone of demon-hate, with such language!—no professed harlot ever had a fouler vocabulary than she […]. 'This life', said I at last, 'is hell […]. I have a right to deliver myself from it if I can […]. I said this whilst I knelt down at, and unlocked a trunk which contained a brace of loaded pistols: I meant to shoot myself. I only entertained the intention for a moment; for, not being insane, the crisis of exquisite and unalloyed despair, which had originated the wish and design of self-destruction, was past in a second.[687]

Though Rochester lapses into suicidal ideations and goes so far as to unlock his trunk containing loaded guns, he is not afforded with the same pejorative descriptors as his wife. In Brontë's safe world of binaries, Rochester is sane, Bertha is mad, and there is no consideration that anything may exist in between these demarcations.

Rhys's understanding of madness is considerably more nuanced than Brontë's, leading some critics, such as Lawson, to question the foundations of insanity so often associated with Rhys's text. Lawson's article endeavours to answer the question: 'Is

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[686] Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*, Deluxe Edition (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 309, 310.
[687] Ibid., p. 308.

Antoinette in fact "mad" in Rhys's novel as she is in Brontë's?'[688] Despite being locked

in the attic of a house for ten years in a country she has never seen the outside of and thus

somewhat unaware of time and space, Bertha/Antoinette's narration in Part Three is

remarkably lucid.

> In this room I wake early and lie shivering for it is very cold. At last Grace Poole,
> the woman who looks after me, lights a fire with paper and sticks and lumps of
> coal. She kneels to blow it with bellows. The paper shrivels, the sticks crackle and
> spit, the coal smoulders and glowers. In the end flames shoot up and they are
> beautiful (116).

While in Brontë's text, Bertha only communicates in snarls and other sub-human noises,

the Bertha of Rhys's text is quite clear, in both her thoughts and spoken language. (By

way of contrast, Grace Poole is depicted as the one who drinks herself to sleep every

night and with whom Bertha/Antoinette cannot discuss philosophical topics like the

importance of names.) It seems safe to assume that the madwoman in the attic of *Jane

Eyre* is qualitatively not the same as the character who narrates Part Three of *Wide

Sargasso Sea*. If Rhys's heroine is indeed mad, that madness means something very

different in Rhys's text, perhaps something not altogether negative. Shoshana Felman's

study, 'Madness and Philosophy *or* Literature's Reason', addresses the categorisations of

madness on which Rhys's and Brontë's texts diverge, the chief of which is the

oversimplification of madness in Brontë's text compared with Rhys's richer

understanding of its nuances and potentialities. Felman offers an understanding of

madness similar to Rhys's, in that many of the symptoms haphazardly labelled as 'mad'

are in fact acts imbued with philosophic underpinnings that render them meaningful,

psychologically rich, and perfectly sane expressions of one's inner world.

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[688] Lawson, p. 25.

This thinking is, of course, one of the most fundamental premises of psychoanalysis and we may pause to remind ourselves of Freud's assertion that 'symptoms have a sense'.[689] Felman's argument is rooted in the philosophical meanings of madness (rather than psychological or psychoanalytic understandings), particularly as these are portrayed in literature. Her discussion focuses on the work of Foucault and Derrida regarding the language of madness and applies these somewhat opposing theories in an effort to decipher the convoluted relationship between madness, literature, and philosophy. Beginning with a short history on the Western conceptualisation of madness, Felman suggests the birth of psychiatry in the late eighteenth century marked the turning point at which madness began to be silenced and systematically compartmentalised. Felman begins her study by invoking Foucault's position and stating her own:

> Foucault's main object – and the challenge of this study – is to contend that anthropology, philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, are built upon a radical misunderstanding of the phenomenon of madness and a deliberate misapprehension of its language. The entire history of Western culture is revealed to be the story of Reason's progressive conquest and consequent repression of that which it calls madness.[690]

Two points are worth mentioning here, as they will inform the basis of the subsequent discussion of Rhys's text. First, the notion that the multitude of disciplines Felman mentions collectively misunderstand madness, as well as the language in which it is communicated; secondly, and arguably more importantly in furthering our understanding of how these ideas function in Rhys and Brontë's texts, Felman's argument that Western culture has progressively diminished and repressed madness in such a way as to render it

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[689] Freud, Sigmund, 'Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XVI (1916-1917): Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Part III)*, XXIV vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 257. This phrase has also been translated as 'the symptom carries a meaning' (Freud, Sigmund, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. by G. Stanley Hall (New York: Boni and Liveright, 2010), p. 1.)

[690] Felman, Shoshana, 'Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason', *Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975), 206–28 (p. 209), italics in original.

silent and impotent. Felman expands upon the manner and the historical context in which this is carried out, which is worth quoting at length.

> In 1794 begins a new era: the enchained madmen of Bicêtre are liberated by Pinel; psychiatry is constituted, madness is released from its physical chains. But this liberation, in Foucault's eyes, masks a new form of confinement: madness is now reduced to the diminished status of 'mental illness', to be caught in the positivistic net of erudite determinism […]. Madness sheds the negative foreignness by which, for the Classical mind, it eluded any objective grasp, so as to know an object among others, submitted to the process of knowledge and rational understanding. Science thereby takes up where the Cartesian *ratio* left off: in the very acquisition of its specificity, madness, according to Foucault, is still excluded, still a prisoner, bound now by the chains of its objectification, still forbidden the possibility of appearing in its own right, still prevented from speaking for itself, in a language of its own.[691]

Felman suggests that the 'net of erudite determinism' in which madness is ensnared is no longer defined by walls, but by words. Madness is labelled, objectified, and then banished, to the offices of psychiatrists or the attics and margins of great works of literature, where it can either be ignored or stand in judgment against the rational and acceptable. While perhaps ostensibly a more humane system, Felman and Foucault contend that the modern treatment of madness is still defined by shackles, confinement, and marginalisation.

At the heart of Felman's argument is the belief that madness is not synonymous with mental illness, as post-eighteenth-century Western culture believed and, as such, it is not reducible to the status of a label or an object. Rather, Felman suggests, madness exists in another register entirely; it is 'nothing other than the excess of its pathos', a 'lyrical explosion', 'torn presence', and the 'capacity for suffering, for emotion, for *vertige*, for *literary* fascination'.[692] This dense description houses a vivid picture of the reaches and capacity of madness, particularly as an experience that goes beyond the normal

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[691] Ibid., p. 211, italics in original.
[692] Ibid., p. 224, italics in original.

boundaries of conscious or rational understanding. The inclusion of the literary element of Felman's portrayal of madness draws on one of the central arguments of her paper and the correlation between literature, madness, and philosophy. If madness is the capacity for that which is beyond the conscious – unknowable and unthinkable – it by definition escapes philosophy, which is subject to rational discourse in the Symbolic realm. Felman, along with Foucault and, to a degree, Derrida, suggests that madness can, however, be manifested or evoked by 'metaphor, pathos, [and] fiction',[693] which constitute and are contained in the building blocks of literature.[694] The problem of communicating something that is, by definition, incommunicable is addressed not by language, then, in its ordinary sense, but by a discourse rooted in evocation. What is at stake, Felman argues, particularly in Foucault's work, is 'the philosophical search for a *new status of discourse*, a discourse which would undo both exclusion and inclusion, which would obliterate the line of demarcation and the opposition between Subject and Object, Inside and Outside, Reason and Madness.'[695] The authentic voice of madness that is sought here is precisely what Foucault eventually locates in the discourse of literature,[696] particularly in literature that is capable of unfettering the aforementioned binaries, a text not dissimilar to Rhys's final novel.

Taking the works of Shakespeare as her primary examples, Felman argues that the role of madness in literature is 'eminently philosophical' and the literary madman, by extension, is 'most often a disguised philosopher',[697] charged with uncoupling culturally imposed binaries and examining what lies beneath and between them. As such, writings

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[693] Ibid., p. 214.
[694] Ibid., p. 222.
[695] Ibid., p. 214, italics in original.
[696] Ibid., p. 220.
[697] Ibid., p. 207.

on hysteria and madness investigate and inhabit the empty and middle spaces between a text's more obvious oppositions in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of unequivocal delineations meant to impose order.[698] The question of place – particularly a place in the margins – is a familiar theme in Rhys's work, as is the question of what constitutes true madness. The language of madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* becomes a means not only for challenging depictions of mental illness, but a method by which the foundations of madness are overhauled, re-examined, and shown to be synonymous with the very structures and institutions that feel the need to divide the world into an organised series of binary divisions. Thus, Rhys's reimagining of Bertha's narrative is not an account of mental illness, but what Lerner calls 'a demonstration of the logic in her madness',[699] which is illustrated by means of disjoining the culturally imposed binaries that divide the world into mad and sane.

Many of the themes and issues central to *Wide Sargasso Sea* are, as Murdoch observes, 'predicated on principles of binary division'.[700] The power of Rhys's novel hinges on its ability to disorient both text and reader by actively displacing the comforts of such divisions. Williams-Wanquet suggests that many critics, such as Adlai Maurel, describe *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a 'mad text'[701] due to precisely the shifting and uncertain structure on which it is built.

> [E]verything is constantly and instantaneously reversible and ambiguous. The dichotomous either/or structure upholding patriarchy is replaced by a simultaneous both/and structure, as limits are abolished, dissolving the oxymoronic structure. Everything is also at the same time its opposite.[702]

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[698] Winterhalter, p. 220.
[699] Lerner, Laurence, 'Bertha and the Critics', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 44 (1989), 273–300 (p. 277).
[700] Murdoch, p. 257.
[701] Maurel, p. 158.
[702] Williams-Wanquet, p. 412.

In a text where boundaries are constantly collapsing and overlapping,[703] *Wide Sargasso Sea* challenges the very nature by which the reader's mind is organised to think about and represent the world. As we may recall from Chapter Three, George points out that 'binarisms are essential for the purposes of definition'[704] and distinctions such as here and there, good and bad, us and them, are therefore necessary for the purposes of differentiation and navigating the world. There is a psychological comfort in making such clear delineations, which enable one to orient oneself in the world by safely thinking in unambiguous, absolute terms.

Rhys accomplishes this textual disruption in *Wide Sargasso Sea* by means of numerous literary devices, including narrative and textual gaps; word choice and naming (including the novel's title); intertextual parallels; and a collapsing of familiar and orienting structures, such as time and space. The inverse relationship between ambiguity and safety, for instance, arises frequently in the text, collapsing the terms and rendering them confused. These concepts can be usefully examined within a discussion of the various settings of the novel. Each distinct section of the novel is centred around a house or dwelling, the first of which is Coulibri, the heroine's childhood home. At the time in which the novel is set, ambiguities of race, skin colour, social status, and shifting socio-economic paradigms reigned; as these tensions escalate within the novel, both the structure of the heroine's home and the structure of the narrative become unsafe. Coulibri is forthwith burned to the ground, claiming the lives of Pierre and the family parrot Coco in the process.[705] Following the arson of her home, Antoinette is sent to live out the

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[703] Smith, R.M., p. 117.
[704] George, p. 4.
[705] The death of the parrot has been largely neglected in critical studies of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as has its reemergence in Part Three of the novel. Due to the bird's prevalence in the novel, however, it is worth

remainder of her adolescence in a Catholic convent, which, in contrast to Coulibri, is defined by a sense of safety. Burrows notes that the safety of the convent is furnished by a system of 'excessive binary divisions' – such as light and dark, good and evil – and initially the heroine luxuriates in the simplicity of such an uncomplicated system of categorisation.[706] Towards the end of her time at the convent, however, Antoinette stops subscribing to religion, fails to pray as often, and makes fewer black and white distinctions; as a result, she feels 'bolder, happier, more free. But not so safe' (32).

Part Two of the novel takes place entirely on the island of Dominica, at the couples' honeymoon house, Granbois, located near the town of Massacre. This third home in which the heroine lives is marked by perhaps the most profound examples of strict duality and harsh binarisms, this time exemplified by Rochester and systematically questioned and dismantled by Antoinette. As this section is narrated by Rochester, a new set of narratorial rules are introduced and a new perspective dominates. From the outset, a sense of dis-ease about the heroine's identity is palpable. Rochester's initial description of his wife centres around her eyes, which he describes as 'too large' and 'disconcerting' (32); he further muses, 'Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they not English or European either' (32). The desire to categorise and label Antoinette is clear from the outset, as is the husband's discomfort at his inability to successfully place her in any single category. Because Antoinette's status is largely ambiguous, she undermines the

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noting the symbolism its image houses, which is intimately tied to many key themes of Rhys's text. Beyond its universal recognition as a symbol of the soul, the image of the bird also represents freedom and the ability to move between and reconcile worlds; thus, birds form a symbolic link 'between heaven and earth, conscious and unconscious' and both 'the perspectives of heaven and earth at the same time'. (Ronnenberg, Ami, and Kathleen Martin, eds., *The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images* (London: Taschen, 2010) pp. 238-41.)

[706] Burrows, pp. 54-55.

possibility of binary division[707] and Rochester, 'who subscribes to Western notions of duality and […] consciousness'[708] simply cannot tolerate her enigmatic and unclear identity. From the husband's perspective, it is Antoinette who is unsafe, as she threatens his system of classification. It is not only his young wife, however, who challenges Rochester's binary thinking; the island itself seems almost an extension of Antoinette and thus also terrifies him. He finds Dominica beautiful but wild and unknowable, 'quite unreal and like a dream' (49) and seems to fear such a world without boundaries. 'It was not a safe game to play – in that place. Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness. Better not know how close. Better not think, never for a moment. Not close. The same…' (58-59). Words and notions which once held discrete and opposite ideas merge here and the boundaries that once structured some of Rochester's most cherished ideas are deconstructed, reinforcing Curtis's assertion that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 'every boundary line is a myth'.[709]

Rochester's dependence on binarisms is repeatedly contrasted with the heroine's more fluid desire for a merging of opposites[710] and the couple is ultimately doomed based on their opposing views of how the world is structured and defined. The many delineations that Rhys's text calls into question create a series of oppositions, such as 'dream and reality, thought and feeling, sanity and madness',[711] which Rochester subscribes to and which Antoinette does not. Despite the husband's best efforts, the heroine's complexity as an individual 'can never be collapsed into a singular, synthesized

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[707] Graham, p. 1.
[708] Davis, Todd F., and Kenneth Womack, 'Reclaiming the Particular: The Ethics of Self and Sexuality in *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Jean Rhys Review*, 11 (1999), 63–78 (p. 72).
[709] Curtis, p. 189.
[710] Ibid., p. 191.
[711] Radford, p. 118

identity, whether that of the good English wife or that of the mad criminal, Bertha

Mason',[712] nor can her worldview, which recognises and incorporates both poles of an

issue, as well as the unknown middle ground between them. Critics generally attribute

Christophine's observation that Rochester wants 'to break [Antoinette] up' (99) as his

desire to push her to the point of madness; however, 'break her up' could as easily refer

to his desire to break her down, into something known that can be rationally analysed and

classified. The colonising desire to understand, label, and define is simultaneously at

odds with both the island and the heroine. The textual uncertainty about the ambiguous

and complex identity of the Rhys woman, particularly in the face of a Western society

that aims to categorise and simplify, has come quite a distance from Marya Zelli in

Quartet. Where Rhys's earlier heroines were uncertain and ashamed of their difference,

Rhys's final heroine embraces an identity and a world where, as Anderson describes it,

'all is dualism'.[713]

> [T]here seems to be no single or absolute answer to any [question]. Thus, Rhys opens the door to an open-ended universe, where anything is possible, and anyone (including ourselves) capable of anything. Rhys points the way to *the other side* – the other side of all our easy assumptions about all aspects of reality, race, culture, sex, psycho-sexuality, sexual roles, and sanity and madness, about love and hate, about life – and, therefore, about death. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, all is enigma, all is dualism, all is *truth*.[714]

This sentiment is echoed by Fayad, who describes Rhys's final novel as seeking, 'above

all […] to avoid that single compartmentalizing vision in favor of one that opens up the

realms of possibility'.[715] The possibility inherent in this vision of 'the other side',

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[712] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 107.
[713] Anderson, p. 57.
[714] Ibid., italics in original.
[715] Fayad, p. 451.

however, exists at the expense of the safety of definition, a difficult position for most to tolerate, let alone accept and embrace.

The discrepancy between Brontë's novel and Rhys's, in terms of their treatment of uncomfortable truths, is vast. *Jane Eyre*, as we have seen, relies heavily on discrete, knowable ideas, definitions and demarcations; Jane's character is good, her aunt is bad; Bertha is crazy, Rochester is sane. Otherness, depravity, and that which is unknowable is simply shut away in Brontë's text in order to avoid psychological discomfort and unbearable realities. Precisely for this reason, however, Lerner argues that *Jane Eyre* becomes a text that 'is filled with hunger, rebellion, and rage'.[716] Such textual repression is not uncommon in Victorian texts; as Gilbert and Gubar point out, '[b]y projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines, but into mad or monstrous women (who are suitably punished in the course of the novel or poem), female authors dramatize their own self-division'.[717] Jane, and by extension Brontë and her reading audience, are safe as long as Bertha is available to bear the brunt of the darker and unconscious aspects of the narrative. Indeed, Gilbert and Gubar portray Bertha as the embodiment of the repressed as well as Jane's double,[718] while Lerner suggests the madwoman in the attic represents Brontë's heroine's fantasies and imagination, as well as Rochester's shadow.[719] According to Wilson, Rhys recognises this textual split and 'that the forbidden room in *Jane Eyre* is also the hidden, repressed, and silenced selves' of the characters.[720] Thus, the reason the madwoman in the attic is afforded so little textual attention in Brontë's

[716] Lerner, p. 276.
[717] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 78.
[718] Ibid., p. 359.
[719] Lerner, pp. 273-74.
[720] Wilson, Sharon, 'Bluebeard's Forbidden Room in Rhys's Post-Colonial MetaFairy Tale, *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3 (2003), 111–22 (p. 111).

narrative is the same reason she is the central focus of Rhys's, whose texts invariably aim to unmask the darker and more unconscious elements of her characters. Made to house and represent the dark and licentious elements of the psyche, Bertha exists in *Jane Eyre* solely as a repository for the repressed and unconscious components of the self. As such, Brontë's text manages to avoid 'the monstrous other' in the attic by affording her 'no real existence' at all, save that of a madwoman, locked away in Thornfield's attic.[721]

If Brontë's novel chains the textual unconscious to a single, marginalised character, Rhys's text sets her free, thereby exposing and exploring the repressed elements that Brontë ignores. As Smith suggests, 'Rhys's revision of *Jane Eyre* […] not only establishes an unconscious narrative dialogue with the precursor text but also engages and brings to textual consciousness its central repression'.[722] Thus, all that appears stable in *Jane Eyre* becomes fluid and amorphous in *Wide Sargasso Sea*,[723] the latter of which Smith argues 'assumes a double structure of sorts' in order to deal with the manifest and latent content of the narrative.[724] Differences that were once managed in Brontë's text by systems of repression, naming, and ostracism are suddenly extremely palpable in Rhys's narrative, which actively endeavours to expose and deconstruct the repressed and silenced textual elements its hypotext aims so hard to conceal.[725] These divergent impulses can be seen throughout Rhys's text, with Rochester and England symbolising the conscious and rational, while Rhys's portrayal of Antoinette and the West Indies espouse the realities of the repressed. As previously mentioned, Rochester

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[721] Williams-Wanquet, p. 411.
[722] Smith, R.M., p. 128.
[723] Nixon, Nicola, '*Wide Sargasso Sea* and Jean Rhys's Interrogation of the "Nature Wholly Alien" in *Jane Eyre*', *Essays in Literature*, 21 (1994), 267–84 (p. 280).
[724] Smith, R.M., p. 117.
[725] Winterhalter, pp. 214-27.

initially describes the island in uncertain terms: '[i]t was a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, "What I see is nothing – I want what it *hides* – that is not nothing"' (54, italics in original). At first, Rochester seems seduced by the island's extraordinary character, which he deems beautiful, alien, and in possession of hidden qualities, which he wants to conquer and understand. Like Antoinette, however, the island neither reveals its secrets nor conforms to easy definitions and, as such, is soon deemed a 'hostile' (65) and dangerous place.

> [A]fter I had walked for what seemed a long time I found that the undergrowth and creepers caught at my legs and the trees closed over my head…. I was lost and afraid among these enemy trees, so certain of danger (66).

The next time he is near the forest, shortly before their departure to England, Rochester's reaction is similar: 'But what are you doing here you folly? So near the forest. Don't you know that this is a dangerous place? And that the dark forest always wins?' (108). Rochester's suspicions about the forest and of the myriad unknowns that the West Indies and the heroine represent mirrors his attitude towards the unconscious, which is marked by fear and repression.

> I hated the place. I hated the mountains and the hills, 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 the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it […]. Very soon she'll join all the others who know the secret and will not tell it. Or cannot (111).

Simpson suggests that what truly frightens Rochester, which is represented both by his wife and the island, 'is the tangle of wild unconscious impulses that he cannot face; and these, which are his truth, are defined as that from which he must run and hide, as if his

life depended on it'.[726] This discomfort and inability to tolerate the unconscious forms the

basis of his subjugation of Antoinette, whom he simply cannot understand and whose

otherness constantly vexes and eludes him.

In an attempt to regain the sense of control he has lost on the island, Rochester

proceeds to silence his wife and subsume her identity. As his discomfort grows, he sleeps

with their housemaid, Amélie, within earshot of Antoinette; renames Antoinette Bertha;

and uproots her from her homeland to imprison her in his attic. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester's

feelings about the final step of this process are described as follows: 'Glad was I when I

at last got her to Thornfield, and saw her safely lodged in that third-story room, of whose

inner secret cabinet she has now for ten years made a wild beast's den – a goblin's

cell'.[727] Unable to control his wife and fearful of what she represents, Rochester simply

locks her away and deems her mad. Winterhalter argues that the husband's actions here

and his display of authority are 'best understood as a mad attempt to reaffirm his

manhood in a world which threatens its very conceptualization'.[728] Winterhalter further

suggests that Rhys's text demonstrates this tendency as a larger problem of over-

categorisation due to an intolerance of otherness:

> Rhys displays how the process of codifying otherness creates the truly destructive
> madness, a madness for authority located in the names it generates. If madness
> exists in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, then, it is at the moment of enunciation. It exists in
> the specialized vocabularies that insist upon the absolute differentiation between
> self and other.[729]

In recognising that her characters cannot be collapsed into single, unified Subjects and

that individuals, by their very nature, defy and transcend labels – of sexuality, culture,

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[726] Simpson, p. 124.
[727] Brontë, p. 309.
[728] Winterhalter, p. 223.
[729] Ibid., p. 227.

and endless descriptive binarisms (dark/light, virgin/whore) – the true 'genesis and nature of madness is unmasked as repression of all that is "other"'.[730] What Rochester condemns as madness in his wife is, in fact, the mark 'of the person who refuses the choice of self-deception' and, in doing so, demonstrates an agency and sanity that is lacking both in his character and in *Jane Eyre* as a whole.[731] By writing a life for the madwoman in the attic, Rhys manages not only to free her heroine from a marginalised and one-dimensional status, but also to transfer the onus of madness to Rochester, whose behaviour is portrayed as markedly more perverse.

A final element of the text that has vexed and divided critics, is the final scene of Rhys's novel and that which binds it to Brontë's: the heroine's act of setting fire to Thornfield Hall. Most critics fall into two distinct camps regarding their reading of this scene and interpret the fire Antoinette/Bertha starts and her dream of jumping from the attic as either 'suicide or a flight to freedom'.[732] It should also be noted that although most critics cite Bertha/Antoinette's death as occurring in Rhys's text, as both Graham and Williams-Wanquet point out, Antoinette merely has a vision of setting fire to the house in her dream and when Rhys's novel closes, the heroine is still walking along the hallway with the candle she will presumably use to burn down Thornfield Hall. As the novel stops short of portraying her actual jump from the attic window, Bertha's death can only be located in implication and intertextual association with Brontë's novel.[733] Despite the absent moment of the heroine's death in Rhys's text, the dream she has of setting fire to Thornfield is often equated with her death and Bertha's 'suicide' is 'variously

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[730] Williams-Wanquet, p. 412.
[731] Simpson, p. 126.
[732] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 108.
[733] Williams-Wanquet, p. 4.

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interpreted as a triumph, a nihilistic embrace of nothingness […] an antagonistic cry for redemption'[734]; 'an overpowering image of political and cultural resistance'[735]; 'a final aggressive act of assertion, reaffirmation, and self-liberation'[736]; 'a victory'[737]; and even as a fantasized union with Tia and a blackness she desired all along.[738] The text may indeed be each of these, depending on one's reading and critical vantage point; importantly however, the final pages of Rhys's final novel continue to evade a conclusive ending.

Rhys seemed incisively aware of the lure of definitions, particularly those constructed via a series of either/or binaries. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys seems able to let go of the temptation to label and define, even if such a position is met with a label of madness from the collective. Abel points out that 'experience, like language, is fluid and complex, and to impose strict categories is to falsify',[739] a sentiment she suggests is true of Rhys's work, particularly *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Perhaps the only conclusion, if we must indeed draw one, is that there never really is one; that truth, in Rhys's fiction, can only be found in the unknowable spaces of gaps and silences. Graham writes extensively of Rhys's predilection for open endings, textual spaces, and gaps, stating: 'Rhys left blanks. Her narrative style subverts her own authority: it refuses to dictate a way of reading the text, and refrains from suggesting superior knowledge on her own part. Her endings expose the myth of polarized choice' while promoting ambiguity.[740] Abel closes her

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[734] Curtis, p. 189.
[735] Kimmey, p. 126.
[736] Anderson, p. 60.
[737] Emery, 'Politics', p. 428.
[738] Erwin, p. 154.
[739] Abel, Elizabeth, 'Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys', *Contemporary Literature*, 20 (1979), 155–77 (p. 173).
[740] Graham, pp. 4, 9.

paper with the following reflection, which is where the current exploration of Rhys's

final novel will also come to a close.

> Rhys's fiction seems grim because it describes unflinchingly a given social structure and its psychological consequences. Yet though Rhys offers no prospect of altering that structure, she does suggest some leeway in emotional responses. The spectrum of responses she portrays is a narrow one, but perhaps less narrow than a hasty reading indicates. Within her apparent determinism lie some subtle variations that a psychological framework can illuminate and clarify. Rhys's microcosmic vision can shift, in the right perspective, to a microscopic image of one aspect of women's mental lives. Rhys's scope may be small, but her perceptions are deep, and her pessimism not as final as it seems to be. To the now familiar topic of women and madness, Rhys contributes her detailed scrutiny of specific psychic mechanisms. Rhys's unremitting vision may anger or depress us, but it will illuminate us if we persevere.[741]

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[741] Abel, p. 177.

CONCLUSION

> Surely all art is the result of one's having been in danger, of
> having gone through an experience all the way to the end, where
> no one can go any further.
> –Rilke[742]

The first of Rhys's novels I encountered was *Good Morning, Midnight*, in the latter

stages of my Master's degree. During the seminar that followed the reading, my class was

divided about how the novel ended: whether René the gigolo had returned or if Sasha had

gone to bed with the *commis voyageur* from next door. I was amongst the half of the class

that read the ending incorrectly – that wanted the 'right' thing to happen so badly that I

was able to project my own, happier conclusion onto Rhys's text. I walked out that day

stunned, both at my own incompetence and at Rhys's skill in creating a work so

psychologically powerful that almost twenty graduate students had misinterpreted a fairly

straightforward conclusion. I also left that day knowing that I had to read the rest of

Rhys's work and figure out her writing, for any author who could rattle my sense of

narrative comfort was obviously worth the effort.

The beauty of Rhys's writing, of course, is that 'figuring it out' is an impossible

task. To even begin to uncover the layers of meaning and allusion within her work

requires not only an understanding and appreciation of multiple lines of scholarly inquiry,

but a persistence to see the real – the trauma, the inexpressible, the melancholia –

embedded throughout the novels. While I never did 'figure her out', I did notice a pattern

in the aesthetic of Rhys's novels similar to what I understood to be the arc of the analytic

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[742] Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Letters on Cézanne*, trans. by Joel Agee, 2nd edition (New York: North Point Press, 2002), p. 4.

process: a struggle to remember, understand, and integrate the parts of ourselves which are not so easily reconcilable. I began to look at Rhys's oeuvre almost as one would a case study, and my hypothesis that her novels tracked the progression of a capacity to tolerate internal spaces began to coalesce.

Storytelling and written narratives, particularly those in which there is a strong autobiographical component, can offer a therapeutic space in which one's story can be worked through, analysed, and rewritten. The position that Rhys's oeuvre communicates a highly therapeutic and purposeful endeavour is held by many critics and writers, including Angier who, throughout her exhaustive biographical work on Rhys, maintained that the author's 'solipsism and her pessimism combined to make her writing exactly what she said it was: a quest for self-knowledge, and nothing to do with anyone else. She wrote to understand her isolation'.[743] Based on our knowledge of Rhys – particularly her distrust of analysis and the 'psychoanalytic gent'[744] whose writings have been employed throughout this study – the author would have been reticent to engage in a traditional analytic relationship. Yet, Athill repeatedly speaks to therapeutic dynamic between the author and her work, stating, 'I don't think she could have survived without her writing […] it saved her over and over again',[745] indicating the degree to which Rhys's writing functions in a psychological capacity, specifically in its ability to provide space for the unearthing and unburdening of painful experiences and uncomfortable feelings.

Perhaps the central problem of Rhys's fiction could be described as the difficulty of finding oneself – one's identity, home, voice, and place in the world – particularly when one is not given the tools or support to do so: where is home is to be located when

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[743] Angier, Lives of Modern Women, p. 121.
[744] Rhys, quoted in Moran, *Aesthetics*, p. 93.
[745] Athill, Interview.

one 'belongs nowhere'[746]? As such, for much of Rhys's oeuvre, both the author's

characters and the aesthetic of her novels exist insecurely and uneasily on what Salman

Rushdie terms *terra infirma*, or unstable ground.[747] Johnson describes *terra infirma* as

'the sense of dwelling in different places in which one is never at home'.[748] Johnson

explains that the lack of such grounding will often result in an experience of 'freedom

and insight known to few',[749] but at the risk, as Rushdie alludes to, of being lost, or even

ceasing to exist.[750] Rhys does not write from a middle ground, as many critics have

argued,[751] but from a lack of grounding entirely, a no man's land where 'home is situated

in the gaps: the open endings and the internal lacunae.'[752] Rhys's concern with such inner

spaces – unknown, dark, at times terrifying – are what set her writing apart as both a

purposeful and a brave endeavour.

This process of self-recognition begins with the heroine of Rhys's first novel,

Marya, and ends with the death of Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic from

Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and the heroine of Rhys's last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Castro

explains that this 'choice of narrative strateg[y],' specifically the use of halls, stairs, and

corridors that lead her protagonists to the final attic in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 'charts a

trajectory from objectivity to interiority […] as if moving closer and closer to the issues

that occupied Rhys most deeply'.[753] Of primary concern on this personal and literary

pilgrimage are questions of identity, voice, and home, each of which has material as well

as psychological manifestations. *Quartet* is the first leg of this journey in a series of

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[746] Graham, p. 1.
[747] Rushdie, Salman. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. London: Vintage, 2000.
[748] Johnson, E., *Home*, p. 28.
[749] Ibid., p. 27.
[750] Rushdie, p. 222.
[751] Wilson, L., 'European', p. 68.
[752] Graham, p. 3.
[753] Castro, pp. 39-40.

novels that progresses both internally and externally – through a series of detours and a

great many rooms and spaces – to arrive at some reconciliation of the self, in the form of

Bertha Mason and her ambiguous jump to her death. It is my hope that this study has

sufficiently illustrated the initial move from a place of disunity and fragmentation in

Rhys's first novel to what Castro deems 'a strong sense of formal closure'[754] in her final

novel, in which Rhys's wandering, silenced, and exiled protagonist is 'given a voice at

last'.[755]

Demonstrating a progression over the course of Rhys's oeuvre does not demand a

resolution from her texts, so much as an ability to tolerate the unhomely internal spaces

Graham describes. Revisiting the aims of psychoanalysis will perhaps elucidate the

progress that I believe Rhys's writing also achieves. In the Introduction to her work on

Lacan, Gallop states that 'strength is defined not in the polemic sense of ability to stand

one's ground, but in the psychoanalytic sense of capacity for change, flexibility, ability to

learn, to be touched and moved by contact with others'.[756] Lacan's own formulation of

analytic success is similar and rests on the individual's capacity to navigate the wall of

language in order to experience connection with the Other.

> Analysis must aim at the passage of true speech, joining the subject to an other
> subject, on the other side of the wall of language. That is the final relation of the
> subject to a genuine Other, to the Other who gives the answer one doesn't expect,
> which defines the terminal point of the analysis.[757]

Within the context of Rhys's work, I believe the points illustrated by Gallop and Lacan

are realised at the end of the author's oeuvre. The aesthetic of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is

qualitatively different than that of Rhys's early work, most significantly in its matured

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[754] Ibid., p. 44.
[755] Ibid., p. 38.
[756] Gallop, *Lacan*, p. xi.
[757] Lacan, *Book II*, p. 246.

approach to language and connection with the Other, which can variously be located in the heroine's relationship to other characters, Rhys's relationship to her audience, and the novel's intertextual connection to Brontë's work. Freud suggests that the end of analysis is not signalled by the development of a completely integrated or wholly imperturbable character, but rather by the convergence of certain psychological factors that allow the individual a more secure position in the world.

> [I]t is not easy to foresee a natural end, even if one avoids any exaggerated expectations and sets the analysis no excessive tasks. Our aim will not be to rub off every peculiarity of human character for the sake of a schematic 'normality', nor yet to demand that the person who has been 'thoroughly analysed' shall feel no passions and develop no internal conflicts. The business of the analysis is to secure the best possible psychological conditions for the functions of the ego; with that it has discharged its task.[758]

Thus, the purpose of analysis, if one were to be stated, could perhaps be informed by an amalgam of the above positions: that, by means of negotiating language, one may form a more secure relationship to oneself and others, as well as a tolerance for internal conflicts which, importantly, are never meant or expected to disappear entirely.

Rhys's work ultimately does – through a laborious and deeply personal process of writing – reach a place of such security, which can be evinced in a comparison between early novels and their heroines and the more fully integrated narratives and heroines of *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the course of her oeuvre and the development and progress therein, I believe Rhys locates a home – though perhaps not the one that was originally sought. More psychologically grounded readings of Rhys's work tend to focus both on the trauma present in the novels as well as the intertextual development that occurs throughout each iteration of the Rhys woman, which Angier

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[758] Freud, Sigmund, 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XXIII (1937-1939): Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, XXIV vols. (London: Vintage, 2001), 209–54 (p. 250).

argues is grounded in a desire for self-knowledge.

> [A]s well as universal works of art, Jean Rhys's novels were a quest for the truth about her own painful life. Behind each of them lies the question she gives Antoinette in the last one, *Wide Sargasso Sea*: 'Why do such terrible things happen?' And with each her answer became more honest and less self-justifying. Jean Rhys's work, in other words, seemed to be not just a great artistic progress but a great moral one: a growing up she never managed in life.[759]

Gregg's position echoes Angier's:

> The 'I' that is written in the Rhys texts is a site of exploration and a process of becoming. She insists on the importance of trusting one's own imagination and memory as a means of resisting the recolonization of the self.[760]

The act of becoming oneself and of locating a home there is at the core of Rhys's artistic purpose. We may also recall Ingman's assertion, which was quoted at the beginning of this study, which argues that the creation of her novels 'gave Rhys the only identity she could be sure of; they were her way of mothering herself.'[761] If Rhys ever did find a home, it was likely in writing. Thus, I would propose the final act of Rhys's final novel, the burning of Thornfield Hall, marks neither a death, a tragedy, nor an act of madness, but simply an end, in an unlikely image of self-possession and homecoming.

It is my hope that this thesis allows for further studies to examine the psychological progression in Rhys's work, specifically as this idea relates to her short stories, nonfiction and unpublished works. The notion of homeliness embedded in the process of writing is also a line of potential scholarly inquiry that could be more fully explored, both in Rhys's writing and in the works of similarly displaced modern authors, whose writings explore and evoke feelings of homelessness and alienation. In line with the Lacanian methods employed in this study, further scholarship could also be

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[759] Angier, 'Introduction', p. v.
[760] Gregg, Historical, p. 51.
[761] Ingman., p. 124.

developed in psychoanalytic literary criticism that utilises linguistic analysis to demonstrate literary movement or progression; this method could be employed where there are a sufficient number of works from the same author, published over a period of time, in order to demonstrate the shifting nature of the author's oeuvre.

In the final pages of *Smile Please*, in a chapter titled 'From a Diary', the following text appears in the form of a conversation with an imagined other under the subheading 'Trial Continued':

> *How can you believe in human love and not in humanity?*
> Because I believe that sometimes human beings can be more than themselves.
> *Come come, this is very bad. Can't you do better than that?*
> Silence.
> *What you really mean is that human beings can be taken over, possessed by something outside, something greater, and that love is one of these manifestations. Then, my dear, you must believe in God, or the Gods, in the devil, in the whole bag of tricks.*
> No, that is not what I mean.
> *Then what?*
> I cannot say it. I have not the words.
> *Say.*
> I cannot.
> *You must.*
> It is in myself.
> *What is?*
> All. Good, evil, love, hate, life, death, beauty, ugliness.
> *And in everyone?*
> I do not know 'everyone'. I only know myself.[762]

While Rhys's novels cannot be 'solved', they can be both learned from and a source of inspiration for learning about oneself. In the interest of avoiding a definitive and conclusive statement about a writer whose work refuses to be defined, I will simply say that I am grateful to have stumbled upon an author who encourages her readers to look not only at the echoes beyond the writing they encounter, but at themselves as well.

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[762] Rhys, Jean, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: André Deutsch, 1979), p. 161.

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