

**"IN THE FACE OF TROUBLE": Inertia, Fate and Survival
in the Life and Work of Jean Rhys**

by

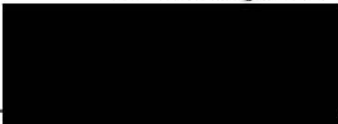
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We accept this thesis as conforming
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ABSTRACT

Diana Athill, in her introduction to *Jean Rhys: The Complete Novels*, speaks of Rhys's "invariable and almost pathological inertia in the face of trouble."

This thesis examines the expression of that attribute in Rhys's work, its implications for her own and her protagonists' survival, and illustrates the parallels between her life and theirs. Rhys translated aspects of her own turmoil into the lives of her characters, in what appears to be, at least partly, an exploration of her own difficulties. Her conviction that her life was predetermined exacerbated the passive, dependent behaviour she had learned as a child of a wealthy colonial Caribbean family, and the "learned helplessness" that resulted from traumatic circumstances that affected her childhood and her early adult years. Inertia, the defence with which she met every crisis, and alcoholism, with its attendant fear, rage and incapacity to function, made a torment of her life.

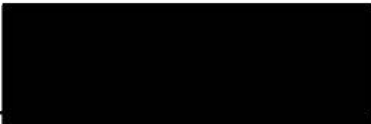
In spite of these handicaps Jean Rhys managed to write five extraordinary novels and many short stories. She also produced a collection of personal writing, some of which formed the basis of her fiction. Rhys's fictional characters manifest a much more tenuous hold on survival than their creator. They live with an almost reckless disregard for their own interests, a recklessness that Rhys occasionally pursued in her own life. But they are almost annihilated, while their author lived to enjoy, as much as was

possible for her, a successful end to her writing career.


An examination of biographies, the novels, and critical analyses of Rhys's fiction suggests a distinct relationship between the author's life and work. The first chapter examines Rhys's family background and her upbringing, which was at times abusive, and which could possibly have led to her reactions of inertia and dependence on the protection of men. The second chapter illustrates how religion, particularly her exposure to Roman Catholicism, and the influence of Obeah, the witchcraft which the slaves had brought to the Caribbean from Africa, may have exacerbated her fatalistic attitudes. The last chapter considers the kinds and availability of work that might have provided independence to a woman of middle-class status in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties, but demonstrates, also, the emotional and mental responses to life which made the performance of such work difficult, if not impossible.

No attempt has been made to arrive at definitive conclusions about the nature of the mental disturbance that appears to have affected the life of the author and the characters she created. Specific circumstances in Rhys's life are compared with similar incidents in her fiction to conclude that while she herself survived, with difficulty, her characters are illustrative of the destruction which she might have considered to be the logical outcome of the kind of life they live.


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DEDICATION

For my best friend and companion,

whose idea all this was—

And for our friends - who aided and

abetted him.

INTRODUCTION

In choosing to examine the influence of autobiography in the fiction of Jean Rhys, I was not at first fully aware of the uncomfortable position I might be taking. But as I read the biographical and critical material I began to realize the extent to which the fiction was informed by the author's own life, and to feel that I was trespassing into the personal secrets and private hells of an anguished soul. "What arrogance!" was my initial reaction. Rhys was dead. What right had I--or anyone--to pry further into that torturously muddled life, and the despair from which she, in life, never wholly emerged?

But Jean Rhys was not just a private person, for whom death would shroud in benevolent reticence the disturbing aspects of the life she lived. She had chosen to write, and to publish. She had also chosen to use her own life as the basis for her work: a work that eventually earned her a respected place not only in the field of what has come to be known as "women's writing," but in the wider modern literary canon. The questions of despair she raises remain prevalent in society and are productive of further inquiry. Because Rhys wrote in a distinctly autobiographical mode, I believe an examination of aspects of what is now known of her difficult life, along with an analysis of some of those same features in the novels, to be valid and useful, partly because it raises questions about autobiography in fiction as well as problems of critical interpretation. It also poses questions about the social impact of such fiction, an impact that is relevant not only to issues of gender equality or the effects of poverty on women, issues which have already been critically examined in Rhys's work, but also to the specific concerns of mental and emotional disturbance, a problem that afflicts people of

both sexes and members of all classes of society. Does such an examination fall within the purview of literary criticism? I believe it does, or should.

Rhys's translation of her own difficulties into the fiction appears to be, at least in part, an attempt to understand and communicate the bewilderment she faced in dealing with the course of her own life, and the difficult, often misunderstood behaviour that seemed inexplicable even to herself. Sections in the fictional texts are often ambiguous and confusing. Apparently designed to elicit sympathy for the protagonist--when in actuality her behaviour is irrational, even at times reprehensible--some of these passages call up responses that result in a diminishing of the reader's empathetic reaction.

If literature reflects a culture, and if that culture is to encompass aspects of human suffering in all its kinds and varieties, then Rhys's contribution to literature involves something beyond the production of good fiction. Mentally and emotionally troubled herself, she presents figures whose lives are severely hampered by their inability to act for themselves in the world. Acclaimed late in life for her great achievement as a novelist, her accomplishment was two-fold, for she also succeeded in further forcing open the door behind which lurks the spectre of mental and emotional illness. As she herself must have learned early, even the milder shades of instability were better kept confined and out of sight--if possible. For her it was not always possible. Jean Rhys always felt that she was "different" from other people.¹ She was; but she was not alone, although she thought so. Many others have suffered from her kind of difference. Few others have attempted to translate that difference so completely into fiction, so adroitly

revealing the essential problems of mental disturbance while concealing its extent, and also the degree of personal experience from which it sprang.

Some of that experience is recorded in her unpublished journals. I am aware, and it has also been pointed out to me, that in writing about themselves, writers inevitably and selectively construct the "life" they share with the world. One cannot, after all, write continuously, as one lives. But that "construct" need not necessarily be for purposes of concealment or revision. I feel that the personal writings of many women authors, Rhys included, are written from the depths of their encounters with life. I believe Rhys wrote from a deep need to probe the complexities of her life, that she wrote with as much honesty as in her troubled states she was capable, and that ultimately she chose to share a great deal of her personal history with the world. Although there were aspects of her life she did not want known, at least while she lived, she sold her personal papers to the University of Tulsa, knowing that they would be preserved, read and eventually revealed. Since those records disclose the similarities between her life and her fiction, surely that act might be interpreted as an acknowledgement that what she concealed in life might offer a further message after her death. It seems unlikely she would construct such a devastating picture of herself and her life, then leave it to posterity and public view, if she was not trying to enunciate a truth--her own truth as she saw it.

Having stated the case, I still have misgivings about my chosen course of study. I leave myself open to the charge of confusing fiction with autobiography, literature with

popular psychology. I also, unavoidably, bring to it the personal impedimenta of my own life experience. However, I have tried, conscientiously, to substantiate any stray opinions of my own on the ravages of mental illness, and its effects on everyone concerned, with sufficient documentation. Our own life experience quite naturally influences the choices we make, and colours our interpretations of everything we encounter, including literature. In pursuing this aspect of Jean Rhys's work, I chose to explore a too often concealed aspect of life, one which holds significance for me. My investigations have, without doubt, raised more questions than they answer-- questions not only about the course of mental illness, but also about the suspect place its investigation may hold in literary analysis. I have not attempted to offer answers. I have instead presented an examination of some facets of the author's life, and their replication in the lives of her characters, to suggest that Rhys's art, taken as it is from her own life, functions on a social as well as an aesthetic level, in a way that purely imaginative works of literature rarely do. Her autobiographical stance adds authority to that function. One may feel, as I have during the course of this writing, irritation with the passivity of the characters, and impatience with their self-absorption, their inertia, their inability or refusal to take a more practical approach to life. Inevitably I have felt that way about Rhys herself. But I have always been cognizant of the extent of her extraordinary accomplishment, the more so as I believe it was achieved under conditions of extreme human stress.

Much of the biographical data has been taken from Carole Angier's 1990

biography, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*. This is a somewhat troublesome text. In the words of A. Alvarez,

Rhys would have hated it: first because of what it reveals of the life she wanted to keep hidden: second because of the way it is written. It is odd that someone who has immersed herself for so long in Rhys's spare and immaculate prose could come up with writing so slack and chatty.

The book is embarrassing in its "chattiness," frequently lapsing into an almost gossipy confidentiality. However, it is also "sympathetic, even handed, and psychologically shrewd...."² It is, as well, thoroughly researched and documented. Perhaps this explains why Diana Athill, Rhys's editor, who herself always wrote with a loving regard for Rhys, obscuring the more horrific aspects of her life under the protective cover of her achievements, became Angier's editor as well.³ Since a complete biography was probably unavoidable, better one that offers compassion with its truth, and which, despite its revelations, treats its subject almost tenderly.

In fact, Angier leaves little room for additional conjecture about Rhys's life and how it affected her work. My exploration simply differs on the question of possible causes, and offers a different point of view of already known facts. No doubt Rhys would have hated this as well, because I have chosen to attribute some culpability for her difficulties to the father she so revered, while suggesting that her admittedly insensitive mother has been somewhat unjustly held responsible, without regard to her own problems, as the sole cause of Rhys's. I also suggest, I hope not unsympathetically, that Rhys herself shares at least some responsibility for the things that happened to her. For that I may stand accused of "blaming the victim," but, as I point out in Chapter One,

evidence suggests that even seriously disturbed people are capable of changing their behaviour to their own benefit. Responsibility for her behaviour was one aspect of her life Rhys was active in attempting to avoid.⁴ Perhaps I may be forgiven for the "blaming," as I also suggest that had she been a well functioning person, the literary world might be the poorer for it. On the other hand, it can be argued that no amount of public approbation can make up for the personal misery she and all connected with her suffered.⁵

Chapter One examines Rhys's physical and emotional inertia and helplessness, and the reactive behaviours they induced--of alcohol abuse, anger and paranoia. Joined with the fatalism she espoused, these behaviours and attitudes evolved into a peculiarly circular pattern of cause and effect. Finally, the chapter discusses her survival strategies, her dependence on lovers, husbands, and friends, and the possibility that at least a part of her helplessness was deliberate manipulation, in order to gain the support and time she needed, first to live, then to write. Rhys's works examined for this chapter are the *Letters* and *Smile Please*, her autobiography. The fiction is referred to briefly.

The second chapter explores the "Caribbean" novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark*, which deal most closely with Rhys's early life. This section examines inertia and fatalism in relation to Colonial mores, to religious and family influences, affinities for--and ambivalences towards--the blacks, and the influence of Obeah, the witchcraft of the islands.

Chapter Three examines aspects of survival--both physical and emotional. This

includes a perspective on the kinds of work and life alternatives open to young women of Rhys's time. *Quartet* and *Good Morning, Midnight* are the primary sources for this chapter.

The conclusion of Chapter Three brings the previous chapters together to further illustrate the relations between the novels and autobiography, between the characters and their creator, and the resemblances between life in the fiction and the life of the writer.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

¹From a conversation with David Plante: "She laughed. 'I always thought I was different. I always thought I was a freak, that I felt things they didn't feel'. 'Who?' She shrugged. 'They.'" David Plante. *Difficult Women: a memoir of three*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1983) 37.

²Quotes from A. Alvarez, "Down and Out in Paris & London," *The New York Review of Books*, XXXVIII.16. (1991) 40.

³Athill's reticence concerning Rhys's life suggests a deep sensitivity towards psychological problems or disorders. In 1986, after her association with Rhys, she published an autobiographical story of her experiences with another writer who suffered from severe psychoses. See *After a Funeral*, by Diana Athill, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986). She remains reticent, in 1985, some years after Rhys's death, in her introduction to *The Complete Novels*. It seems ironic that Rhys's publishers, who knew of her reluctance to have anyone write about her life, would publish Angier's biography. It is even more ironic that Angier, who also knew Rhys's wishes, would herself write such a revealing book and then join Michael Schwab (another of Rhys's assistants during her last years) in criticizing both Deutsch, her publisher (and indirectly Athill, her editor), for publishing the unfinished portion of Rhys's biography, and David Plante for his *memoir*. Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990), 630.

⁴Angier recounts the circumstances surrounding the death of Rhys's first child, 112-13. Rhys herself wrote: "My son was taken off to the hospital when he was only three weeks old....Jean [Lenglet] immediately dashed out to buy a bottle of champagne to cheer me up. By the time the first bottle was finished I'd forgotten all my worries. We were all laughing....The next morning I had a message...to say that my son had died." From *Smile Please: an unfinished autobiography* by Jean Rhys, (London: Penguin, 1979) 147-48. To David Plante's question: "What did [the baby] die of? Rhys answered 'Je n'sais pas. I must have done something wrong.'" (Her "I must have" still seems to express doubt, even fifty years after the event. It hardly seems possible, as she says, that she did not know). From *Difficult Women: a memoir of three*, (London: Gollancz, 1983) 18.

⁵Alvarez also writes: "Ms. Angier's biography make[s] the reader doubt if any book...could be worth the price Rhys and those close to her paid." *New York Review*, 43.

CHAPTER ONE

Inertia, Fate and Survival in the
Life--And its Influence on the Fiction

I filled three exercise books and half another, then wrote: 'Oh, God, I'm only twenty and I'll have to go on living and living and living.' I knew then that it was finished and that there was no more to say.

Jean Rhys, *Smile Please*, 130

I see something great in your hand, something noble. The fortune teller who came to the dressing-room said that. I was pleased but not surprised. I know. But what? How? Next birthday I'll be nineteen. If I miss it? You won't. But if I do?

Rhys, "From a Diary: at the Ropemakers' Arms."
Smile Please, 171

How much of a writer's life and experience can be translated into the lives of fictional characters before they become autobiographical models of their creator? Jean Rhys served as her own model for the characters of her novels and a number of her short stories. She, and they, lived almost parallel lives, sharing specific time frames, similar circumstances, and psychological perspectives. The experiences of her life became the basis for the situations in which her protagonists found themselves. The characters never achieve full adult maturity. They live their lives in emotionally undeveloped cocoons of self-absorption, bound by their strivings to attract men on whom they can then become totally dependent. Because the men they are attracted to, and whom they attract, are governed by their own self-centred imperatives, these women, like their creator, are

never expected to function as other than helpless creatures in need of constant care and attention. These patterns, which Rhys herself established during her early adult years, were to remain basically unchanged throughout her life, and that haplessness was transposed into her early work in nearly identical detail. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her last novel, the patterns remain but they are imposed on a more fictional construct.

Perhaps the most striking resemblances between Rhys's fiction and her own life are the frequent, prolonged periods of physical and mental debility she suffered, which she infused into the central characters of her novels. This debility, in the words of her friend and editor, Diana Athill, an "invariable and almost pathological inertia in the face of trouble,"¹ was the most overt of her symptoms and appears to have been, at times, both cause and effect of other aspects of her behaviour. In his introduction to Rhys's *Letters* Francis Wyndham writes:

She suffered from congenital physical fatigue which made many practical activities insurmountably difficult, and therefore had to be plaintively dependent on other people, whereas her true nature was proud, combative and individualistic. Friends, lovers and relations...were always distressed, often irritated and sometimes repelled by the air of helpless passivity with which she made her exigent demands....More mysteriously, 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...a stranger in an indifferent, even hostile world.²

Nothing in what is now known of Rhys's long and difficult life suggests any serious physical or ongoing illness. Nor is there anything in her personal writing, or her fictional characterizations, to indicate that her chronic "physical fatigue" was inborn. However, the "spiritual sickness" echoes Rhys's own account of her feelings following

an abortion in her early twenties, and the long convalescence that followed it.

[I]t became a part of me, so I would have missed it if it had gone. I am talking about sadness.³

This "sadness" or "spiritual sickness," which also permeates the fiction, eventually manifested itself in the patterns of inertia, alcoholism, anger, paranoia, and a general inability to function competently, which were to bedevil her for the rest of her life.

Although Wyndham and other writers usually date Rhys's apparent disability from the end of her first love affair, typically the origins of troubled psychological states are traceable to a variety of circumstances. It now seems probable that Rhys's problems were symptomatic of some form of psychological disorder, caused by a series of stressful events and circumstances early in her life, or by an inherited predisposition which was precipitated by those same events or circumstances. The "physical fatigue" was more likely a function of the disorder, rather than an isolated or "congenital" condition in itself. Rhys's mother, her mother's sister, and her own sister, Brenda, all suffered from a form of dementia during their later years.⁴ Rhys may have suffered from a similar or related condition all of her adult life, which worsened as she grew older. Current research into Schizophrenia, for example, suggests that a predisposition to the disease can be inherited, as can a "vulnerability" to Manic-Depressive illness. Peculiarly, both of these conditions usually become apparent during or following adolescence. Although congenital or hereditary imperatives do not necessarily, or alone, determine the onset of a mental illness, the apparent inevitability of Rhys's problems (suggested by the studies made of her life), and the progressive severity of her symptoms are suggestive of an

inherited genesis. However, events and circumstances often are, or can be, a primary cause. Rhys's symptomatic behaviour did not become pronounced until she was in her early twenties and had suffered a number of setbacks to her youthful hopes and dreams. Whatever its initial causes, the condition was eventually to restrict her ability to deal effectively with even the simplest aspects of everyday life.

Rhys's personal writing suggests that her lethargy, and the survival strategies she developed around it, grew directly out of events in her childhood and adolescence, and the colonial culture in which she was raised. More than half a century after the abolition of slavery, the white middle-class of the Caribbean still clung to its presumption of privilege, convinced that it was entitled to the luxury the servant class it had created and depended upon was still being forced to provide. Her responses were further rooted in her affinities for Roman Catholicism and Obeah, the witchcraft of the Caribbean, both of which she was exposed to from childhood. Because her youthful experiences were, to her, inexplicable, her problems apparently unsolvable, these influences may have helped to instil a self-destructive fatalism in her. Most significantly, perhaps, those habitual responses also grew out of the attitudes of her parents, who failed to understand her or to provide the kind of nurturing she needed.

Rhys was born Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams on August 24th, 1890, in the town of Roseau, in Dominica. Her father was a newcomer to the West Indies. Her mother was a third-generation Creole, descendant of a landed, upper middle-class colonial family, whose hold on its plantations and wealth became increasingly tenuous after the

abolition of slavery in 1834.⁵ Sometime between 1907, when Rhys left the island at the age of seventeen, and her only return visit, in 1936, the last of those plantations, which she calls Geneva Estate in her autobiography, was burned, leaving nothing but the grounds on which the house had stood.⁶ By the time Rhys was born, money was no longer plentiful. However, her father's medical practice was successful enough to provide his family with a life of relative ease, attended by descendents of the slaves owned by the early colonial settlers, one of whom had been her great-grandfather.

By her own account Rhys appears to have begun with a fairly predictable, and not even particularly repressive, late Victorian childhood. She recalls being loved and cherished by her mother when she was a very young child (SP 42). She remembers a photograph taken when she was perhaps five years old, from which memory she drew the title for her autobiography (SP 19). Of her sixth birthday she writes,

It is at Bona Vista that I have my first clear connected memory. It was my birthday... The upper part of the large living-room had been cleared and made into a stage and my two brothers and elder sister were acting their version of Red Riding Hood....I was wearing the new white dress...and a wreath of frangipani...and there I was crowned, bursting with pride and importance, safe, protected, sitting in a large armchair, my father on one side, my mother on the other, my shiny shoes a long way off the ground. My father had come up from Roseau for the occasion, a three-hour ride.(SP 23)

Rhys describes the close family atmosphere. Her brothers and sisters entertain her; her mother acts to allay the child's disappointment when "the play collapsed" (SP 23-24).

But even as a beloved youngest child she was subjected to the care of a nurse whose behaviour might have marked the beginning of Rhys's trauma. "Meta" threatened

her with tales of zombies, vampires, and a variety of other horrors, real and imaginary, and although "forbidden to slap [her]," would take her little charge "by the shoulders and shake [her] violently" (SP 31). Although the nurse eventually disappeared, the child had been shown a "world of fear and distrust," of which she was to say, "I am still in that world." After that she "often screamed, cried, collapsed with terror" (Angier 13). However, in spite of those frightening episodes, Rhys remembers the earliest years as her happiest. But after the family moved from Bona Vista to Roseau, and some time after her sister was born, they became less so:

Life had changed a great deal for me since the days of the photograph. My two brothers left the island for school in England....My eldest sister...went to live with one of my mother's married sisters in St. Kitts....My little sister was seven years younger than I was. She was now the baby, the spoilt and cherished one. I didn't hate her for supplanting me...but I think...my loneliness was very sudden. I was now expected to look after myself and...friends ...weren't really important to me....Now I was alone except for books. (SP 2)

Rhys's time sequences in *Smile Please* are vague, but her mother's loss of interest in her was evidently not in itself an immediate result of the new baby's birth. It appears rather to have been a waning of the constant attention the older child had been accustomed to receive:

Even after the new baby was born there must have been an interval before she seemed to find me a nuisance and I grew to dread her. Another interval and she was middle aged and plump and uninterested in me....and when I tried to interest her she was indifferent. (SP 42-3)

Although Rhys appears to connect what she saw as her mother's loss of interest with the arrival of the new baby, there were possibly a number of other factors involved

in that withdrawal. The changes Rhys recalls only in relation to her own life must also have had devastating effects on the rest of the family. Minna Rees Williams's elder daughter and two of her sons had disappeared from her life. There were money worries, presumably: Rhys recalls Minna weeping, on a visit to a friend, "How could it stretch? What am I to do?" (SP 44). Rhys also suggests that her own behaviour was becoming increasingly problematic:

I see now that she was trying to drive [out] something she saw in me, that was alien, that would devour me.⁷

But, except for one or two incidents, she does not describe exactly what that behaviour was. Mrs. Rees Williams might even, in mid-life, have begun to suffer some of the symptoms of the mental disturbance with which she was afflicted before her death. Whatever her own preoccupations, or her actual feelings towards her daughter, the mother grew cold, indifferent, and punitive towards her. Teresa O'Connor quotes passages from the unpublished "Black Exercise Book:"

My mother who beat me ["whipped me severely" is inserted above the line] I was fond of but somewhere in my heart I despised her. (O'Connor 22)⁸

Rhys's reaction to her mother's last attempt at physical punishment indicates that she was capable of reacting to such incidents with a violence of her own:

[T]o my great surprise, I heard myself shrieking "God curse you, if you touch me I'll kill you." (Angier 24)

The beatings stopped, but the tone of her mother's resigned rejoinder--"I've done my best, it's no use, you'll never learn to be like other people"--suggests she was aware that

words would hurt as much as physical punishment:

I saw the long road of isolation and loneliness stretching in front of me....
I collapsed and cried as heartbrokenly as my worst enemy could wish.
(Angier 24)

Rhys's memories of her father were more positive, but her feelings towards him were also marked by ambivalence:

The curious thing is that I was afraid of my father who never touched me.... He was very kind though with a tendency to shout, gave me pocket [money] and occasional half crowns. One day I took some tea up [to] his room and clumsily spill[ed]...it on the bed. I was [too] frightened to speak. I could only stand there as if I expected the roof to fall on me. He was very surprised and rather hurt I think. I saw it in his eyes. 'Good God the poor little devil's frightened of me....What's the matter, aren't you well? You haven't got one of your headaches have you? What is it? Tell me.' He put his arms round me, kissed me, stroked my hair, was very gentle....How could I tell him I was being beaten too often and much too severely, teased too much, thrust back on myself and given a kink that would last for the rest of my life. I didn't know myself. (O'Connor 22-3)

Obviously her father engendered awe rather than trust or confidence. The child could not bring herself to confide in him even when he showed interest and gentleness.

Passages in Rhys's autobiography suggest that there were reasons for her reticence with him. She once came upon him

standing in front of the photograph [of his father] shaking his fist and cursing. My mother's version of this was: 'The old man grudged every penny spent on Willie. Everything must go to the eldest son, his favourite.' (SP 68)⁹

Her aunt Clarice, her father's sister, "gave [her] the idea that he was a sad man, continually brooding over his exile...", often saying "meaningly, 'Poor Willy. Poor, poor Willy'" (SP 68-69). And there was an elderly and somewhat obsessive "Aunt Jeanette,"

apparently a Rees Williams connection, whom Rhys visited when she was going to school in Cambridge. Rhys recalls that on one of the last occasions when she saw this aunt

she embraced me and said, 'Poor lamb, poor lamb.' Perhaps she knew that I was bound for a stormy passage and would be sea-sick most of the time. (SP 70)

Rhys's account of Aunt Jeanette occupies more than a page in the middle of the chapter devoted to her father. It suggests a perceived connection and raises further speculation that there were predispositions to emotional turbulence on the Rees Williams, as well as the Lockhart, side of Rhys's family.

The destruction of a doll sent from England may have been symptomatic of the "kink" Rhys felt she was "being given." Her mother's favouring of her younger sister, Brenda, by insisting that, of the two dolls sent, the "dark" one Rhys preferred should be given to Brenda, with nothing more than an admonishment not to be "silly and selfish," seemed undeniable to the older child. The mother's insensitivity and the father's inept management of the situation indicate the failure of these Victorian parents to recognize an expression of distress. Rhys's description of the incident is horrifying:

I laid the fair doll down. Her eyes were shut. Then I searched for a big stone, brought it down with all my force on her face and heard the smashing sound with delight. (SP 40)

Rhys remembers that when she tried to explain her feelings of injustice--"She only wanted it because I did. It wasn't fair"--her father responded without looking at her:

'Nothing is fair,' he answered rather grimly. 'Nothing. And the sooner you understand that the better. You weren't very fair to the poor doll if it comes to that. So silly. So naughty....Your mother thinks that Great-aunt Jane spoils you,' he said, still looking away. 'Encourages you

to imagine that you must always get your own way or you will kick up a hell of a row. Perhaps you'd better stay here instead of going to Geneva next week.' (SP 40)

But when the child was further upset at not seeing her beloved Aunt Jane, one of the few people who she felt really loved her, he said,

Well, this time then. But you must not worry your mother like this. I will not have it. You must turn over a new leaf or I'll be very angry. (SP 40)

Her father had only condemned the violence: "But he hadn't told me why I'd done it and I thought he knew everything." This seems to indicate that even as a child Rhys was puzzled about her behaviour, as if she knew something was wrong. However, her parents obviously viewed it simply as *bad* behaviour, a resort to destructive tantrums, whenever she could not get her own way.

Clearly, if Rhys recounts accurately, her father was caught between the child, whom he loved, and his wife. If she recognizes this she does not mention it. However, she writes that he "spent most of his time away from home," either in his office, or on his medical rounds, and as "soon as the day's work was over, he'd go up to the club to play bridge, for cards were his passion" (SP 71). He apparently had somewhat less "passion" to spare for his wife and children. Possibly he felt constrained to sacrifice the child's needs to the necessity of maintaining harmony at home. His frequent absences suggest that there might have been tensions in the Rees Williams household which were not entirely due to one daughter's behaviour. Rhys also recalls that he

liked women...would flirt outrageously with anyone attractive who came to the house. My mother didn't seem to mind at all and now I wonder if

she minded and didn't show it. (SP 73)

Whatever the underlying pressures, the child was learning to behave in ways that would govern her conduct as an adult. Perhaps with more knowledge, or even more interest, Rhys's father might have alleviated the damage that was being done. Instead, as much as her mother was influential in shaping her violent reactions, he may have been instrumental in forming her lifelong patterns of inertia, helplessness, and dependence on men. Her seeking (but never receiving in sufficient measure) the love and attention she needed was reinforced by his occasional kindnesses and interventions on her behalf. Instead of giving her practical guidance and a consistently protective environment in which to grow up, he relinquished the greater share of the responsibility for her upbringing to her mother.

The personality differences that baffled the parents set the daughter apart from the rest of the family. Gwen, as she was then called, withdrew into books and imagination when she was about twelve years old. She discovered that

writing poetry took away sadness, doubled joy and calmed the anxious questioning feeling that tormented me.... (Angier 22-3)

But this happy diversion coincided with an incident which would further disturb an already precarious emotional balance. The elderly man who molested her touched her only once, she records, but he continued for some time to assault her young mind with crude sexual fantasies of "submission, punishment, cruelty" (Angier 28). She did not tell her mother since "it was not a thing you could possibly talk about," and "Mr. Howard," as she named him in the "Black Exercise Book," was a family friend. She

believed she would be blamed for the situation. By the time her mother began to suspect, she was "completely under his spell." The man's wife obviously knew. Gwen was a "wicked girl." She would be "punished" ("Punished--whichever way I turned I met that word"). She was sure she was blameworthy: "I only struggled feebly. What he had seen in me was there" (Angier 28).¹⁰

"I'm always being made into a victim," Rhys was to say impatiently in later years. In *Smile Please* she says,

[I]t still annoys me when my first object of worship is supposed to be a villain. Or perhaps the idea at the back of this is that his class was oppressing mine. (SP 114)¹¹

Something of this attitude appears in her remarks about the outcome of the molestation episode:

Did Mr. Howard go potty, the little *saleté* that I was go from bad to worse?...Not at all....[Mr.Howard] died an easy death at the age of nearly eighty, respected and loved by all. And I...I forgot it. I became very good at blotting things out, refusing to think about them. (Angier 28-9)

Whether or not Rhys considered herself a victim, she *was* victimized in that situation, her earliest sexual drives taken advantage of by an old man's perversions. She was also a victim of the mores of her time that made her, in her own eyes, a "little *saleté*." But whatever else "Mr. Howard" had done, he had spoken to her with kindness and "deference." He bought her gifts of her favourite "sweets." Most of all he gave her the attention she craved: "Mostly he talked about me, me, me. It was intoxicating...irresistible." Then he "abandoned" her, to a conviction of her own evil:

I knew that he was going...I hoped that...he would say something...that

would make it all right and as if I had not been wicked. (Angier 26-27)

The memory that she "blotted out" was to re-surface in her love affairs, as a passive acceptance of sex as dominance, and as a means of gaining attention and being cared for.

During her early teens, religion also began to play a role in Rhys's development. The Anglican faith in which she was raised, and the Roman Catholicism of the convent school in which she lived for several months during her adolescence both appeared to contribute somewhat to the fatalistic view of life which she had already begun to draw from the unhappy experiences of her childhood. She became convinced, "[a]n unconscious Manichee...", that

the Devil was quite as powerful as God, perhaps more so. I didn't believe, as I read, that it was two faces of the same thing. It was a fight between the two and the Devil was responsible for everything that had gone wrong. (SP 82)

To her the church's teachings did not seem particularly at variance with the principles of the Obeah witchcraft which exists side by side with Christianity in the Caribbean. Her later allusions to zombies suggest that she in time thought of them in the form they are believed to take, as "ancestral spirit[s] or god[s], or...living person[s] who ha[ve] been possessed by ...ancestral spirits."¹² But in her early years God and the Devil were almost synonymous--as entities over which she could have no control--with the "zombies and souciantis," with which her nurse had terrorized her as a child. This aspect of Rhys's beliefs will be discussed at more length later.

These beliefs, however, could only convince her of the inevitability of events and her own suffering. They could not cushion the shocks as life meted them out. When she

first moved to England from Dominica, she was enrolled by her aunt in The Perse School in Cambridge. After two terms there, when she was eighteen, she made a sudden decision to pursue a stage career and begged to be allowed to attend the Academy of Dramatic Arts. Her father consented, but at the end of her first year she was ordered home. School officials felt it would take too long to eradicate her Dominican accent, which they considered detrimental to her success, and her father's practice could no longer support her education in England.¹³ But Rhys did not want to go home. Instead she applied for a job in the chorus line of a troupe of travelling actors. At the end of her first season her father died. Neither her mother nor her father's sister were able to help her, and her relationship with both of them was effectively ended. She had been thrust into a world in which she was poorly prepared to make her own way, a world that disapproved of women, especially women of her class, who worked, even if they worked out of necessity.

Unhappy experiences and disappointments accumulated. She was disenchanted with the England she had for years dreamed about. From the day she arrived it never came up to her expectations. Her first taste of independence had been most disagreeable—a year of travelling through grim Northern towns, living in squalid rooms, and earning barely enough to live on. The landladies who despised her, but took a large portion of her meagre income, came to typify in her mind the respectable world of the female relatives she felt had rejected her, and increased her dislike and distrust of women. She had no one to turn to. At twenty Gwen Williams was ready for her first

affair.

At first she did not even like the man who became her lover:¹⁴

When I first met this man I rather disliked him, and why I came to worship him I don't quite know....He was like all the men in all the books I had ever read about London. He lived in Berkeley Square, and I got used to the warmth, the fires all over the house, the space, the comfort.(SP 114)

Obviously his financial and social status, his kindness, and willingness to take care of her, formed a large part of his attractiveness. One might, as Rhys herself did, argue that because he contributed to her financial support for several years, Hugh Smith did not abandon her, but, by reinforcing the cycle of helpless dependence begun by her father and "Mr. Howard" and then leaving her, that is exactly what he did. Twenty years Rhys's senior, he offered the magic combination of a lover's attentions and the care and financial support of a father, no doubt an irresistible resolution to her problems which, by this time, were intensified by the realization that she could not earn a decent living on the stage.

Hugh Smith's rejection was, in effect, the catalyst that turned Rhys's already precarious emotional state into the chronic condition that was to torment her for the rest of her life. Since the fulfillment of her own needs was the basis of her feelings for him, the loss was catastrophic. Although he supported her financially, she had lost him not only as the provider of a degree of physical ease she could not afford on her own, but as a presence who gave her what was, to her, at least as urgent a necessity--constant emotional reassurance. Perhaps, as Angier suggests, Rhys had hoped that he would

marry her, although she knew that wealthy English gentlemen did not often marry chorus girls, even ones from respectable middle-class backgrounds who had once "had servants and carriages," and who were related to such people as "the Spenser Churchills" (Angier 67). Certainly the social expectations of her class encouraged the physical faineance with which she viewed the mundane activities of day-to-day life. These expectations were evidently shared by all her family:

All...had a...reserve and unapproachability.... [A]ll had high standards of behaviour...which...they all...had difficulty living up to, because they all had volatile tempers. [T]hey were all...quite difficult and demanding. Partly, perhaps, this was as much a colonial characteristic as a family one; but they all assumed that they were in some way special and ought to be served, and if they weren't they were all...inclined to sulk. (Angier 640)¹⁵

With Hugh Smith she had been allowed to slip back into the habits of childhood. Her every physical need was met: in his house, by servants, in the comfortable rooms his protection afforded, by landladies or maids. She was to follow a pattern of seeking this kind of personal care throughout most of her life, although often under much less comfortable conditions. Whenever she could she lived in hotels or rooming-houses where breakfast, dinner, and housekeeping were usually part of the service. For the rest she relied on restaurants and bars, even when she had little money. The arrangement continued with her first husband, Jean Lenglet, whom she married eight years after her affair with Hugh Smith. (It did not change even after the birth of their two children, a son born in 1920 who lived for only three weeks, and a daughter, Maryvonne, born two years later. Maryvonne spent her early years in *cliniques* paid for by sympathetic friends) (Angier 124).

The adult Rhys appears to have been reasonably happy only when there was plenty of money and she could live in luxury, or at least in comparative comfort. One of these intervals she described as the "spending phase" in the autobiographical short story "Vienne," about the year she spent in Vienna with Jean Lenglet.¹⁶ For another brief period in 1936, Rhys and her second husband, Leslie Tilden Smith, lived in an apartment paid for, along with other expenses, by Tilden Smith's sister after he and Rhys had spent his entire inheritance in one year.¹⁷

They found a beautiful flat; they bought new furniture....At last Jean had a chance to make her surroundings beautiful....She was good at beauty when she had some money....A daily woman came in to clean. For once Jean could have everything around her 'right'...and the boring part...the housework, was done by somebody else. (Angier 360-61)

After Hugh Smith's rejection, the young Ella Williams turned to other men, partly in an attempt to "cure" herself of Hugh Smith, but also because, since she at first refused the support he offered, she needed the money they gave her. Either unwilling, or unable to find other work during this period, she evidently had to resort briefly to prostitution to support herself.¹⁸ When she became pregnant she had no one to turn to but Hugh Smith. She was now forced to accept his help, although it was his cousin, Julian Martin Smith (whom she hated because she believed he had been instrumental in ending the affair) who acted as his agent. After the abortion, and several unsuccessful attempts at finding accommodation that offered the services she needed at a price her allowance afforded, Ella

settled down to [a]...monotonous existence. When I was dressed I would walk to Tottenham Court Road and have lunch in a vegetarian restaurant

....After that my one wish was to get back to my room and sleep, but some remnant of knowing what I ought to do remained and I would take long walks, have tea at some distant place, then walk back again. I would be in bed by nine o'clock. It was astonishing how much I could sleep. I'm sure I slept fifteen hours out of the twenty-four, and I never dreamed. I slept as if dead. (SP 119)

After her recovery from the abortion Rhys worked at different jobs, as an artist's model, and briefly again on the stage. For a period during the first world war she did volunteer work in a troop canteen. She met other men, and she was also engaged for a few years to a then well-known journalist, Maxwell Macartney. After she met Jean Lenglet, a Dutch national then working for the French government as an Intelligence agent, she worked for a year at "an ordinary job, at the Ministry of Pensions" until the end of the war (Angier 100-105). Throughout these years, and until she and Lenglet were married, she continued to receive an allowance from Hugh Smith.¹⁹ Rhys seems never to have felt that she had been exploited. Although she spoke of the life long "sadness" Hugh Smith's rejection precipitated, she continued, even in her late years, to fault her own passivity:

I realize now what a very kind man he must have been. I was an ignorant...a shy girl. And when I read novels describing present-day love-making I realize I was also a passive, dull girl. (SP 114)

The poems of her early teens, and the writing out of her relationship with Hugh Smith, were evidently a largely unconscious exercise in self-therapy. During the chaotic period of her first marriage, journal keeping apparently became a deliberate therapeutic device. By that time, living in poverty in Paris, the pattern of her life had been set. She had learned the "value of an illusion," that the precariousness of existence, the grimness

of hunger and homelessness, could be obscured in a glow of well-being induced by alcohol.

It was astonishing how significant, coherent and understandable it all became after a glass of wine on an empty stomach.²⁰

The idea of writing as a career did not occur to her, nor did the journals begin to metamorphose into the essential stuff of literature, until after her meeting with Ford Madox Ford and the subsequent publication of *The Left Bank*.²¹ By that time she was in her mid-thirties. When she began to write for publication, her notebooks became the groundwork for the fiction. The first four novels, all published between 1928 and 1939, enjoyed only a brief popularity, primarily in literary circles. Narrow in scope and similar in content, their depiction of the lives of women who seemed unwilling or unable to do anything to help themselves or anyone else, did not appeal to the majority of contemporary readers. They were condemned for being too depressing.²² The "something great" the fortune teller had forecast when she was nineteen, and which Rhys, in the personal writing of her later life, professed to "know" would happen, was not to emerge until nearly the end of her life, when the literary world lauded her last novel as a masterpiece, and one critic, at least, proclaimed her stature as "the greatest living English novelist."²³ It was only after the triumph of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the subsequent re-publication of the earlier work that Rhys's ability to capture the essence of a time and place, and the realities of some of the women within it, began to achieve wider appreciation.

Since the content of her unpublished work has become more accessible, the

essentially biographical nature of the fiction has become clearer. She herself asserts,

'I can't make things up. I can't invent. I have no imagination. I can't invent character. I don't think I know what character is. I just write about what happened. Not that my books are entirely my life—but almost.'²⁴

A. Alvarez also suggests that she could only work with the material of her own life:

Her books were autobiographical to an exceptional degree....[S]he had no gift for plots, she couldn't dream up situations she herself had not already been in....[S]he wrote about the people she knew....[S]he stuck to the facts of her life, the people and places and disasters she had lived with, and then refined them, reduced them to their essence.²⁵

In his review of Carole Angier's biography, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, Alvarez also comments on the changing perspective biography places on Rhys's fictional work:

[H]er life was monstrous and the effect of Ms. Angier's...biography is to make the reader doubt if any book...could be worth the price Rhys and those close to her paid. No wonder she did not want her biography written. Her prose was pure and self-denying and it kept very close to the facts of her life....it distilled them, shaped them, made them seem inevitable. But the facts behind the art are shabby and demeaning: booze, rage, sexual manipulation, cultivated passivity, dire ingratitude, and a blank indifference to husbands, lovers, children, friends and relatives. Ms. Angier's biography is a powerful argument against biography itself: Jean Rhys was one of the finest writers of the century but the best way to read her work is to know nothing about the woman who wrote it.²⁶

Alvarez's disillusionment with the personality of a writer whose work he so admired is clear. But it is erroneous to suggest that the fiction is less "demeaning" than the facts that inspired it. Certainly Rhys "distilled," "refined," and raised them to the realm of art, but the facts are there, shaded into the fabric into which she so delicately wove the experiences of her life. Although in two of the novels, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and

Good Morning, Midnight, the characters gain some critical insight into their own behaviour, Rhys was never capable of placing her characters in an entirely different light from the one she herself stood under. It seems doubtful that she even tried. Her protagonists stand, in a softened light, for herself. The softening is more apparent than real, an illusion, cautiously directing the reader into the harsher glare of a reality that reflects the anguish with which she herself lived and which she, inevitably, imposed on all who knew her.

Although minor illnesses often appear in the fiction as a cause for the protagonists' lethargy, the reality is more complicated. Rhys apparently never suffered from any serious physical illness during her early adult years, except for a bout of pneumonia during her first year on the stage.²⁷ But her personal writing and fiction both detail the colds, or 'flu,' from which she and her characters frequently suffer. Sometimes these are attributed to the effects of climate change, from the warmth of the Caribbean to the cold, grey drizzle she always associated with England. But more often they seem attributable to chronic stress induced by a too frequent shortage of money, poor living conditions, bad food (occasionally no food), and alcohol dependency. The inertia appears to contribute to the stress, which results in physical illness, which further contributes to the inertia. The problem becomes a circular trap which appears to be inescapable.

The scientific interpretation of inertia as the "tendency of a body to remain in its state (at rest or in motion) until acted upon by an outside force,"²⁸ is an apt description

of the behaviour of the Rhys protagonist, as well as of Rhys herself. All are happy and appear to function normally when their physical and emotional needs are met by someone other than themselves, particularly a man. They remain "in motion" while being acted upon "by an outside force." All suffer an immediate and prolonged drop in energy, accompanied by acute hypersomnia,²⁹ when faced with the end of a love affair or any other crisis in which they feel alone and helpless. Lying in bed, preferably asleep, is a means of escape. They remain "at rest," unable to act until again "acted upon" by another force--another man, or the same man.

Unlike Rhys's twentieth-century protagonists, the central character of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not specifically modelled on herself. But since, by the time she wrote it, she had suffered a lifetime of emotional turmoil--her sanity frequently questioned by others as well as by herself--it is not surprising that she chose to express that aspect of her life through this novel. Other biographical aspects emerge from it. Antoinette's early life was torn apart by postcolonial turmoil. Both Antoinette and her mother are partly modelled on Rhys's maternal great-grandmother who had actually survived that Caribbean upheaval. Rhys's own early years were marked by the lingering legacy of conflict between the black descendants of slavery who still lived in paid servitude to the people of her class, the descendants of their former colonial masters.³⁰

The behaviours that recur as parallel themes throughout Rhys's work appear as echoes of her own life. Throughout her adult years she drank to an excess which she, her biographers, her admirers, and critics, all euphemize as "drink" or "her drinking."

But in spite of what would now (and in the common terminology of at least her later years), be defined as chronic alcoholism, she must have been constitutionally very strong. She lived for nearly eighty-nine years. She spent at least forty of them in appallingly destitute circumstances. Throughout her middle years she was forced to move frequently and to live in conditions of discomfort that would have destroyed a less enduring person. Yet she survived to publish, in her mid-seventies, her most widely read novel. This was followed by a collection of short stories in 1976. She began writing her autobiography when she was in her eighties. She continued to work on it almost until she died in May, 1979. Her psychological, and apparently psychosomatic, frailties present an extraordinary contrast to her astonishing will to achieve as a writer--and to continue achieving, to the death. According to Angier, even "[i]n her teens...

she already showed the lassitude and exhaustion of her middle and old age. But this...was a pretence; or...she was instinctively...husbanding her resources. For she abused her body for a long lifetime, giving it far too little food and far too much alcohol, battering it with cold, poverty, discomfort, depression, drunken falls and violent rages. From her early seventies on she looked as though she was dying. And yet she didn't die. Physically as well as mentally she was 'twins,' weak and faint on the surface, tenaciously strong beneath. (Angier 627)

In spite of her tenacity, debility and dependence were the dominant characteristics in Rhys's life, and in her work, and, although her "secret" strength carried her through to a belated recognition (and an occasionally almost bearable existence), her characters were rarely allowed to survive even as well as that. All of the novels and many of the short stories chronicle a progressive descent into helplessness, inertia, mental disturbance, and ultimate emotional, if not always physical, destruction. The *Letters* and

autobiography describe a more fluctuating pattern, with occasional affirmative intervals. However, their movement also spirals downward, blending the occasional patches of light into the same darker shades that dominate the fiction. The repetitive nature of both the fiction and the personal writing suggests that the need to write was driven by something more than creative will.

Rhys's extreme inertia in times of crisis was possibly the greatest contributing element in her personal poverty and its resulting ills. The publisher's note on the jacket of Angier's book reflects the puzzlement with which admirers must contend:

Jean Rhys had a long life...of great difficulty. So inept was she in its management that her authority as the writer of five beautifully shaped and controlled novels appears mysterious: how could someone so bad at living be so good at writing about it?

Possibly it was *because* she was "so bad at living" that the patterns of inertia and concomitant drinking woven into both her personal writing and her novels appear in themselves to be an exploration, a continuous probing for the reasons that drove her own behaviour and affected her life so negatively. But if writing was in fact an attempt at insight, it was in direct conflict with that other compelling aspect of her psychological make-up, discussed earlier in relation to the religious influences of her childhood. This was her almost lifelong belief in fate. The conviction that one is at the mercy of a power that "predetermines events unalterably"³¹ would seem to render a quest for understanding irrelevant, and must surely lead to a sense of the futility of resisting the course of events, or trying to understand them on a human level. To an interviewer she once said,

I do believe that life's all laid out for one. One's choices don't matter

much....(O'Connor 45)

In her autobiography Rhys recalls a fatalistic vision of her future as the ship in which she had sailed from Dominica docked in the England of her adolescent dreams:

I swear that looking out of the porthole that early morning in Southampton, looking at the dirty grey water, I knew for one instant all that would happen to me. (SP 168)

Fate appears as a principle theme in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and as a somewhat less deliberately conceived idea in *Voyage in the Dark*. The theme will be discussed in relation to both of these novels in a later chapter.

References to her chronic "tiredness," "depression," "blues", a "dead feeling," and to the alcohol she drank to relieve those feelings run through Rhys's letters like threads in a repetitive pattern, connecting her to the protagonists of her novels and stories. She sometimes refers to these bouts almost as welcome diversions, a temporary escape from the wretchedness of both past and present. In 1933 she writes to friend and fellow writer, Evelyn Scott:

I came down here crazy with depression....Haven't had a drop for a month....I'm not so very well thank God and as usual on these occasions have to lie down....I've lain there and eaten two huge meals and read... so feel a bit shaken. Never mind. I'm relying on the kick I'll get out of my first drink. (*Letters 22*)³²

In February, 1934, after finishing *Voyage in the Dark*, she again writes Scott:

I had the horrors about *Voyage* and about everything for a bit....Last week I spent most of my time in bed....(*Letters 23-4*)

In December 1935, Rhys commiserates with Scott:

As for the drawbacks of trying to stop drinking-- well I know a little about

that....I've been rather at the end of myself lately--a terrible 'three quarters dead' feeling--a very lonely feeling.... (*Letters 27*)

In another letter she is "really ill...and...drinking a hell of a lot to keep...going" (*Letters 33*).

Although letters to her daughter were filled with helpless messages of love, as Maryvonne grew older Rhys grew quite frank about most aspects of her situation. One letter, written in January, 1949, is a combination of such desperation and manipulative self-pity that, while the problems she outlines are overwhelming, her daughter is at least as deserving of sympathy as she is:

I had your telegram yesterday and very nearly wired back asking you to come if you could--for I haven't been well for some time and 'things are getting on top of me....' Then I realized how impossible...and how selfish....But I'll tell you all about it and this will be a great relief for I'm...lonely....

Current woes--marital and residential--are discussed at length, then she goes on:

Then...I got flu. Then I got all right but I found a great indifference taking hold of me....That has gone on since week before Xmas....I can't feel that anything matters at all--except not thinking, for I've tried hard and a *quoi bon?* Also I haven't been eating much as I like being warm better than going out or even into the kitchen....I do not feel I have the right to bore you with my troubles....In fact the worst part of all this has been the feeling that I've let you down and not helped you enough or been the right sort of person for you....I hope you'll try to understand this collapse and why I tell you of it....I'm sure that I'll pull myself together, sell my furniture and we will find rooms...in London....[D]on't worry a bit about me but try to believe I've done my best--and will be all right when this ghastly feeling of weakness has passed....

"One thing more to show you why I'm depressed," she adds. A neighbour's dog has killed her cats:

Now the cellar (*oh God, that cellar*) is full of rats. I went out to get the milk just now and....[t]here lay an enormous dead rat....That settles it. I must go. The slippers I bought for you are here waiting for the gloves and a toy for Ruthie to join them. I hope to *drag* [italics added] myself to London by the end of the week, buy the other things and post the lot....I will write to Job as soon as I am well enough....Don't fear that it will be a melancholy one. (*Letters* 47-8)

It is indicative of Rhys's "exigent" self-absorption that while she was no doubt staggering under her own difficulties, she seemed much less concerned that Maryvonne was carrying a frightening load of her own, living in Indonesia with her husband and baby, where the Dutch were not altogether welcome after the end of the second world war.³³ Rhys passes *this* off in a letter to another friend:

It's true there's a war over there....Still even a war would be better than this ghastly hopelessness and treachery in Europe....(*Letters* 47)

Although the *Letters* contains only a portion of Rhys's correspondence, it still chronicles her regularly occurring collapses and the short intervals between them. Good news, however, had the effect of immediately pulling her out of the doldrums. To Maryvonne in 1956, she apologizes for not writing because of a "bad cold:"

Then I collapsed. I got all right but so tired I only wished to sleep and sleep....Till this morning-when I had a letter telling me that the BBC were after my address....I am feeling so different--almost alive again...I thought I was finished for good....(*Letters* 134)

To Francis Wyndham in 1962 she wrote:

I can't tell you how much good your letter has done better than bottle after bottle of champagne. I "see" this long delayed book at last
...(*Letters* 215)

The behavioural patterns that governed Rhys's life deeply affected the lives of all

who knew her, from her immediate family, to lovers, husbands, relatives and friends. Like all the men in her life, her first husband had afforded her a situation in which no effort was required of her. When Lenglet was jailed she again felt abandoned. In her mid-thirties she continued to repeat the patterns of behaviour begun at twenty. Unable to care for her infant daughter, she was forced to abandon her to *cliniques* in Paris, and later to put her permanently into Lenglet's care. After her affair with Ford, and following the break up of her marriage to Lenglet, she turned to her then agent, Leslie Tilden Smith, with whom she lived for several years. They were married in 1934.

Rhys's first eleven years with Tilden Smith was the period of her greatest productivity. He did everything in his power to keep her writing, from all of the housework to editing, typing, and selling her manuscripts. During the war he re-joined the Air Force, so giving them the only secure income they had had in years. When he was posted away from London, she could not bear to be left alone, so he took her with him. Her behaviour eventually forced him to resign his commission. As she grew worse, she physically abused him. Tilden Smith died at the age of sixty: "He came from a long-lived family and should--his daughter sa[id]--'have lived for years and years'" (Angier 430).³⁴

Two years "to the day" after Tilden Smith's death, Rhys married his cousin, Max Hamer. Hamer had had to divorce his wife to marry her and, as a result, his daughter rejected him.³⁵ This marriage was no less turbulent than the others. Hamer was not as supportive of her writing, nor could he help her as Tilden Smith had done. Never very

efficient, Rhys was desperately trying to write when Hamer became ill with his last illness. Exhaustion again turned to anger when her needs were thwarted. Her attempts at home care were disastrous and often ended in neglect or abuse. However, she did not want him sent to hospital, at least for lengthy periods of time, partly because it made him so unhappy, but also because she could not bear to be alone herself.³⁶

New friends, most of them from the literary community who rallied round during the last years of her life, also proved inadequate in their efforts to meet her inexhaustible need. Although no longer financially dependent after the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but still unwilling, and finally unable, to care for herself, she was capable of "dire ingratitude" when her needs were frustrated, even inadvertently.³⁷

Although Rhys was examined for insanity when she was charged with assault and being drunk and disorderly in 1949, and again when she was hospitalized after an "attack on a neighbour" in 1964 (Angier 442, 518), doctors decided "that she was not 'mad.'" While researching her biography, Angier consulted with "several analysts of different schools" who agreed with the earlier diagnoses "because (apart...from a few episodes) she never really lost touch with reality" (Angier 657). They suggested that Rhys suffered

from...a borderline personality disorder...[which] goes back to infancy, to a failure of the relations between mother and child....The child's needs are not met; from the start, therefore, it feels...hostility from the world, and deep, unassuageable rage towards it. And it fails to develop a complete, autonomous self. (Angier 657-58)

This ignores all relationships in Rhys's childhood except that between herself and her mother (which was close until Rhys was six years old), and also does not take into

account Angier's own speculations about an inherited genesis. Unfortunately, Angier skims too glibly over the troublesome aspects of diagnosis: in a book so recently published, in which she delves so intimately into her subject's tormented personality, she offers no definitions of mental illness, which she calls "madness," nor any comparative analyses of aberrant mental conditions. Current opinion on the behavioural aspects of schizophrenia, for example, indicates that sufferers often function normally between onslaughts of the illness. They are not necessarily ill--or "mad"--nor in a state of "los[ing] touch with reality" all the time.³⁸ Although it is not possible now to know for certain the causes of Rhys's behaviour, or whether she suffered from an actual psychosis, there seems no doubt she suffered from some debilitating mental or emotional problem. There are a number of milder neuroses or conditions that account for a tendency to inertia, feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and depression.³⁹ However, these do not include the alternative moods of paranoia and rage from which Rhys suffered. Manic-Depressive illness and Schizophrenia do involve these or similar mood changes. Manic-Depressive sufferers also resort to an "excessive use of alcohol and/or...drugs during the depression stage," as do Schizophrenia patients. In addition, a heavy use of alcohol is known to *trigger* episodes of schizophrenia.⁴⁰ Although violence is not generally a symptom of this disease, it can occur "in conjunction with [the] hallucinations, delusions, preoccupations and jumbled thoughts" that characterize it.

Schizophrenia sufferers in an hallucinatory state, usually brought on by severe stress, often "insist they are hearing voices."⁴¹ On one occasion Rhys revealed to David

Plante that as a child she

heard voices in my head that had nothing to do with me. I sometimes didn't even know the words. But they wanted to be written down, so I wrote them down. Well, there it is. Some time after, a long time after, but still a long time ago, oh a long time ago, before the First World War--'she took a drink.' People say about him he [Lancelot Hugh Smith] was a villain. He wasn't. People don't understand. (Plante 14)

Startling as this revelation appears, it follows the strategy Rhys used in her novels, that of cautiously revealing, little by little, the traits or behaviour of her characters. Perhaps at some point she planned to include such revelatory materials in her autobiography. Plante observed that she often appeared to prepare in advance what she planned to say to him. Perhaps she was testing his reaction, to find out if such disclosures would be accepted, or acceptable. Mental peculiarities are still stigmatized to a great extent. During the first half of Rhys's lifetime such conditions were kept hidden as much as possible. Curious, also, is the way the passage carries on to the "sometime after" when, presumably, the same "voices" might have told her to write out the story told in *Voyage in the Dark*. The subsequent reference to Hugh Smith's desertion seems to pull the apparently disjointed thoughts together into a connected whole, producing at the same time the peculiarly circular cause and effect relationship among its elements that typifies the patterns of her life and writing.⁴²

Plante's instinct, that the revelation was planned, adds a thought-provoking dimension to Rhys's behaviour. No doubt the course of her condition was, in the main, inexorable, but there are also indications that she had some control over her situation. For example, although she always returned to it, she managed to give up drinking from

time to time, no doubt knowing that, although it relieved her pain, it seriously aggravated her problems. It is also evident that she was capable of controlling her behaviour to a degree but that she often used it to manipulate people when it suited her. Mental patients are often thought by relatives and friends to be manipulative. Such behaviour can, with perseverance, be altered, even in a person with serious mental problems. Children often learn this behaviour early, and some carry it over into adulthood. They know from experience that it works: it worked for Rhys, particularly with the men who became her lovers or husbands.⁴³ While a certain amount of feminine helplessness held its attractions for the men of her time, it is doubtful that the difficulties created by her lack of energy, her drinking, and her outbursts of violence, paranoia, of emotional and physical abuse, were behaviours she would have displayed early in a relationship. She must also, of necessity, have been able to discipline her mental functioning in order to "distil" her experience into the precisely tempered prose she wrote.

While her writing was supremely disciplined, it is possible that on some, perhaps unconscious, level she chose to give free reign to the erratic workings of her mind in order to indulge herself, and to be indulged, in her demanding behaviour. It also resulted in situations that fuelled her writing. Some basis for this possibility may be found in works written in relation (or response) to the experiences Rhys details in *Quartet*, by both Ford and Lenglet.

Although Rhys had evidently not considered a literary career until she met Ford,

she had by that time filled a number of notebooks. But diaries are written in isolation. Her suffering was still seen by others as simply bad behaviour. Perhaps the experience of publishing opened an avenue for sharing her problems with the world, without actually revealing herself in life. Ford's influence as mentor was more important than his role as lover but, although she gave him a lot of credit for inventing her as a writer, it seems more likely that he simply reinforced to good effect what she already instinctively knew, and set her on the road to publication. Since she "knew all that would happen" to her, and believed that she was "fated to write,"⁴⁴ perhaps she chose, also unconsciously, as a means of survival, to follow the prerogatives that have always been open to male genius. She had to survive to write. To ensure herself time, to conserve her energy, she had to obtain the menial services that women were ordinarily expected to provide. These *were* often supplied for her, by other women, in the cheap hotels she lived in. Since she seemed unable to work at anything besides writing, financial support had to be provided by the men she married, and sometimes by members of her own family.⁴⁵ Although her life was miserable, she wrote. Had she made an effort to take control of it, to develop practical working skills or to be a traditional homemaker and adequate parent, she might not have written at all. And writing was the only survival that had real meaning for her. Her daughter, Maryvonne, once said of her, "Writing was really something for which she had an enormous need at times." Rhys herself said,

Writing took me over. It was all I thought of. Nothing and nobody else mattered much to me. (Angier 224)

With old age and physical illness, the helplessness and "exigence," so deeply

entrenched over a lifetime, became Rhys's true condition of being. Interestingly, despite her lifelong habit of disliking and fighting with other women (even the few who had been her close friends), it was women to whom she turned as her principle care-givers: her editors, Diana Athill, Diana Melly, Sonja Orwell, her daughter and others.⁴⁶ Although there were a number of men who also shared in her care, including Plante and Wyndham, it was women who disrupted their own lives and careers, who moved her into their homes, who possessed or learned the necessary skills, and who, Rhys possibly sensed, were prepared to endure. This was her final means of survival, when no other was left to her--to turn to women, whom she had always despised and distrusted:

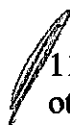
‘I’m not at all for women’s lib....I don’t dislike women exactly, but I don’t trust them. You can never tell them what you really think...they’ll do you down....I’ve never been intimate with them. It’s not worth it...Women are kind, but they do for you what they want to do, not what you want to do.’ [W]hen women who were not her close friends spoke to her, she looked at them with a superior and wounded tolerance as she listened, and said in response, simply, ‘Perhaps.’ (Plante 40)

Without them, Rhys could not have continued to write almost to the end.

NOTES: CHAPTER ONE

¹Diana Athill, "Introduction," *Jean Rhys: The Complete Novels*, by Jean Rhys (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985) x. Pathological--"Of or caused by a physical or mental disorder." *Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

²Francis Wyndham, "Introduction," *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-66* by Jean Rhys, Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly edd. (Middlesex: Penguin, 1985) 10-11. Subsequent references by number in parentheses in text as *Letters*, unless otherwise noted.

 ³Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: an unfinished autobiography* (London: Penguin, 1981) 119. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses in text as SP, unless otherwise noted.

⁴Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1990) 655-56. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses in text as Angier, unless otherwise noted. In her later years Brenda Rees Williams suffered a decline that resembled the behaviour Rhys exhibited from time to time. Angier suggests that there may have been a link connecting mental illness to the family: "Why were these sisters, so different in every other way, both...so angry? Was there something in their shared background--as white West Indians...as daughters of Minna Rees Williams? 641.

⁵Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962* (Kingston: Heinemann, 1981) 52, 63.

⁶Genever Plantation was first burned during a riot in 1844 by former slaves who thought a census taken on the island was a "preliminary to a return to slavery." Rhys's great-grandmother "barely escaped with her life....In 1932 the blacks burnt down the new house." Louis James, *Jean Rhys* (London: Longman, 1978) 47.

⁷Teresa F. O'Connor, *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels* (New York: New York U Press, 1986) 45. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses in text as O'Connor.

⁸O'Connor, 22-24. Quotes are from the "Black Exercise Book."

⁹O'Connor also describes this scene (22) from *Smile Please* 67-8. William Rees Williams was perhaps not as carefree as Rhys believed him to be.

¹⁰Rhys later wrote this experience into a short story in which the narrator says of

Phoebe, "She began to wonder how he had been so sure, not only that she'd never tell anybody but that she'd make no effort at all to stop him talking. That could only mean that he'd seen at once that she was not a good girl--who would object--but a wicked one--who would listen." Jean Rhys, "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose," *Tales of the Wide Caribbean*, 60. Angier 26.

¹¹Paula Le Gallez, *The Rhys Woman* (Houndmills, Macmillan, 1990) 2-3. In *Smile Please* the "first object of worship" Rhys refers to is Lancelot Hugh Smith. Some writers have suggested that since Rhys's standard of living had fallen considerably below the comfortable middle-class status of her childhood, Hugh Smith used his wealth and power to take advantage of her.

¹²Ivor Morrish, *Obeah, Christ and Rastaman* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1982) 60. In letters to Wyndham during the writing of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she writes, "A zombie is a dead person raised up by the Obeah woman, it's usually a woman...and can take the appearance of anyone. Or anything. (*Letters* 263). "I don't know if 'obeah' still goes on. But it did. And voodoo certainly does--Also anonymous letters--and still come tragedies. I know of two cases. Only a few years ago. The boy involved shot himself, the girl just died (in two weeks and for no reason but sadness)" (*Letters* 216).

¹³Biographical details are primarily from Angier. The Academy of Dramatic Art, called Tree's School for its founder, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (Angier 46-47). "Now the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art," Thomas F. Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1979) 5.

¹⁴Lancelot Grey Hugh Smith, Stockbroker, member of a large and wealthy British family. Jean Rhys's first lover. Angier, 62.

¹⁵Angier's notes on sources for this information, 661, 732.

¹⁶Plante quotes: "After Paris we went to Vienna. But I don't want to talk about Vienna," 18. Short story "Vienne," from *Tigers are Better-Looking*, by Jean Rhys, (London: Penguin, 1972).

¹⁷Even this happier period continued to be marred by Rhys's drinking (Angier 361-62). Rhys and Tilden Smith lived together from 1928 to 1934, when they married after her divorce from Lenglet (Angier 232, 293).

¹⁸Angier 72-4. Rhys did not have the abortion at the end of her affair with Hugh Smith, as some writers, including Diana Athill ("Introduction," *The Complete Novels*) suggest. In *Smile Please* the reader is also, perhaps inadvertently, led to conclude that Rhys's first lover was responsible for her first pregnancy. Angier suggests that the

pregnancy occurred in the same way that Anna's does in *Voyage in the Dark*. The information is taken from the Jean Rhys Executor's Archive (EA) from a draft of "On Not Shooting Sitting Birds (ONSSB) See Note 75, 676. Abbrevs. 659-60). Angier evidently views this passage as another of Rhys's autobiographical "fictions." Although Angier is painstaking in her research, it is not always clear what material is actually autobiographical, unless we are to assume that all of Rhys's unpublished work is. However, the information is not available elsewhere, and since *ViD* was autobiographical, one assumes (with caution) that other writings dealing with the same incidents are specifically about the writer herself.

¹⁹Angier refers to the allowance Rhys received from both Hugh Smith and Ford at the end of their love affairs, as Rhys's being "pensioned off" (757). She outlines these periods in Rhys's life on 76-77, 161.

²⁰Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (London: Penguin, 1973) 20-21. All subsequent references noted in parentheses in text as Q, unless otherwise noted. "One realized all sorts of things. The value of an illusion, for instance, and that the shadow can be more important than the substance," is suggestive of T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men." Some influences of the writers of her time are evident in her work. Another example of this is, of course, the quotation at the beginning of *Quartet*: "...Beware of good Samaritans..." by R.C. Dunning.

²¹Several of the stories have been included in her later publication of short stories: Jean Rhys, *Tigers are Better Looking: With a selection from The Left Bank*. 1968. (London: Penguin, 1972). Ford Madox Ford (formerly Ford Hermann Hueffer), modernist British novelist and editor of the *transatlantic review* when Rhys met him in Paris. He encouraged her to write, and they also had an affair while Rhys's husband was in prison. *Quartet* is an autobiographical account of the lives of Rhys, Jean Lenglet, Ford and Stella Bowen, during that period.

²²In a letter to Evelyn Scott in 1931 Rhys writes: "I am always being told that unless my work ceases being 'sordid and depressing' I haven't much chance of selling" (*Letters* 21). To Morchard Bishop in 1931: "I'm sorry Good Morning, Midnight depressed you. No I didn't mean it to be hopeless...Well I won't start on that argument" (34). Angier suggests that the charge came from "many people--reviewers, publishers, everyone...it was also Leslie....It was his job to sell her work...[but] he didn't realize ...how deeply rooted...was Jean's dark and unsellable vision" (Angier 286).

²³Staley, 117-18.

²⁴David Plante, *Difficult Women: a memoir of three* (London: Gollancz, 1983) 52.

²⁵A. Alvarez, "Down and Out in Paris and London," *The New York Review of Books*, XXXVIII, 16 (1991) 40.

²⁶ Ibid. 43

²⁷Headaches may have been one recurrent illness Rhys suffered, as mentioned in the "Black Exercise Book" (O'Connor 23) and Chapter One above, 16. Anna also mentions headaches (ViD 63). See also Chapter 2 Note 15. Rhys's pneumonia becomes Anna's "pleurisy" (ViD 31).

²⁸Clayton L. Thomas, ed. *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary* 16 ed. (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1985) 907.

²⁹"Condition in which the total time asleep is greatly increased....may be associated with mental illness, drug or alcohol abuse....," Thomas 1692.

³⁰See Chapter 2 Note 15.

³¹*Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 513.

³²Evelyn Scott, a writer who "became a leading figure among the bohemian intelligentsia in Greenwich Village [in] the 1920's, interested in every 'modern' movement in politics, literature and art." *Letters*, 21.

³³Maryvonne Lenglet Moerman (born 1922) *Letters*, 26. After W.W.2, when Indonesia, a former Dutch colony, had ousted its Japanese occupiers, it declared its independence from Holland. But the Dutch attempted to re-occupy the country, killing thousands. After several years of struggle they "finally transferred sovereignty over the former Netherlands East Indies to the new Indonesian republic." Ginny Bruce, ed. *Indonesia-a travel survival kit*. Ginny Bruce, ed. (Victoria: [Australia] Lonely Planet Publications, 1986) 21-2. Angier writes that "Maryvonne and Job had to leave the life they'd built up over nine years and return to Holland. They were lucky to escape with their lives," 476.

³⁴Angier 224, 286, 425, 430.

³⁵"[H]e had had to divorce his wife of more than thirty- five years; and lose his only child too, for his daughter broke off with him when she learned that he'd left her mother" (Angier 440).

³⁶"[Max] was an intolerable burden on her. And he needed care she longed to provide, but couldn't; he never reproached her, but she reproached herself unceasingly.

And he stopped her from working. Sometimes, therefore, she neglected him; she left him unfed or unwashed and withdrew into her obsession. Sometimes she snapped. Then she hit him as she'd hit Leslie; and like Leslie he pretended something else had happened....Once...he couldn't pretend, because Jean had attacked him so loudly...the neighbours heard her....[A]fter it Max was more in hospital than out of it," Angier 497. "[Max] hates it there, and who wouldn't?...[S]ent to this place by a penny in the slot doctor. (N.H.S. indeed!! A rotten set up)....And here *I* am quite alone and nearly in despair lest my own health should give way....I intend to... have Max back, for I would infinitely prefer physical toil to this terrible anxiety and loneliness." Letter to Selma vas Diaz. (*Letters* 238).

³⁷Angier describes Rhys's reaction when Diana Melly had to leave her (in the care of friends) for a weekend, to visit another friend who needed help. Melly's husband called her "Johnny Rotten." 646-48.

³⁸Daniel Y. Patterson, *Living with Schizophrenia* (Princeton: A Service of E.R. Squibb & Sons, n.d.) 4-8.

³⁹J.P. Chaplin, *Dictionary of Psychology*, 2nd Revised Edition (New York: Dell, 1968) 274. Melancholia: "a pathological state of depression accompanied by low motor functions and low reactivity to stimuli." Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1954) Trans. by Alan Sheridan, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987) 5. Depression: "[T]akes the form of motor inertia against the background of a mood of sadness, accompanied by a psychic slowing down." See also Psychasthenia and mental asthenia.

⁴⁰Ruth Thompson, Harvey C. Stancer, Emmanuel Persad, *Understanding Manic-Depressive Illness: An Information guide for patients and their families* (Clarke Institute of Psychiatry Affective Disorders Unit, 1984). Thompson et al also suggest that in the early manic phase of Manic-Depressive illness a sufferer may be, among other things, "more active...self confident, perceptive and creative than usual." 3. Patterson, 8.

⁴¹Mary V. Seeman, John F. Thornton, Elizabeth Plummer, *Schizophrenia: Symptoms and Management at Home* (Richmond Hill: Merrell Dow, 1987) 7-8.

⁴²It is, of course, not possible to know how much of Plante's recollections are simply that and not an effort at making "literature" of Rhys's life, something he suggests she herself occasionally seemed to be doing when she dictated to him (41). It seems reasonable to assume, however, that since Plante seemed genuinely fond of Rhys, and was himself an associate of many of Rhys's literary circle, he would write of her with as much accuracy, and honesty, as possible. Although Rhys does not mention the "voices" in *Smile Please* the idea fits with the compulsion she does describe, to write out

the story of her love affair with Hugh Smith, SP 128-130.

⁴³Seeman et al, 19. Rhys was occasionally able to practice behaviours that were healthier for her, i.e., "some remnant of knowing what I ought to do...I would take long walks...(SP 120 and Chapter One above, 25-6). A producer she knew sent her to a dancing teacher, and Rhys spent several months working regularly and very hard-- "to be happy one must work" she wrote of this period in *Triple Sec*. Her teacher even believed that she could have become an acrobatic dancer if she had come to her earlier. Rhys was evidently happy during this period. She was eating well and not drinking. However, this period of sustained work ended when she met Lenglet (Angier 96-97). Angier believes, with others, including Rhys's daughter, that Rhys's incompetence was manipulative, partly pretence, to gain attention. "She had stuck emotionally...in childhood...felt happiest when treated as a child." Also, "she preferred to think it wasn't possible [to manage], that whatever happened was her trap, her fate. Then she could be angry at objects, instead of at herself, which she could...only do in writing" 592-3.

⁴⁴Quoted by Helen Nebeker in *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage* (Montreal: Eden Press 1981) 43 (Note 18, 203), from an interview with Mary Cantwell, "A Conversation with Jean Rhys," *Mademoiselle*, 79 (October, 1974), 208 & 210. Nebeker also quotes Athill: "She once said to me, 'There are times when I feel as though I were a pen in someone else's hand'" 43.

⁴⁵Angier. "[B]etween them Edward and Brenda [Rees Williams] gave Jean an allowance for many years" 432.

⁴⁶The care friends gave Rhys during her last years are detailed in Part Four, Chapters One and Two of Angier's biography.

CHAPTER TWO

Inertia and Fate in the Fiction

He said, 'I can't stand any more of this.' 'All right,' I said, 'let's go.' I got up and we went out....I got a taxi outside the hotel. I felt all right except that I was tired and I couldn't sit up straight. When he said 'O God, look what I've done,' I wanted to laugh.

Voyage in the Dark, 85

'And you,' I said. 'Do you believe in God?' 'It doesn't matter,' she answered calmly, 'what I believe or you believe, because we can do nothing about it, we are like these.' She flicked a dead moth off the table.

Wide Sargasso Sea, 105

Voyage in the Dark and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are, in several respects, characteristic of all Jean Rhys novels. But they also share specific similarities that place them in a separate category, often referred to as the "Caribbean" or "West Indian" novels.¹ Both are stories of young women in their late teens or early twenties. Both offer broader perspectives of childhood, parents, and the West Indian environment in which each grew up.² Although *Voyage in the Dark* is less descriptive of a character's early life, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* lends an historical background to the life of a young woman in the mid-nineteenth-century, Anna and Antoinette share similar early experiences. Both apparently suffer severe psychological damage occasioned by their treatment by men they love. But both, by implication, are deeply traumatized long before they are involved in adult relationships.

Although *Voyage in the Dark* was Jean Rhys's third published novel, it was written in its first "rawly autobiographical" form (Athill ix) fourteen years before her

first novel, *Quartet*, was published. Some writers suggest that if it were placed first among the four early novels, the figures could be representative of the same woman at different stages of life.³ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, also written in its essentials many years before it was published, might be placed at either end of the spectrum, suggesting an extraordinary circularity. But the order in which the two novels were eventually "distilled" from their earlier forms also suggests a long process of reflection, after which the characters appear in their essential outlines, stripped of any extraneous elaboration that might have coloured the earlier drawings. At the end of her writing life Rhys circles back to her own beginnings. And although she uses a "borrowed" character, placing her within the context of Dominican history, she is still exploring the disturbed behaviour that typifies all her female characters.

Rhys originally began *Wide Sargasso Sea* under the title *Le Revenant*, shortly after the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight*. However, as she said on different occasions, either she had "wanted to defend the 'poor Creole lunatic' when she arrived in England...and read *Jane Eyre*" or she'd read it as a child and had "had [it] 'lying inside me' ever since" (Angier 371). Rhys explores Antoinette's development through the life of that "poor creole lunatic" and, in the process, the Brontë character becomes peculiarly her own.⁴ Unlike Rhys's twentieth-century protagonists, Antoinette is not troubled by the apparently psychosomatic ills that beset Rhys's other characters. Her emotional illness is torturous and progressively debilitating. As a child, she suffers the dislocation experienced by colonial families, particularly their unprotected women and

children,

when the slavery on which their luxurious life styles depend comes to an end.

Anna's early years--two generations removed from Antoinette's--are also touched by this conflict, but Antoinette's story is more catastrophic in its depiction of postcolonial violence and its effect on a young girl who loses her home, a father she never knew, and a mother who rejects her and retreats into a demented world of her own. Although Anna's childhood and adolescence, at least what we are allowed to know of them, do not seem as palpably calamitous, her story is pathetic in its tracings of parental loss and rejection. She, also, has been deeply wounded by childhood events.

Antoinette and Anna share several attributes that contribute to their disordered mental states.⁵ Their belief in fate intensifies their inability to fend effectively for themselves. They drink too much, either for comfort or in futile attempts to stimulate themselves to action. Both are unable to respond rationally to their problems, and their lack of physical energy is more rooted in emotional disturbance than physical weakness. Anna's tiredness, which she often speaks of herself, is also noted by other characters, not always in sympathetic terms. To Laurie she "always look[s] half asleep and people don't like that." Ethel screams at her,

The thing about you is that you're half potty. You're not all there....Anybody's only got to look at you to see that. (ViD 118, 124)⁶

Anna behaves as if she lives in a state of shock, but no one with whom she comes in contact, not even Walter, realizes that. Christophine, however, does tend to view Antoinette's inactivity as a malady:

I get frightened that she sleep too much, too long....There are mornings when she can't wake, or when she wake it's as if she still sleeping.
(WSS 128)

In spite of their inertia, both women also respond violently in certain situations. Antoinette bites her husband when he tries to keep her from drinking, then, fearing his anger, "smash[es] another bottle against the wall and st[ands] with the broken glass in her hand and murder in her eyes" (WSS 122). Anna stops her lover and his friends from laughing at her by putting the end of her cigarette "down on Walter's hand. I jammed it down hard and held it there..." (ViD 74). Although both have been provoked, their excessive reactions serve only to ensure, and indeed to hasten, their defeat.

Edward, whose narration strengthens the view of Antoinette as already severely disturbed when their marriage begins, notes her lack of energy. Although obviously in her own element, happily in control of their honeymoon expedition to her beloved Granbois, at a town in which they stay the night, "Antoinette had a room to herself, she was exhausted."⁷ He also discusses what he views as her lack of realistic perception about anything not directly connected with her own world:

She often questioned me about England and listened attentively to my answers, but I was certain that nothing I said made much difference. Her mind was already made up. Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song, a waltz, some note of music, and her ideas were fixed. About England and about Europe. I could not change them and probably nothing would. Reality might disconcert her, bewilder her, hurt her, but it would not be reality. It would be only a mistake, a misfortune, a wrong path taken, her fixed ideas would never change....Nothing that I told her influenced her at all. (WSS 78)

Such observations might, of course, be dismissed as the judgment of an unreliable

narrator, but he also narrates a chilling episode in which, after a quarrel with the servant, Amélie, who then leaves the room singing a song about a white cockroach, Antoinette's mind seems to veer from the present. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, she begins to tear up a bed sheet. Cummins suggests that

[t]he shift to Edward's point of view does not displace Antoinette's vision....Antoinette as presented by Edward is completely consistent with her own presentation....[H]is point of view allows Rhys to legitimize Antoinette's vision without the use of omniscient narration....⁸

The way Edward notes Antoinette's exhaustion echoes and authenticates her "I often stay in bed all day" (72), as do Christophine's comments on how much Antoinette sleeps (128). But although Edward narrates the incident without comment he himself has precipitated the quarrel and the sheet-tearing incident, which occurs after he has had sex with Amélie within Antoinette's hearing. Her husband's unfaithfulness, coupled with Amélie's retaliatory slap, jolts Antoinette back into the past situation when the usually subservient blacks had acted violently against her. Angier suggests that

[a]fter each rejection [Antoinette] suffers some form of traumatic reaction....After Amélie sings 'White Cockroach' she seems to imagine she's back at Coulibri during the fire, and she tears her sheet into strips as Aunt Cora tore her petticoat for Pierre. (Angier 537)

Similar narrative patterns trace the parental influences and rejections that are material to both novels. Antoinette's narration about her parents often suggests that she either does not remember or that she does not trust her own memory, which forces her to present them from other viewpoints. Anna narrates from her own point of view which we cannot always be sure is reliable. Although she speaks of her father and Walter with

love, the intense negativity towards herself which she ascribes to most of the other characters is suggestive of paranoia. Although she elicits sympathy, it is more for a girl who has mired herself in self-pity than for someone who is being persecuted by everyone with whom she comes into contact. Her stance of total aloneness in a callous, indifferent world suggests that there is something missing from her story, as well as from her account of the actions of others towards her. Anyone who has ever loved her, or been kind to her, either leaves her, lives on the other side of an ocean, or is dead. Cummins writes:

Anna controls the secondary foci, those other voices of the outside world which despise her, and, because she seems to have little knowledge of how the paranoia at the centre of her vision may distort her vision or influence her selections, she cannot be considered a trustworthy guide to external reality....Her lack of self knowledge makes her trustworthy only as a guide to the feelings of the undermined. (Cummins 366-67)⁹

Although Anna remembers her father lovingly, he appears to have been often absent from her life. He had placed her in a convent for half a year while he visited England. He is absent on other occasions when she is at Morgan's Rest with Hester.¹⁰ Ultimately he dies, leaving her dependent on her step-mother who seems intent on "getting rid of her," as her Uncle suggests.¹¹ He appears through memory, in vivid but fragmentary glimpses that offer only hints of his influence on her behaviour.

Like Antoinette, Anna reacts to threatening situations in the present by reverting in memory to frightening situations in the past. Thus, when she receives a suspect letter her immediate reaction is to recall a fearful incident in the past, that of coming upon her "Uncle Bo," whose false teeth, in sleep, slip in and out of his mouth--"long yellow tusks

like fangs--you don't scream when you are frightened and you don't move because you can't." When she reads the letter, her fear transforms to loss and she reverts, circuitously, to a former loss:

But I went on thinking about false teeth, and then about piano-keys and...the blind man who came...to tune the piano...and my father sa[ying], 'You are a real musician.' He had a red moustache, my father. And Hester was always saying 'Poor Gerald, poor Gerald,' But if you'd seen him walking up Market Street, swinging his arms and with his brown shoes flashing in the sun you wouldn't have been sorry for him. That time when he said, 'The Welsh word for grief is hiraeth.' And that time when I was crying about nothing and I thought he'd be wild, but he hugged me up...and then he said 'I believe you're going to be like me, you poor little devil.' (ViD 81)

Anna's reactions muddle conflicting memories and emotions. Jeffries has been (in her mind, at least) almost like a father to her. The Welsh word "hiraeth," which her father had told her meant "grief," is connected to her father and her loss of him. His comforting her, as Walter sometimes did, becomes confused with the loss of her lover. In losing one she loses the other once more. Recalling Hester's pitying "poor Gerald," she remembers her father's pity--"you poor little devil, you're going to be like me." This seems to suggest that although some of her problems may originate from inherited personality traits, the crippling self-pity that contributes to her inertia may have been promoted by Gerald's suggestion that she is to be pitied, as he is pitied by Hester. A further indication of his tendency to self-pity is demonstrated by Hester, in her anger at his "losing touch with everybody in England," and her repetition, evidently word for word, of what he

[o]nce...said to [her], 'No, I never want to go back. It cost me too much

last time and I didn't really enjoy it. I've got nobody there who cares a damn about me. The place stinks of hypocrites if you've got a nose...I don't care if I never see it again.' (ViD 53)

Although Hester's own emotions are called into question here, the words themselves suggest the father's possibly volatile mental state, addressed as they evidently were to the wife who appears to epitomize the hypocrisy and heartlessness he decries, and whom he had married during an extended visit to a country he "didn't enjoy" and that "st[ank] of hypocrites."

Antoinette's father is as notable by his absence as Anna's. Antoinette has even less connection to him: "(My father, visitors, horses, feeling safe in bed--all belonged to the past)" (WSS 15). All we know about him must be gleaned from the different points of view contained in Antoinette's and Rochester's narrations, a strategy that suggests a possible confusion of facts in Antoinette's mind, that forces her to relate what she has heard rather than what she herself remembers;¹² it also helps to build a sense of a past in which there are other people, as opposed to the truncated existence Bertha Mason lives in the Brontë novel. This approach also reminds us that lives viewed from different perspectives take on different attributes. No one ever sees another person in exactly the same way. Thus Antoinette overhears some women guests at her mother's wedding:

Emancipation troubles killed old Cosway? Nonsense--the estate was going downhill for years before that. He drank himself to death. Many's the time when--well! And all those women! She never did anything to stop him--she encouraged him. Presents and smiles for the bastards every Christmas. Old customs? Some old customs are better dead and buried. (WSS 24-25)¹³

She encouraged him, the gossips suggest, but Antoinette pursues this train of thought no further. Earlier she says that her mother was "my father's second wife, far too young for him *they thought*" (WSS 15 italics added). One is left to surmise why Annette encouraged her husband's affairs and accepted his "bastards" with "presents and smiles," and why the things Antoinette remembers hearing are all negative.

Further information about "old Cosway" comes at another remove, from the apparently psychotic Daniel who claims to be one of Cosway's illegitimate sons. Daniel's judgement is even more condemnatory, but for different reasons:

'Pious,' they write up. 'Beloved by all'. Not a word about the people he buy and sell like cattle. 'Merciful to the weak,' they write up. Mercy! The man have heart like stone. Sometimes when he get sick of a woman ...he free her...give her hut and a bit of land...but it is no mercy, it's for wicked pride he do it....[H]e walk like he own the earth. 'I don't give a damn,' he says....I remember...the morning he put a curse on me. Sixteen years old I was and anxious....I walk all the way to Coulibri.... [F]irst thing he tell me is I'm always pestering him for money....[H]e call me what's-your-name. 'I can't remember all their names-it's too much to expect of me.' he says. (WSS 101-02)

Although he was given the money, Daniel's hate stems from the curses he received instead of the acknowledgement of paternity he wanted, and which was not denied to another son, Alexander. Christophine offers Antoinette's husband yet another point of view:

It's lies all that yellow bastard tell you. He is no Cosway....His mother was a no-good woman and she try to fool the old man but the old man isn't fooled. 'One more or less,' he says, and laughs. He was wrong. More he do for those people, more they hate him. (WSS 129)

Although much has been gleaned about Cosway's character, that evidence is conflicting,

though it reinforces the view that he wasted little concern on his family, committing the ultimate desertion by "[drinking] himself to death." Wife and children are left to survive as best they can, so that the cycle of Antoinette's helplessness begins almost from her infancy. When her step-father also dies, again leaving her adrift, she is at the mercy of a weak-willed step-brother who continues the arrangements for her marriage to Edward Rochester, but with less parental concern for her future.¹⁴

As Antoinette's natural father is known only indirectly, so Anna's birth mother is an even more nebulous figure. During a tirade directed at Anna, Hester's innuendo about Anna's "unfortunate propensities," and their possible causes, are interpreted by Anna as a slur against her mother:

You're trying to make out that my mother was coloured.... You always did try to make that out. And she wasn't. (ViD 56)

The only other time Anna mentions her mother is to talk about the family estate to Walter, near the end of their affair, and to tell him she is the "fifth generation born out there, on my mother's side," (ViD 45).

While Anna's real mother is conspicuous by her absence, her step-mother is rendered opprobrious by her presence. Even before they leave the West Indies, the relationship between Anna and Hester is intensely negative. When Anna was "unwell for the first time" it was Francine, a black servant whom she loved, who "explained... so that it seemed quite all right and...all in the day's work like eating or drinking"(ViD 59). Hester's less than comfortable explanations of the onset of menstruation make her feel ill, and the two end by quarreling. When Anna goes to Francine for comfort, she

intuits that she has, in Francine's eyes, crossed a line into adulthood that will earn her the distrust accorded all whites, and consequently she feels further rejected:

I felt more alone than anybody had ever been in the world before....Then a cloud came in front of my eyes and seemed to blot out half of what I ought to have been able to see. It was always like that when I was going to have a headache. (ViD 62-63)¹⁵

Hester's behaviour and Francine's supposed rejection precipitate a suicide attempt. Hester appears to be extraordinarily insensitive both to her step-daughter's immediate feelings and to the losses she has sustained throughout her life, including the loss of her mother. After taking her to England, a journey which, by removing her from familiar surroundings, compounds her loss and leads her into a series of adverse choices, Hester eventually disclaims all responsibility for her and, indeed, cheats her of her inheritance. Although we can never be sure whether Hester is as ugly as she has been painted, Anna's perceptions of her certainly reinforce the idea that she is at least partly responsible for Anna's inability to care for herself.

Antoinette's final rejection by her mother, when she is still very young, is even more devastating. Having recovered from her own long illness after the burning of Coulibri, Antoinette goes to visit Annette who at first holds her "so tightly that [she] couldn't breathe...", and then looks for Pierre as well; when Antoinette shakes her head, saying "But I am here, I am here," Annette cries, "no, no, no" and flings her away (WSS 40). After the brief years of Annette's acceptance of, and kindness to, Antoinette, beginning with the appearance of the Luttrells and Antoinette's subsequent position as bridesmaid at her mother's marriage, Annette again rejects her.

Although both Anna and Antoinette appear to be physically healthy young women, both have earlier suffered a prolonged physical illness brought on by emotional shock: Anna's precipitated by sunstroke, Antoinette's by racial upheaval and a blow from a rock thrown by a child who had been her friend. The care they received during these illnesses may have contributed to their lasting emotional lassitude, since it achieved for them both the kindness and attention they needed (and which they apparently did not otherwise receive): Anna from her father and Francine, who is temporarily restored to her, and Antoinette from the one loving woman in her life besides Christophine, her aunt Cora.

The experiences of both women, in childhood and adolescence, lead them towards an unconscious philosophical determinism that exacerbates their inertia, since they become convinced, with good reason, that they are at the mercy of external forces. As children they are helpless to protect themselves. But as they grow up they remain helpless. They never learn to express or assert their own needs. Eventually they develop the belief that all life is predetermined, an attitude that both justifies and magnifies their apathetic responses as adults.¹⁶ Religious influences, particularly those of the convent school where each lives during adolescence, further impress a sense of fatalism upon them. Antoinette's conviction, born of her childhood experience and her second dream--

I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen (WSS 50)

--is intensified by religious ritual. Although the convent is a "refuge," she is also troubled by the prayers that dwell on the "hour of death" as if, by implication, they

emphasize the inevitability of the unhappy events that have happened in her life, and which will continue to happen:

...a place of sunshine and of death....Hot coffee and rolls and melting butter. But after the meal, now and at the hour of our death, and at midday and at six in the evening, now and at the hour of our death....I learnt to gabble without thinking....About changing now and the hour of our death for that is all we have. (WSS 47, 48)

Anna recognizes her fate in hindsight, as an explanation for the feelings of dread that haunt her:

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....(ViD 82)

But, as with Antoinette, the inexorability of death has been impressed upon her in a convent:

'Children, every day one should put aside a quarter of an hour for meditation on the Four Last Things....(Question: What are the Four Last Things? Answer: The Four Last Things are Death, Judgement, Hell and Heaven)....[L]ie straight down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut and say: 'One day I shall be dead. One day I shall lie like this with my eyes closed and I shall be dead....'(ViD 48)

Anna is also moved to compare English Sundays to the Anglican Sundays of her childhood, as she waits out those long days when Walter

was never in London and there wasn't any hope that he would send for me. That year my birthday was on a Sunday....The feeling of Sunday is the same everywhere, heavy, melancholy, standing still. Like when they say, 'As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end'....'To the Memory of Doctor Charles Le Mesurier, the Poor of this Island were Grateful for his Benevolence, the Rich Rewarded his Industry and Skill' That gave you a peaceful and melancholy feeling. The poor do this and the rich do that, the world is so-and-so and nothing can change it. For ever and for ever turning and nothing, nothing can change it. (ViD 36-37)

Walter is otherwise occupied on weekends, even on her birthday. She is nineteen years old. "The poor do this--the rich do that....and nothing can change it."¹⁷

Despite her sense of the inevitable, Antoinette turns in desperation to obeah in the hope that Christophine's "magic" can change fate. Antoinette's confusion and conflicting needs are evident as Christophine argues with her that she should leave Edward, rather than trying to win him back. First she insists that

I cannot go. He is my husband after all....I am not rich now. I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him.

But when Christophine has absorbed this lesson in English law, and suggests an alternative "visit" to a "cousin in Martinique," from which vantage point she could "[a]sk him pretty for some of your own money," Antoinette offers an amazingly contradictory response:

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘After all I could, but why should I go to Martinique? I wish to see England, I might be able to borrow money for that. Not from him but I know how I might get it. I must travel far, if I go.’ (WSS 91)

Although she later denies the possibility of such an escape, insisting that "everybody" "would force me back" (WSS 94), it seems clear that she is not entirely friendless nor without choices. But Antoinette does not want to leave her husband. She wants him to love her, and even though all the evidence tells her that he does not, she still hopes, because only his love can protect her from the power of the fate she intuitively feels he holds over her, the fate she hopes to circumvent with the aid of Christophine's obeah. To Christophine's urging that she talk to him, she cries,

‘I have tried,’ I said, ‘but he does not believe me. It is too late for that

now...I will try again if you will do what I ask. Oh Christophine, I am so afraid...I do not know why, but so afraid. All the time. Help me.' (WSS 96)

Antoinette's fear at this point accentuates the sense of fate Rhys wishes to amplify. Christophine clearly recognizes the fear, but she first attempts to discourage Antoinette's wish to use obeah by trying both to deny her own association with the practice, and to stress the dangers to white people of using it:

So you believe in that tim-tim story about obeah...[a]ll that foolishness and folly. Too besides, that is not for *béké*. Bad, bad trouble come when *béké* meddle with that. (WSS 93)

The practice of obeah had been a source of conflict between the colonial society and its slaves. Knowing that it could be emotionally damaging for Antoinette to "meddle" in a cultural practice she did not understand was only one reason for Christophine's reluctance to "help" Antoinette in this way:

[U]nder the conditions of slavery the...negro was virtually forbidden to practise or to perpetuate his own religious culture....(Morrish 41).

Christophine had already been imprisoned once for practicing obeah (WSS 103, 118, 131-32). To accede to the request is, therefore, dangerous on two counts. However, she is unable to deny Antoinette's pleas and, after extracting a promise from her to talk to her husband once more, reluctantly gives her the aphrodisiac with which she hopes to re-kindle Edward's attraction to her (96-97).

Although Anna does not have recourse to Obeah to re-ignite Walter's interest, she retains memories of the witchcraft of her island. "Jumbie-beads are lucky" (ViD 50). Francine tells her stories at the start of which she "had to say 'Timm, timm' and Anna

"had to answer 'Bois Sèche,' " a ritual that Francine insists upon (ViD 61).¹⁸ Like Antoinette, Anna is attuned to the black culture of her island, and feels a strong affinity for the people, especially the women who appear to be more at ease with themselves than English people. "Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad" (ViD 27). Also like Antoinette she has black "cousins" to whom presents are given "every Christmas." (ViD 55, WSS 240). But there is a bleak side to this affinity. Overtones of racial divisions, as articulated by Hester, play as much a part in *Voyage in the Dark* (albeit with less volatility), as they do in *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn't do it. (ViD 56)

Both young women suffer conflicting feelings about the blacks. When they are not "coloured cousins," or a lover like Sandi Cosway, a mother figure like Christophine, or angry ex-slaves who pose a threat to the safety of whites, they are servants, and both Antoinette and Anna take their servitude, and by implication the servitude of others, for granted as a fact of colonial, white, and therefore privileged, life, even when they live in poverty themselves. The conviction that someone will be there to attend to their physical wants contributes to their helplessness in looking after themselves. Antoinette's acceptance of the service of others is perhaps more understandable. Before the emancipation she had been looked after by slaves. Afterwards, Christophine had procured servants for Annette and the children through her own personal power:

The girls from the bayside who...helped with the washing and cleaning were terrified of her. That, I soon discovered, was why they came at all--for she never paid them. Yet they brought presents of fruit and

vegetables and after dark I often heard low voices from the kitchen.
(WSS 18)

When Annette remarries, wealth buys the service of the freed blacks. Antoinette never knows a time when she is not waited on, her physical needs, at least, always attended to. Amélie's open defiance only becomes possible in the face of both Antoinette's and Rochester's loosening control over their situation. Although Christophine exhorts her to "have spunks" and "do battle" for herself (WSS 84, 96), Antoinette is no longer able to fight. Christophine has always fought for her.¹⁹

Anna, on the other hand, has not had black servants since she left the island. But she grew up accustomed to them, and even in poverty, in cheap rooming houses, a certain imperiousness comes naturally to her. "Can I have my hot water?" she asks the landlady who is watching her "with her little red eyes." When Walter Jeffries sends her money and she goes out to buy clothes, her

landlady was washing the steps, plung[ing] her hands into a pail of filthy water....There she was on her knees....'Will you lay a fire in my room, please?... My voice sounded round and full....'That's because of the money,' I thought. (ViD 24)

The fire laid, she asks for tea, and her landlady finally replies, "You seem to think I'm here to wait on you" (ViD 26). Of course landladies despise Anna as much as she does them, and they assert their own power by making, and sometimes acting on, their own judgements of Anna's sexual morals (ViD 26). One wonders if this commentary on the circularity of the exploitation process is intentional or if Rhys ever thought of the marginal economic advantages and respectability enjoyed by boarding-house owners in

decaying neighbourhoods. Her personal dislike of landladies colours Anna's satirical, often cruel descriptions. One, fulfilling another "request" has "bulging eyes, dark blobs in a long, pink face, like a prawn" (ViD 89). But despite her apparent insensitivity towards *them*, Anna is extraordinarily sensitive to what she thinks are their reactions to her. During her affair with Walter, a landlady who appears to treat her with respect, "always made her expression blank when she spoke to me" (ViD 65). But since she is not equipped to look after herself, landladies are a necessary adjunct to her existence. She always lives in rooms where breakfast and evening tea, at least, are a part of the service, and other needs are fulfilled on request.²⁰ So, although she is no longer in a position to have servants, black or white, Anna retains the habit of, and the need for, having them, and this, also, contributes to her helplessness.

Anna's story is analagous to Antoinette's in many ways, but, as mentioned earlier, Rhys had to deal with specific technical difficulties in the writing of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as well as satisfying her own personal, less clearly defined imperatives. Consequently, as Antoinette fulfills her promise to Christophine, to "speak" to her husband, Rhys continues to explore Antoinette's confusions, her apparent reluctance or inability to talk coherently to Rochester, to tell him about her past life, to reassure him that she is not the debased creature his own darkening imagination and Daniel's hysterical tale have convinced him she is.

They begin by arguing about God, and Edward offers, in light of what we know of him, a totally predictable version of religious faith. Antoinette's satirical reaction to

his pomposity, combined with his already tense emotional condition, leads him to see in her a resemblance to Amélie and to think, "[p]erhaps they are related. It's possible...even probable in this damned place," further emphasizing the nightmarish quality of his own mental state (WSS 105). His countering query produces an equally predictable, if more intelligent reply:

‘It doesn’t matter,’ she answered calmly, ‘what I believe or you believe, because we can do nothing about it, we are like these.’ She flicked a dead moth off the table. (WSS 105)

This reminder of Antoinette’s fatalistic philosophy further emphasizes the fruitlessness of their discussion. They are now completely at cross purposes; Edward at one moment coldly demanding the truth or falsity of Daniel’s story, at the next suggesting they talk "some other time," because he feels

This is not the place or the time...not in this...dark listening night outside. (WSS 106)

Antoinette, stretched to her own emotional limits, alternates between antagonizing him and demanding that he hear her out. "‘You frightened?’ she said, imitating a Negro’s voice, singing and insolent." To his suggestion that she tell him tomorrow "in the daylight," she responds, "You have no right to ask questions about my mother and then refuse to listen to my answer." Although he agrees--"if that’s what you wish," he implies a reluctance that appears manipulative, telling her he feels "very much a stranger here...that this place is my enemy and on your side" (WSS 107).

Antoinette’s narration of the events of her life, with an occasional interjection from the hearer is, perhaps as Rhys intended, as disjointed as their preliminary arguing,

and ends with Antoinette's "I have said all I want to say. I have tried to make you understand. But nothing has changed" (WSS 111). Although the episode elicits sympathy for both of them it also demonstrates that each is close to shattering under the tension, and that neither is really listening to the other.

At the end of the passage Edward's sudden and unexpected use of the name "Bertha," initiates the power he now begins to impose upon Antoinette. This is also the means by which Rhys begins to relate the characters to the Brontë novel. The two are locked into a situation in which they are helplessly unable to empathize with each other and the sudden interjection of the name seems contrived and insincere. However, it is also possible that Rhys is accentuating Rochester's insincerity and suggesting that the reader's sympathy for him may be misplaced.

The shifting, disjointed dialogue, the incoherence and broken continuity of these passages echo the modernist approach Rhys followed during her earlier writing life.²¹ But her writing was also driven by her own independent imperatives, and this passage seems to evolve more from a compelling need to impose her sense of "shape" on the conflicting and confused dialogue of disordered minds, rather than from the exigencies of stylistic method.²²

The rather too awkward leap into the *Jane Eyre* scenario is jarring, when our impulse is to look for a resolution of the situation at hand. However, this may also be deliberate, since there can be no resolution. Edward's apparent agreement with Christophine, that they should separate, "for a time," seems sincere, but it is again

apparent that Antoinette does not want that. When she says "I wish to stay here in the dark...where I belong" (WSS 111- 12), there is again a sense of contrived scene-setting, since it is followed almost at once by her request that he come to say goodnight to her. Just before the chapter breaks we are led to believe, although we are not certain, that Antoinette has, indeed, put a philtre in his wine. We are also led to believe, although again we cannot be sure, that it was probably her intention to do so no matter what the result of their talk. If Antoinette's part is disjointed and confusing, Edward's, with his alternating coldness and appearance of understanding, his sudden resort to calling her a name she has never heard, begins to be suggestive of his heretofore latent intention.

The cry of fear, of impending fate, which Antoinette makes to Christophine, and the problem of choice, briefly discussed earlier, suggest that Antoinette's apparently conflicting needs and desires, her reversals in thinking as she talks to Christophine, and to her husband, represent a solution to what must have constituted a technical difficulty in the writing. Although Rhys was exploring the disintegration of a personality and layering into its fragmentation a fatalism which she herself espoused (both of which she expresses through Antoinette's disturbed thought), she was also faced with an unalterable conclusion to her story, if not to her novel itself. Antoinette's, or Bertha Mason's, fate had been decided a century before. In creating the character's early life Rhys was, in effect, filling in a blank space. She still had to work with the end of the original story. Cummins comments on another aspect of Rhys's "double focus."

Before the third part of the novel...the brief passage narrated by Grace Poole signals the introduction of a new silent but powerful voice...the

voice of Charlotte Brontë. It...retrospectively infuses its spirit over the entire novel.... Brontë's Bertha haunts Rhys's novel...Th[e] double focus...with one of its foci in an English novel of the past, enlarges and heightens the sense of determinism, since no matter what the heroine attempts, her fate has been preordained. (371)

Antoinette's confused approach to her problems, and the viewpoints of other observers, must be constantly brought forward to support the idea that she is already quite disturbed. There are, however, times when she is also quite lucid, and these, juxtaposed against her more disrupted actions or speech make it impossible ever to be certain whether she is already mad, in the process of going mad, whether her husband is deliberately driving her to it from the start, or just from the moment he makes the conscious decision. And despite Antoinette's pre-ordained fate, Rhys works from a psychological standpoint--exploring the trauma that renders her incapable of acting effectively in her own interests. Instead of leaving (which of course, she cannot, trapped as she is in the plot of another novel), the solution is still presented as a choice which she *might* make. She looks at it and discards it. She had almost refused to marry Rochester, who says, "If she won't, she won't. She can't be dragged to the altar" (WSS 65). She was not forced into the marriage. Giving Antoinette the illusion of choice gives Rhys the opportunity to explore the development of her insanity, although her end remains inevitable. To satisfy the letter, if not the spirit, of that conclusion, Antoinette makes all the wrong choices, in order to live out the fate that has already been prepared for her.

Along with her interpretations of the practical limitations and emotional

functioning of her female characters, Rhys demonstrates an often acerbically expressed understanding of the outside forces that shape them, particularly the social pressures imposed upon them and the callousness of society that ill-prepares them to fend for themselves, then abandons them to a life of neglect and poverty. In presenting the kinds of men these women choose, or are chosen by, she poses a conundrum that asks whether the women are predisposed to rejection because their emotional functioning so adversely affects the men's behaviour, or whether both individuals unconsciously choose partners who will react predictably in a relationship. The male characters in all of Rhys's novels also function at diminished emotional levels and are lacking in qualities essential to the success of a relationship. Although this lack, specifically of an ability to love for reasons other than self-gratification, is evident in Walter Jeffries, it is most salient in Edward Rochester. Of his own troubled memories of childhood, Edward asks himself,

How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted. (WSS 85)

In an imaginary letter he inveighs against his father for forcing him into a marriage for money:

Dear Father. The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to). I have a modest competence now. I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests. None of the furtive shabby manoeuvres of a younger son. I have sold my soul or you have sold it.... (WSS 59)

Although it is not within the purview of this thesis to explore the emotional functioning of the male characters, except as it impinges on the mental state of the

women, it is fair to note Rhys's thoroughgoing analysis of how their social status affects their functioning. Since gentlemen in Rochester's day evidently did not work to earn money, it does not occur to him that he, like Antoinette, has choices. His actions as a disinherited second son accord with the mores of his time. Antoinette is dispossessed; her inheritance becomes *his* "modest competence." The only concession he need make, the "provision for her (that must be seen to)," is to personal conscience, not to social demand, and not to law. The psychological forces he gathers to accomplish his wife's destruction, when he has convinced himself that it is no more than she deserves, are savage, but the performances of the twentieth-century characters of all of Rhys's earlier novels, exemplified by Walter Jeffries, are also ruthless--though arguably to a lesser degree; however, the result to the women is almost as destructive.

Although we do not know if it extends to women of his own class, Jeffries embraces a monetary view of the single, working female that is typical, in Rhys's writing, of men of his social and financial status. Her portrayal of Jeffries suggests that he takes for granted that sexual gratification is purchasable under the guise of a "love" affair in which both participants understand the terms. Those terms are part of an implicit belief that protects him from troublesome twinges of conscience: women like Anna fully recognize from the outset that marriage is out of the question; they do not possess, or if they do they choose to ignore, the instincts which tell them they are being used; they also do not possess the finer feeling that might make them sensitive to the subtly cruel and inevitably crude treatment they receive. One other protective proviso

(for the man) might be added--that the assumptions of gentlemen cannot by their nature be interpreted as crude. Although it was perhaps not Rhys's intention to make such points, particularly about Walter Jeffries, the story quite often leads one to such conclusions: "You're a perfect darling, but you're only a baby. You'll be all right later on," that is, she will make a better mistress because she will learn how to behave better in such situations. "Some people are born knowing their way about; others never learn. Your predecessor-...." Perhaps this is an unintentional cruelty. But it is easy to read it as a crudely disguised warning to Anna that she, too, will some day be a "predecessor" (ViD 44).²³ Anna misses little in her observations of what it means to become a gentleman's mistress. After their first night together, when it is time for her to leave (Walter lives alone and is unattached, so there seems little need for such discretion: it appears to be simply an expectation on his part to discourage too close an involvement), he offers to go outside with her to get a taxi and Anna sees

a telephone over by the bed. I thought, 'Why doesn't he telephone for a taxi?' but I didn't say anything.

It is Anna who must contend with the knowing winks of taxi drivers (ViD 34). Although Walter is kind and Anna falls more hopefully in love--

Of course, some people do get on. Yes, but how many? What about what's-her-name.... 'Chorus-Girl Marries Peer's Son,' (ViD 64)--

underneath that hope she knows that she will not "get on," that Walter will not marry her, even when he knows her background is not that of the usual chorus-girl:

'I wish you could see Constance Estate,' I said. 'That's the old estate--my mother's family place. It's very beautiful. I wish you could see it.'

(ViD 45)

Anna's idea of "getting on" is different from Walter's: "I want to be with you. That's all I want." He says,

Don't be like that...like a stone that I try to roll uphill and that always rolls down again.

Although he is charmed by her, her inertia, her lack of ambition and need to be taken care of, are threatening to him. He supports her, provides singing lessons, uses his connections to find work for her. Knowing that he has no intention of marrying her, he hopes that providing her with the means to "get on" will allay his conscience and insure her survival after his eventual rejection. Anna's dream of marriage is futile, although she does not always realize it, and her lack of survival instincts, which Walter at first exploits and then ignores, juxtaposed against his position of power, suggests that he is no more capable of sustained relationships than she is. His attitude towards women generally is a further indication of his inability to relate to them honestly. Vincent's friend is "old" at thirty one. She is a "damned bore" for "kicking up a row" because Vincent did not give her "enough money" (ViD 75). Walter is also manipulative. Anna, in despair when he rejects her, collapses in her taxi, and Walter says: "I shouldn't wonder if I got ill with all this worry" (ViD 85).²⁴

Although parallel themes of helplessness, and the variety of determinants, both internal and external, that lead to it dominate both novels, their conclusions are dramatically different. While Anna's inertia and fatalism affect her ability to transcend

her experiences and doom her to an emotionally disturbed half-life of poverty and dependence, caught on a treadmill of "starting all over again, all over again..." (ViD 159),²⁵ Antoinette deliberately courts (as she must) the fate that both draws and terrifies her. But she never completely loses her understanding of what has happened to her.²⁶ "It's my belief that you remember much more than you pretend," says Grace Poole (WSS 149). She particularly recalls parting from her "cousin," Sandi. In the interval between the honeymoon at Granbois and her husband's taking her to England, they saw each other "when that man was away....the servants knew, but none of them told" (WSS 152).

'Will you come with me?' he said. 'No,' I said, 'I cannot.' 'But I can't leave you like this...you are unhappy.' 'You are wasting time,' I said, 'and we have so little.' (WSS 151-52)²⁷

Louis James contends that

Rochester does not destroy her....[S]he preserves her passion, and a world of sensations and images that reflect her knowledge of reality.²⁸

One might argue that if Rochester does not destroy her, then her passion is in the service of her ultimate *self*-destruction. An inability to make decisions for herself, conflicting, vaguely defined needs, her own fatalism, lead her to reject all proposals for escape--"if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse--" and become the means of bringing about the fate she believes to be hers.

NOTES: CHAPTER TWO

¹Teresa F. O'Connor titles her study *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels*. Louis James also suggests this category, and cites two Caribbean writers, Wally Look Lai and Kenneth Ramchand who both include *Wide Sargasso Sea* in their groupings of West Indian novels.

²Early experiences and parental influence do not make up a significant proportion of the three other novels. The West Indies or some other tropical place is suggested, but not specifically as a homeland. Marya's "long eyes slanted upwards...oddly remote in expression, and on the Boulevards ...shabby youths would...address her hopefully in unknown and spitting tongues" (Q 7). Sasha remarks on "We English" The only hint of a past is the memory of "Sister Marie Augustine saying 'My child, don't hurry. You have eternity in front of you.'" *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) (London: Penguin, 1969, 32, 72. Julia's mother, dark skinned, with high cheek bones and an aquiline nose and black eyes (72), spent her childhood in "South America...." Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, (1930) (London: Penguin, 1971) 70. Subsequent references to these novels will be by page number in parentheses as (GMM) or (ALMM). Fathers are not mentioned in any of these novels. Memories of a past life begin for all three women when they escape England to marry a man in a foreign country.

³"Because the autobiographical elements precede both *Quartet* and *Mr. Mackenzie*, the novel is especially important in further delineating the portrait of the Rhys heroine" (Staley 59). Nancy R. Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988), also remarks on the order of the novels: "Although published third, *Voyage in the Dark* presents the first leg of the life journey undertaken by the young woman who is Rhys's continuing protagonist" 61. Peter Wolfe, *Jean Rhys* (Boston: Twayne, 1980) suggests that "the heroines of the first four novels are the same woman given different names and viewed at different stages in life" 20. Subsequent references to Wolfe will be by page number in parentheses in text.

⁴Charlotte Brontë *Jane Eyre* (1847) Q.D. Leavis, ed. (London: Penguin, 1966) 318. Bertha Mason's full name was Bertha Antoinette. There are elements of Rhys, her mother, and her great-grandmother in both Antoinette and Annette. Resemblances to Rhys occur primarily in aspects of their behaviour, particularly Annette's narcissism and her concern with mirrors. The characters also appear to reflect Rhys's youthful admiration of her mother's appearance. Both Antoinette and her mother are modelled on Rhys's great-grandmother who was "pretty, with dark curls and a lively, intelligent face....I was told she was a Spanish countess from Cuba but...I doubted that" (SP 34) See Note 6, Chapter 1 of this thesis. Annette's rejection of her daughter in favour of the younger child is reminiscent of what we understand of Rhys's own mother.

⁵They also share these attributes with the protagonists of the other three novels. It is only their youth, their Caribbean settings and family histories that they do not share with Marya, Sasha, and Julia.

⁶Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) (London: Penguin 1969) 118, 124. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses as (ViD).

⁷Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) (London: Penguin 1968) 58. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses as (WSS).

⁸Marsha Z. Cummins, "Point of View in the Novels of Jean Rhys: The Effect of the Double Focus," *World Literature Written in English* 24.2 (1984): 370. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses as (Cummins).

⁹Cummins further surmises that Rhys was aware of the problem of narrative in *Voyage in the Dark* as she "apparently authorized a Dutch translation...with a *third* person narrator" (Cummins 367 and Note 11, 373).

¹⁰"She often had me check to make sure a passage she thought of using in her autobiography hadn't already been used in one of her novels or short stories. I did my best, but I, too, couldn't always remember" (Plante 51). "Morgan's Rest, though small, was very fertile. Cocoa was grown there...coffee, also nutmegs, and though my father could seldom be there himself, he had installed an overseer..." (SP 84). Anna's father calls his estate "Morgan's Rest": "It was good land....He grew cocoa and nutmegs. And coffee..." (ViD 62).

¹¹Anna's voice seems reliable here; the letter is read to her and sounds sympathetic towards her, but we are still relying on her memory.

¹²"Antoinette's point of view....[h]er narration of her childhood experiences gives her a psychological plausibility and...moves her beyond the personal into the realm of historical and social statement" (Cummins 369). This is true to a point, but it must always be borne in mind that what *looks like* psychological distance is still, often, a distillation and rewriting of actual events or perceptions. See Note 4.

¹³Cosway and Uncle Bo both appear to be modelled, at least in one respect, on Rhys's brother, Owen Rees Williams, who fathered three half-caste children in Dominica (Angier 29). He is also described by Angier as the brother closest to Rhys in resembling their father, in nature: "dreamy, rebellious, and longing for adventure" (8).

¹⁴All three father-figures reflect the often absent father in *Smile Please*.

¹⁵Hester appears to be modelled on both the rejecting mother and Aunt Clarice of *Smile Please*. The headache might have been a recurrent migraine which "usually affects one side of the head, often accompanied by nausea and disturbance of vision." (OEED).

¹⁶Richard A. Lippa, *Introduction to Social Psychology* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1990). "Abramson, Garbner, and Seligman (1980) describe[] *learned helplessness* in humans in attributional terms." They may attribute their helplessness to "internal traits," or "[a]fter repeatedly experiencing their inability to control events [they] may develop global negative *attributions*," i.e., they "tend to attribute their own behaviour more to situational causes and others' behaviour more to dispositional causes." (632, 635 *italics added*). Anna and Antoinette both appear to attribute their own helplessness, not to internal causes, but to fate. Rhys appears to attribute their helplessness to external causes as well as to fate, or at least she suggests that the workings of fate have created those external causes. However, particularly in *Voyage in the Dark*, the idea seems to be that Anna's behaviour is attributable to external causes (the way she was, and is, treated) but the behaviour of the others, Hester, for example, arises from their own dispositions. This seems rather to have it both ways. Anna's problems are everyone else's fault. Everyone else behaves badly towards her because they are innately cruel, or at least unpleasant.

¹⁷Hugh Smith, on whom Walter Jeffries is modelled, lived in London during the week, in his house on Charles Street near Berkeley Square, but spent his weekends at his family home, Mount Clare, in Roehampton (Angier 62-63).

¹⁸Rhys gives no explanation for this ritual in the novel. In *Smile Please* she writes that she had "made great friends with a negro girl called Francine" who would tell her stories in which this same ritual had to be played out, although she didn't understand why. It "wasn't until much later, when I was reading a book about obeah, that I discovered that 'Bois sèche' is one of the gods" (SP 31).

¹⁹It is interesting that Annette suffers from the same helplessness that marks her daughter and that it is Christophine who bridges the gap of five years between Cosway's death and her marriage to Mr. Mason. In a discussion of Rhys's black characters, Lucy Wilson remarks that Selina of Rhys's "Let Them Call It Jazz," and Christophine, "unlike Rhys's white protagonists seem to thrive on adversity and to draw strength from their opposition to the prevailing power structures....[T]heir insights into the uses and abuses of power...reveal the full scope of Rhys's social vision...." She goes on to say that both Anna and Antoinette are "victims by nature," although she has already suggested that as "social outcasts...[they] are powerless to alter [their] condition." "'Women must have spunks': Jean Rhys's West Indian Outcasts," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 32.3 (1986), 439-40.

²⁰Rhys's protagonists do not have homes of their own. They do not cook meals or look after themselves in any way. All come from "respectable" if impecunious homes, where at least one servant was on hand to provide some care and attention. For example, Julia's sister Norah, who lives in "genteel poverty," "labelled 'middle class, no money,' for all to see" and who envies Julia's second-hand clothes, which she thinks are less shabby than her own, has a servant: "Some tea?" she asks Julia. "Jane's in the kitchen; she'll make you some" (ALMM 53, 44, 54, 88).

²¹Her writing often evokes her familiarity with the work of other modern writers. Staley suggests a resemblance to both Mansfield and Colette, "whom she admired as much as any woman writer" (Staley 23-24). Rhys, along with her contemporaries, did not concern herself with her readers: "They're sheep...they follow after" (Plante 36). But whatever, or whoever, her influences were, Rhys followed her own independent writing and thought processes--a trait that seems in complete contradiction to the dependence in which she lived her life.

²²Rhys "often talked of the 'shape' of her books: she imagined a shape, and everything that fit into the shape she put in, everything that didn't she left out....[S]he told me that to her writing was a way of getting rid of something, something unpleasant especially" (Plante 34).

²³Vincent practices his cruelties--and crudities--with gentlemanly suavity. (So does Walter, but one questions if it was Rhys's intention to portray Walter with the same irony, modelled as he is on Lancelot Hugh Smith whom she defended. Anna does not appear to note Walter's cruelties). Vincent says on examining Laurie's picture: "'She really is pretty. But hard--a bit hard,' as if he were talking to himself. 'They get like that. It's a pity.'" In the next breath he demands that Anna return Walter's letters, asking cruelly, when she brings them, "Are you sure these are all...?" (ViD 148-49)

²⁴Rhys's intention continues to be problematic. The accepted view of *Voyage in the Dark* is that it is biographical to an exceptional degree, but Rhys's portrayal of Jeffries seems at odds with the lover she defended as "a very kind man" in her autobiography (SP 114) and in interviews.

²⁵All of the earlier novels follow this pattern. What happens to the women is left to conjecture, but the endings reinforce the sense of a continued hopelessness for all of them. Rhys's original intention was for Anna to die of the abortion, but her publishers insisted that she change the ending (Angier 294-95). The conclusions of *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight* are even more enigmatic than that of *Voyage in the Dark*.

²⁶Rhys does not make Antoinette the insensate creature that is Brontë's Bertha Mason. We never know how long Antoinette has been in the attic, and because the sense of time is hazy, and we do not know what she looks like at this point, we imagine a more human effect than that given to Brontë's original.

²⁷Antoinette never actually says that she and Sandi have been lovers. That is Rochester's conclusion: "'Infamous daughter of an infamous mother,' he said to me" (WSS 152). Sandi is Alexander Cosway's son, and so would not have been a "cousin," as Antoinette calls him, but her nephew, although they are the same age. This appears to be the only loving relationship, sexual or not, which Antoinette has before her incarceration.

²⁸James is one of several who puts forward a positive view of Antoinette's situation. Wilson disagrees: "Critical response to Antoinette's suicide is consistently positive, even when qualified. Her death is seen as 'her most decisive action and her final escape from domination' (Davidson 39), as a form of rebellion and assertion (James 124)...as a triumph over her surroundings (Wolfe 152), Emery 428)...These attempts to call Antoinette's desperate leap by any other name reveal a reluctance on the critics' part to accept her defeat, as if to do so would somehow diminish Rhys's...achievement" (442). Wilson also comments on *Wide Sargasso Sea* "Two persons do try to save her, and Antoinette is good to her word" (444).

CHAPTER THREE

The Problem of Survival

That evening she sat...in a small bar drinking coffee and...composed a letter to England asking for some money....Then she tore the letter up...'I've got to be sensible. I'll get out of this all right if I'm sensible. I've got to have some guts....' Humbug it all was. The rotten things that people did. The mean things they got away with....Nobody caring a bit....But anything to do with money was swooped on and punished ferociously. 'Humbug!' she said aloud.

Quartet, 28, 29.

[T]hat 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?... [T]here I am, like one of those straws which floats round the edge of a whirlpool and is gradually sucked into the centre, the dead centre, where everything is stagnant, everything is calm. Two-pound-ten a week and a room just off the Gray's Inn Road....

Good Morning, Midnight, 37, 38.

The concept of survival in any Rhys novel is bound in an inexplicable tangle of physical deprivation and emotional and mental chaos. The process of a slow emotional dying is a theme with which Rhys was obsessed. Her characters may live to continue on, repeating an endless cycle of adverse choices, relentless poverty, and pitiless rejections, but in actuality they are, from the early stages of young womanhood, closer to death than to life. Because of the diminution of the life force, it is as crucial to examine the emotional incapacity to build satisfactory lives, as it is to explore the proposition of simple material existence.

To discuss the idea of practical survival involves an establishment of the time frames in which Rhys places the characters in the novels to be examined in this chapter. Sasha, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, refers in flashback to the beginning of her story, at the time of her marriage to Enno when

[t]he war [was] over. No more war--never, never, never. Après le guerre, there'll be a good time everywhere....(GMM 96)

Early in the novel she tries to remember when she began calling herself Sasha:

Was it in 1923 or 1924....Was it in 1926 or 1927? (GMM 11)

Events in Paris appear to extend into the early 1930's, after which she goes back to England for several years, then returns for a brief holiday, sometime in the mid or late years of the decade. No dates are mentioned in *Quartet*. Time can only be assumed by its publication in 1928, and possibly by what is known of the author's life. Marya is a chorus girl until she marries Stephan Zelli. At the point when Stephan is released from prison, she has been in Paris for five years (Q 115). If Marya also married immediately after the war, then the story ends in the mid-twenties.¹

Neither Marya nor Sasha have been prepared by their upbringing for life in an ordinary working world. In Paris their lives are transient. They live in hotel rooms; they eat in restaurants. They have no homes, no lasting associations, no permanence. Sasha gives little information on her life before she left England, except to say after her arrival in Paris:

And not to go back to London. It isn't so fine, what I have to go back to in London....(GMM 96).

She does eventually go back, to live on the proceeds of a tiny inheritance, and the little she says about her relatives leaves the impression that she comes from a middle-class background. All we know of Marya's life in England is that her "relatives, though respectable...were poverty-stricken," and that she had been a chorus girl (Q 15). It is unlikely that when she needed work, either woman would seek the more available kinds of factory or service employment traditionally performed by working-class women. And because the Rhys figure is completely isolated, with apparently no one to help her, her choices of occupation and her chances of getting it are further limited. In her earlier years in Paris, after her husband abandons her, Sasha tries a variety of jobs, all poorly paid, all equally disastrous--in a children's clothing store, from which she "got the sack...in a week" (GMM 26); as a mannequin for three months, until she "got bored" (19); as a tour guide for American Express, which gives her one assignment and does not ask her to do another (27-28).

It seems clear that employment is limited for both women for reasons other than availability, but, since they must both work from time to time to support themselves, it seems pertinent to examine the kinds of work they might have pursued.. As both women apparently spent their early working years in London, it is useful to consider Joan Beauchamp's 1937 research which outlines the availability of work in England for women in trades and in unskilled areas of working-class employment, as well as for skilled and unskilled work in the professions. Although it is probably in the professions that the Rhys character might seek employment, for various reasons she usually finds

herself in the unskilled echelons of that category. Beauchamp writes that

doctors, hospital matrons, secretaries, entertainers and film stars [were] making good money;..on the other hand, nurses, typists, chorus girls, cinema 'crowds,' pianists and entertainers [were] definitely to be classed among the lower-paid workers, many of whom [were] barely able to make a living.²

Of these professions, those of entertainer, film star, and possibly secretary required rather less training and would likely be the ones which a Rhys protagonist might seek.³ Although modelling is not included in the study, Sasha's work as a mannequin would also have been classed as a "professional" occupation, another that did not require advanced training, but Sasha's choices were limited when she left that job, and she was then forced to work in an "unskilled" non-professional job as a shop assistant, although the shop was of a middle rather than working-class character. Since Marya's training appears to have been curtailed by financial circumstances she also would have been compelled to work in the "unskilled" professional category, even though it seems reasonable to suppose that to dance and sing in a chorus line required at least some elementary talent and training. Both would have encountered difficulties seeking other work, since work for women, especially for middle-class women, during and immediately after the war was limited in most fields:

the percentage increase in the number of women workers was rather less in 1911 to 1921 than...that of men.

However, the availability of work for women began to increase during the period from 1921 to 1931 and marked "the beginning of a tendency...to substitute female for male workers in industry...."

But that *availability* "improved" at the cost of other considerations:

Women were paid less than men on the theory that they do not produce so much, and that they have no families to support. (WWW 10)

This occurred in both industrial and clerical types of employment:

In comparing the Census figures of 1921 and 1931 it is interesting to note that the number of women clerks and typists has risen by more than 160,000....The amalgamation of insurance, banking and commercial firms has created huge offices, and the consequent rationalization and mechanization of offices has led to the displacement of male labour by cheaper female labour plus machinery. Just as the introduction of the typewriter meant the replacement of a whole army of male clerks and copyists by female typists, so the introduction of more complicated machinery for book-keeping, invoicing and statistical work, etc., has meant the replacement of skilled labour by cheaper female labour, and the proletarianization of the major part of clerical labour. (WWW 56)

Conditions and availability of work for women and attitudes surrounding it were no different in France. Simone de Beauvoir writes:

[W]oman was seeking emancipation through labour in a society in which the family continued to exist: tied to her father's or her husband's hearth, she was most often satisfied to bring extra money into the family exchequer; she worked outside the family, but for it; and since the working woman did not have to provide for the whole of her needs, she was led to accept remuneration far below what a man required. Since a significant number of women were thus content with depreciated wages, the pay of women in general was of course set at a level most advantageous to the employer....If employers warmly welcomed women because of the low wages they would accept, this same fact gave rise to opposition from the male workers....Regarding women in commerce, the learned professions, and the public services, France, England and the United States are of about the same rank.⁴

The First World War generated other, often contradictory attitudes towards work

for women. The loss of great numbers of the male labour force to the military had inspired both countries to encourage women, as their patriotic duty, to take up agricultural and industrial work, and most particularly the manufacture of munitions during the war years. The trend immediately the war was over was to try to reverse that process. James McMillan in *Housewife or Harlot* writes that

[T]he appalling loss of French manpower confronted a nation already undergoing a long term decline in its birth rate with the spectre of depopulation. The response of the French state to this frightening prospect, with its stark implications for the future of France as a great power, was...to try to turn French women into baby machines.⁵

So, although the loss of so many men resulted in a continued serious labour shortage, women were urged to return to their homes. Punitive legislation discouraged the dissemination of family planning or birth control information. New abortion laws were drawn up and enforced (McMillan 189). Although a certain amount of work in the lower echelons of commerce appears to have been always available, the employment climate for middle-class women in France was not encouraging.

The battle in Britain to return women to their homes --and returning servicemen to the work the women had been doing--began long before the war was actually over:

From early in the war there was strong pressure from many quarters to ensure that women would 'go home'. The *Factory Times* carried an article on this subject in 1916 which is typical of one of the strands of opposition to women's continuing role in industry: 'We claim that the solemn obligation to the men who went away will necessitate those women going out as quickly as possible, to say nothing of the fact that it was universally acknowledged that women brought into industry through the war were doing work that is not congenial or natural to a woman...we must get the women back into the home as soon as possible. That they ever left it is one of the evil results of war.'⁶

Rhys's characters, then, are drawn against this background of limited employment, of post war labour problems and antagonistic attitudes towards women.⁷ Such conditions in themselves might have presented almost insurmountable obstacles to Marya or Sasha if Rhys had been painting portraits of women struggling towards self-actualization in a hostile labour environment, or even of women who, as a matter of course, worked at ordinary jobs simply to support themselves. Her awareness of social oppression is apparent. But Rhys did not intend her characters to fulfill such roles. They are driven by other impulses. For Sasha life appears to begin only when she marries Enno and goes to Paris. Of Marya's years in the chorus,

[s]ometimes she would reflect that the way she had been left to all this was astonishing, even alarming. When she had pointed out that, without expensive preliminaries, she would be earning her own living, everybody had stopped protesting and had agreed that this was a good argument....For Marya's relatives, though respectable...people (...even quite good people), were poverty-stricken and poverty is the cause of many compromises. (Q 15)

In this brief paragraph and the one following, the narrator implies that family compromises precipitate Marya's plunge from middle-class poverty to working-class indigence. Her "quite good people" are responsible, if not for her choice of employment, at least for the necessity of seeking it, as well as for the loneliness, the hardness and monotony of her life, and the passivity that results. After her dreams of playing "a glittering part" have died, Marya makes no attempt to find other kinds of work:

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. (Q 15).

Rhys's characters do not seek lives of active independence. They are positioned firmly in an existing social structure of femininity, of pursuing a phantasm of beauty and glamour they can rarely grasp. They live in settings and situations of almost total dependence, physically and emotionally. In such a construct they can only be, and always are, substantiated by--or for--an "other," usually a man in some position of authority--an employer, husband, lover. Marya's husband takes complete responsibility for her life. Later, she remains financially dependent on her lover, even after he rejects her. After Sasha's husband leaves her, and after several disastrous attempts at a variety of jobs, from the time she returns to England until we encounter her in Paris on her holiday, the "other" is an older relative, or the amorphous "he" who instigates a regular "solicitor's letter" containing her weekly "two-pound ten." Simone de Beauvoir approaches the idea of the "other" from a different perspective, but the conclusion is basically the same:

'She cannot think of herself without man'....She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--*she is the Other*. (SdB xix italics added)⁸

For both Marya and Sasha money is a primary symbol of the connection between herself and a representative "other." It is more than a means of economic survival. It is involved with their feelings about the people, usually men, who provide it and who

take care of them, no matter how inadequately. The meaning they attach to money contributes to their troubled emotional functioning. It becomes a reason, an excuse, a symbol, on which to hang many resentments. Rhys creates a further cause and effect circularity in these conflicting postures, which initially result from their need and a lack of sufficiency, but which now result in psychological contortions to denigrate the society which they feel rejects them. When Stephan is imprisoned, Marya is terrified--but defiant. People do "rotten things" and "get away with it," but Stephan's "*escroquerie*" is "swooped on" and will be "punished ferociously." She has silenced her own apprehensions, had "stopped questioning" her husband's activities. Now, when he is caught, it is not his fault. He has, after all, made her happy. He looks after her.

[He] was secretive and a liar, but he was a very gentle and expert lover. She was the petted, cherished child, the desired mistress, the worshipped, perfumed goddess....She felt that her marriage, though risky, had been a success....(Q 20)

It is the outside authority who will punish "anything to do with money" that she blames for her predicament.⁹ It is only later, faced with the consequences of her affair with Heidler, and her desperate financial and emotional circumstances, that she also blames Stephan.

Both women are passive recipients, always waiting for their men to appear, to provide the next meal, the next bottle of wine. Although this dependence is expected of them, their extreme passivity also creates rather contradictory conflict for both husbands. Stephan had always wanted Marya to wait for him in their hotel room, but his worst worry, when he is imprisoned, is that she is incapable of looking after herself. When

she is at first reluctant to go and live with the Heidlars, he frets:

Do you want to drive me mad? I wonder if you know what it's like for me shut up here, thinking of you without a sou. (Q 45)

Enno chafes at Sasha's passivity apparently for other reasons:

'You don't know how to make love,' he said. That was about a month after we got to Paris. 'You're too passive, you're lazy, you bore me. I've had enough of this. Good-bye.' He walked out and left me alone.... With twenty francs on the table. (GMM 107)

Even though she is pregnant, her inertia is still extraordinary. For three days she leaves her room only to buy food. When he returns, instead of asserting that she "won't be treated this way," as she wants to do, she immediately succumbs to whatever it is he wants of her: "[M]uch too strong...the thing in myself, oh, much too strong" (GMM108). For all of Rhys's protagonists the middle-class life of ease and servants in which they grow up, early family conflict, (in some only hinted at, in others more fully drawn), and the always enigmatic suggestion of mental or emotional imbalance, perhaps innate but also partly due to that conflict, appear to combine as the basis of their lack of emotional strength, the "thing" that is "much too strong," that renders them unable to defend or look after themselves. When Enno leaves again and Sasha knows he is not coming back, "[she] start[s] eating at a convent...where the nuns supply very cheap meals for destitute girls..."(GMM 119). She lives on these and the "quarter of wine" she can get "for a few sous" until her relatives send her money. She apparently never blames Enno for leaving her in such circumstances:

Did I love Enno at the end? Did he ever love me? I don't know. Only, it was after that that I began to go to pieces. Not all at once, of course.

First this happened, and then that happened....(GMM 119)

She also ignores the fact of her previous passivity, that she had put very little effort into the marriage, and suggests she "began to go to pieces" only after Enno leaves her.¹⁰

Rhys usually situates her hapless characters, when they are left alone and isolated, in a cheap hotel room--a setting that emphasizes the precariousness of their existence. Against this backdrop both Sasha and Marya must write to their English relatives for money. Neither has any friends she can turn to. Marya's one contact, the Heidlers, have nefarious plans for her. Sasha apparently has no friends and is harassed by a compatriot, a malevolent "English valet de chambre," who lies about her to the hotel patron (GMM 119).¹¹

When Sasha returns to England to seek out her relatives, and finds that she is less poor than she supposed, her reaction is indicative of her troubled mind set. Her attitude towards money now feeds her anger, her isolation and paranoia. The unnamed "she" who left her the legacy only did it "to annoy the rest of the family"; the "he" who informs her of it asks why she didn't drown herself (GMM 37). By the time she receives it, "[t]hirty five pounds...had accumulated," so she tries to drink herself to death, only to discover that she "must be solid as an oak," physically at least (GMM 37). Instead of seeing the small bequest as a windfall to tide her over hard times, or as a means to building a new life, she avoids taking any action at all. She sinks into further inertia for five years, taking her "little health stroll" every day, looking at "this and that" (GMM 11). She is as paralysed by this small security as she had been by a total lack of

it. Her emotional stability weakens even further. In the face of what might for someone else be a stroke of luck, her resentment, her distrust--of everything and everyone--and the mental disequilibrium that fuels her paranoia take over:

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 prying--*leave me alone....*(GMM 37)

Although she initially names the friend, or possibly relative, who lends her the money to go to Paris, Sidonie's words--"I can't bear to see you looking like this" or rather the "way she said it"--are interpreted to mean "'She's getting to look old. She drinks.'" Thereafter Sasha refers to her as "somebody" or "this woman" whom "I had not seen for months and then she swooped down on me..." (GMM 11).

But years before Sasha receives this inheritance she is employed as a receptionist for a prestigious women's "dress house" in Paris. Since, by the early thirties the Great Depression was in progress, this may explain why she suggests that the "customers were getting fewer and fewer" (GMM 16). When the English manager visits the shop, he reduces the nervous Sasha to a quivering incompetence by his impatience when, in panic, her mind goes blank and she does not understand his badly pronounced French. She is articulate in her own defence only in phantasy:

Well, let's argue this out, Mr. Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray, there's no denying it. So you have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month, to lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings till you get me to the point when I blush at a look, cry at a word....Let's say that you have this mystical right

to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple--no, that I think you haven't got. And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit. (GMM 25-26)

In actuality Sasha speaks both French and German reasonably well and her suitability for the job is recognized by the French manager, but her fear of losing it renders her incapable of even simple communication with the Englishman.

The Mr. Blanks of the world are indeed menacing to women forced to work at jobs that pay barely enough to live on. But this is the closest Rhys comes to making what appears to be a forthright political statement on the conditions of employment for women in her time. It quickly becomes apparent that Sasha's phantasized denunciation has less to do with the prevalent social system or the politics of the patriarchy than it has to do with her isolation and anxiety. Although social processes are at least partly instrumental in reducing her status and her opportunities for a decent life, her silent harangue is not a manifestation of strongly held political views. Staley notes

this combination of paranoia and insight, [in which] Sasha recognises those forces in society which turn her into a weak and helpless figure who simply cannot get on. It is in this condition that women like her turn to men for protection and in so doing leave themselves subject to the forces which crush them. Nor is there a way to retreat, for 'the passages will never lead anywhere, the doors will always be shut, I know' (GMM 28), (Staley 86).

But for Sasha "the doors will always be shut" not only by reason of prevailing social forces, but because her helplessness is prompted by other impulses as well. In the fitting-room to which she flees when she finally breaks before "Mr. Blank's" apparent lack of the most basic understanding or compassion, hangs a dress which

has been worn a lot by the mannequins and is going to be sold off....The saleswoman has promised to keep it for me....I have seen myself in it....
(GMM 25)

The dress, though "worn a lot", still costs four hundred francs, the exact amount of Sasha's monthly salary. Before obtaining her job three weeks earlier, she had been "living for some time on bread and coffee" (21), but already, by buying the dress, she has incurred a debt equal to her first month's salary. Sasha quits her job rather than be fired, but she does not rail against a system that keeps her poor. She does not give thought to finding another job. She does not even think of the possibility of going hungry again. She thinks instead

about the black dress, longing for it, madly, furiously. If I could get it everything would be different. Supposing I ask So-and-so to ask So-and-so to ask Madame Perron to keep it for me?...I'll get the money. I'll get it....(GMM 28)

Sasha's emotional equilibrium, and even, she believes, her ability to function effectively, hinges on the possession of a beautiful dress, the magical charm that would allow her to conduct herself with confidence. "If I had been wearing it I should never have stammered or been stupid" (GMM 25). The problem is clearly not so much one of employment (she had been able to find work), of more or less money (she had already spent her first month's salary) or of the coldness and lack of interest with which she believes she is treated (if she had had the dress Mr. Blank would have behaved differently). The problem is within Sasha herself. It is life-long, repetitive, and debilitating wherever she is, no matter what she does. Staley makes the point that

Good Morning, Midnight is a novel where present and past collide, and the past

is a dark and looming shadow over the present until the very end. (86)

The past and the present also foreshadow the future. Sasha cannot free herself from the paranoia that interprets the most casual interest of strangers as ridicule or insult. In a restaurant she thinks she hears a young man ask the girl with him "Tu la connais, la vieille?" and immediately assumes he is talking about her (GMM 35). In another café she sees the owner talking to two young Englishwomen:

The girls turn and stare at me. 'Oh, my God!' the tall one says....Théodore goes on talking. Then he too turns and looks at me. 'Ah, those were the days,' he says....'Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, maintenant?' the tall girl says loudly....Now everybody in the room is staring at me; all the eyes in the room are fixed on me. It has happened. (GMM 43).

These episodes appear as meaningless assaults that take place without context. As in Rhys's other novels, disjointed dialogue and apparently disconnected events suggest that she utilizes the modernist style not so much to evoke the dislocations of a sick society, as she does to demonstrate the functionings of a mind caught in an emotional and mental trap: a mind that slips from fear to despair to paranoia to hatred, with an occasional glimpse of another truth, a calmer reality that keeps it from being engulfed in a nightmare.

These moments come through in various ways. Early in her Paris visit, Sasha begins to get excited about having "some money to spend" and cautions herself:

But careful, careful! Don't get excited. You know what happens when you get excited and *exalted*, don't you?... Yes.... And then, you know how you collapse like a pricked balloon, don't you? Having no staying power.... Yes, exactly.... So no excitement. This is going to be a quiet, sane fortnight. Not too much drinking, avoidance of certain cafés, of

certain streets...and everything will go off beautifully. (GMM 14 italics added)

Sasha is aware of how easily she loses control and also that her self-consciousness and her lack of confidence allow her imagination to play tricks on her. Has the young man in the restaurant really called her "la vieille?" He might just as easily have said "l'Anglaise?" The girl evidently repeats "The Englishwoman?" The Rhys character, particularly Sasha, often switches from French to English to indicate a characteristic mental confusion. It is also possible that Sasha made an entirely coincidental inference. The couple might not have been talking about her at all.

She re-examines the second restaurant scene, superimposing possibilities over her initial interpretation, deciding finally that no harm was meant. She concludes:

And that's everything that happened, and why get in a state about it?...But I'm not, I'm not. Can I help it if my heart beats, if my hands go cold? (GMM 46)

In her cheap hotel she sees cockroaches crawling out from under the carpet in the bathroom (29), the

hall smells like a very cheap Turkish bath....got up to look respectable and clean outside...[T]hen you go down...into a fog of stale sweat--ten, twenty years old. (GMM 32)

But when she returns from a fruitless search for something better that she can afford, she finds that

it looks all right and smells as respectable as you please. I imagined it all, I imagined very thing....Somebody's Times Literary Supplement peeps coyly from the letter-rack. A white-haired American lady and a girl who looks like her daughter are talking in the hall... 'Look here, look at this. Here's a portrait of Rimbaud. Rimbaud lived here, it says.' 'And

here's Verlaine....They both lived here.'

Even the *commis* no longer frightens her (GMM 33-34). Such thoughts may be rationalizations of truly negative events or conditions. But they may also suggest more balanced perspectives on actuality, moments of clear seeing which keep Sasha from slipping into complete psychosis, into a world where, in her bad moments, everything, even Paris itself, conspires to threaten or attack her:

[O]h what a bitch you can be! But you didn't kill me after all, did you? and *they* couldn't kill me either...(GMM 15 italics added).

Houses stand anthropomorphically, waiting for the

poor devil without any friends and without any money. Then they step forward...to frown and crush....Frowning and leering and sneering, the houses, one after another...with two lighted eyes at the top to sneer. And they know who to frown at. (28)

If Sasha's contorted visions seem nightmarish, they are no more so than Marya's villainous "good Samaritans" who precipitate her slide into sexual slavery. Lois, by suggestion and innuendo, manages to convey to Marya that her best hope--and perhaps suitability--is probably that of concubine. By destroying what little impetus Marya has towards autonomy, Lois sets the stage for her to become Heidler's mistress.

'You were on the stage weren't you? I hope you're not thinking of trying for a job as a *femme nue* in a music-hall. They don't get paid anything at all....Of course,' Lois remarked in a reflective voice, 'men...a man would possibly...yes, in a way...But that sort of thing must be done carefully....'(Q 43)

Lois's suggestiveness, and the way the notion is presented, is anything but subtle, nor does it evoke the response that seems intended. However, some writers have chosen to

interpret *Quartet* as a metaphor, assuming the characters to be fictional symbols Rhys uses to expose the representatives of power in the social hierarchy, be they men or women, who ruthlessly bring about the destruction of the socially and economically helpless for their own gratification. Thus Wendy Brandmark suggests that by

procuring Marya for Heidler, Lois preserves her place in a marriage which is socially and economically necessary for her survival.¹²

But Lois's quite overt suggestion is scarcely credible and rather seems to raise the question of the narrator's reliability. Lois might condone her husband's affairs, but such a crass attempt to procure a lover for him, and her apparent scheming throughout the novel, seems, instead, deliberately designed to place her in the worst possible contrast to Marya. The proposed lover is himself painted in heavy tones, without a single redeeming feature. Heidler's figurative ponderousness, his pomposity, his grossness and brutality elicit amazement at the depths of Marya's feelings for him.

These portraits of power, set up in comparison to Marya's helplessness further convey the sense of her pitiable state. When she meets the Heidlers through an acquaintance, she is apparently friendless. After Stephan is jailed she becomes ill with "flu." When the Heidlers seek her out (the narrator makes a point of this), her physical weakness contributes to the ease with which she is pushed into accepting Lois's proposition.¹³ However, reluctant to make the decision herself, she first consults Stephan, but is not clear as to why she feels uneasy, although Heidler has already made advances to her. In his anxiety, Stephan urges her to accept, thereby taking the responsibility for the decision out of her hands. Once living with the Heidlers, she makes protest after

protest against her situation, but seems helpless to free herself from her ineluctable descent into sexual obsession. Like Sasha, Marya suffers as much from a lack of emotional resourcefulness as she does from a paucity of financial resources.

Of all of Rhys's protagonists, Antoinette is the only one predestined to die, but it is she alone who displays a certain amount of courage and active resistance to the forces intent on destroying her. In spite of her fatalism, her mental disturbance, her inability to transcend the psychic damage she has suffered even enough to save herself from being locked away in the attic, she retains remnants of the vital personality she might have been under other circumstances, and which we glimpse only on occasion. The earlier Rhys protagonist, on the other hand, manages to live, but even when physical survival is assured, she is always closer to death than to life. From the beginning she has poor survival instincts. Her education, cursory at best, has been curtailed by financial constraints. Her entire upbringing has taught her physical dependence. She seems incapable of self-discipline. She meets every crisis with emotional lethargy and physical illness. As she grows older she loses whatever youthful resilience she has had. Her conflicts with her family; the inertia, helplessness and self-absorption she brings to every relationship, suggest emotional deficiencies that make her unable to live a whole and complete life. She ends, like Marya, emotionally and physically battered, like Julia in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, between "dog and wolf," cringing, but predatory, forced to continue the hunt: "Lend me a hundred francs, will you? Please" (ALMM 137). Or like Sasha, she rejects what remains of hope, in the genuine affection of a young gigolo,

to embrace instead her own degradation in a perverse gesture of compassion for the *commis* she loathes and fears, whose attentions have been revolting to her--a creature who perhaps is intended to personify her own *self*-loathing and possibly an acceptance of what she may believe to be an aspect of her own character.

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....(GMM 159)

As some writers find affirmation in Antoinette's suicide,¹⁴ and hope in Anna's vision of "starting all over again," Staley again finds it in the conclusion of *Good Morning, Midnight*:

As the feminine consciousness releases itself in that nether world where deep truths frequently reside after a crisis between wakefulness and sleep, the self asserts a qualified affirmation--not an individual affirmation but rather an impassioned shout for the efficacy of the possibility of union between man and woman in which both natures are in harmony and love, and each fulfills the other. (Staley 97)¹⁵

An interpretation of "affirmation" in an encounter with such a repugnant representation of the "species man"¹⁶ is neither a hopeful nor positive translation of emotional or sexual integration. Such interpretations evanesce in the confused mental functioning that Rhys's characters display. Elizabeth Abel views that functioning as psychopathic:

Rhys's recurrent heroine...in addition to her obvious passivity...manifests several specific symptoms of schizophrenia: impoverished affect, apathy, obsessive thought and behaviour coupled with the inability to take real initiative, a sense of unreality...and a feeling of detachment from the body....Rhys's heroines experience the world as a hostile environment and lead lives of isolation, detached from family and friends, unable to establish real contact with others. They all undergo periods in which they feel dissociated from bodies they experience as mechanical and alien, lose interest in a world they perceive as flat and gray, and succumb to

obsessions that drive them in repetitive, unproductive patterns from which all pleasure has been drained....[They] are not insane: They fall rather into the category sometimes referred to as ambulatory schizophrenia and sometimes as the schizoid...state.¹⁷

The "recurrent heroine" always sinks quickly under an adverse situation. She "collapse[s] like a pricked balloon...[h]aving no staying power." Her constant use of alcohol as a stimulant to action, for courage, as a defence against fear and self-consciousness, and as a release from misery, is a further indication of, even as it serves to increase, her emotional impoverishment. Antoinette drinks herself into fury and violence at Rochester's treachery and coldness (WSS 120-22). When Walter casually mentions "her predecessor," Anna asks for a drink in order to "be happy," as he commands. She demands whisky: "It's in my blood...All my family drink too much" (ViD 44).

Sasha orders a Pernod in a bar because "[i]t is cold and dark outside, and everything has gone out of me except misery." Then she continues to drink because she fears what the waiter and even the woman who washes dishes behind the bar are thinking. In her mind she addresses them:

[T]his is my attitude to life. Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try. Three hours to choose a hat; every morning an hour and a half trying to make myself look like everybody else. Every word I say has chains round its ankles; every thought I think is weighted with heavy weights. Since I was born, hasn't every word I've said, every thought I've thought, everything I've done, been tied up, weighted, chained? And mind you, I know that with all this I don't succeed. Or I succeed in flashes only too damned well....But think how hard I try and how seldom I dare. Think--and have a bit of pity. That is, if you ever think, you apes, which I doubt. (GMM 88)

This silent cry--"[s]ince I was born, hasn't every word...every thought...everything I've done...been tied up, weighted and chained?"--is one of the closest and most affecting approaches Rhys makes to her protagonists' plight--the causes (whether innately or socially induced, or both) of the mental contortions they are (and have always been) forced to perform, and the constrictions under which they live. To "untie" their thought and action (which they are often unable to prevent themselves from doing), is to lose control of the outward appearance of reason, which provokes contempt, disgust or worse, but which is, nonetheless, as nothing compared to their own self-loathing. The spurt of hatred with which Sasha ends, further indicates the lack of balance which sends her thoughts flying in entirely different directions from where they began. Drink impels her from misery to pleading, to rage, to hate, and on into further states over which she apparently has little control.

Marya's slide into inertia and despair is also accompanied by a steady increase in drinking. Peter Wolfe observes that

her fears sharpen as her fortunes drop. Her drinking habits chart her sad tailspin. The first paragraph of the book shows her drinking coffee while sitting alone...in a café. In Chapter 5, she is drinking vermouth....[A]fter moving into the studio flat she drinks two brandies and half a bottle of champagne at a dinner party. By Chapter 17, drinking has made her sound 'as hoarse as a crow'(130-131)...and she spends much of her dreary Riviera sojourn drunk on Pernod. The end of the book shows her drinking her Pernods straight....(Wolfe 20)¹⁸

With further emphasis on the "recurrent" nature of Rhys's protagonists, Wolfe also offers a suggestion as to causes:

The novels *do* have a similar impulse and do reach into each other as an

extended character study. Disliking the literature of ideas, Jean Rhys studies human psychology. She treats, in particular, the female psyche when it has begun to droop or panic from neglect. Although ignorant of her plight, the Rhys heroine must grow up or die. This is the heart of the problem--nobody has taught her how to grow up; nobody gives her any room to grow into. (Wolfe 20)

But the character seems *unable* to grow up, and again that inability may be partly traceable to a lethargy generated by the expectation of privilege with which she has been raised, combined with negative early life experiences, and a possibly innate debility which interferes with her capacity to function.¹⁹ Contrary to Wolfe's assertion that Rhys "studies human psychology" she concentrates entirely on the psychology of her female protagonists. Her other characters are all partially drawn figures whose significance lies only in their relationship to those women. And just as the writer's absorption is centred on them, they are shown to be absorbed only in themselves, incapable of seeing the world as a whole, or of finding a place for themselves in it. Sasha, unable to transcend her need for revenge against all the men who have hurt her, rejects René. When he leaves she continues a conflicting and occasionally bizarre dialogue she had been having with herself even as she struggled with him:

Who is this crying?...This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other--how do I know who the other is? She isn't me....She says, 'I hate to stop you crying'....I stop crying....'And another thing,' she says, 'If he's taken all the money--which he almost certainly has--that'll be a lovely business, won't it?...' (GMM 154-55)

Finding that René has not taken her money, that his interest was in her, she phantasizes his return:

I think: 'How awful I must look! I must put the light out.' But it doesn't

matter. Now I am simple and not afraid; Now I am myself. He can look at me if he wants to. I'll only say: 'You see, I cried like that because you went away.'... (Or did I cry like that because I'll never sing again, because the light in my sale cerveau has gone out?) (158)

In the state of temporary emotional revival--"it hurts, when you have been dead, to come alive" (153)--in which René has left her, and her anguish at rejecting him, Sasha wills and phantasizes--René's return. However, even before she sees the *commis*, she senses that it is he, and not René, who stands over her. Inexplicably, in her condition of self-induced near-hypnosis she deals yet another blow to her emotional survival, expressing her self-loathing by accepting him in René's place.

Marya's nemesis seems, at times, almost as loathsome as Sasha's. But her obsessive "love" for Heidler is, in the beginning, based on the same need to be cared for that prompted her marriage to Stephan. When he breaks off the affair, her desperation prompts her return to Stephan:

'I can't any more--I can't. I must be comforted. I can't any more. I can't any more. Can't go on. Can't....'(Q 137)

Unable, in her wretchedness, to appreciate what Stephan's feelings might be, she says,

'I'm so unhappy that I think I'm going to die of it. My heart is broken. Something in me is broken....Help me!' (Q 140-41)

Shattered by his own experiences, Stephan nonetheless, after his initial anger--"You must think I'm Jesus Christ"--cannot help feeling pity for her: "My poor Mado! My poor Mado!" But when he tries to comfort her, she shrinks away. A moment that might have begun to repair the damage they have done each other is destroyed. When Stephan threatens to kill her lover, Marya screams at him that she loves Heidler. When Stephan

collapses in misery, she then reproaches him for what has happened:

‘You left me all alone without any money....And you didn’t care a bit what happened to me. Not really, not deep down, you didn’t. And now you say beastly things to me. I hate you.’

But even then she is not through with him. When he quietly accepts her condemnation and tries to leave, she makes a complete reversal:

Now, added to all her other terrors, was the terror of being left alone in that sinister, dusty-smelling room with the enlarged photographs of young men in their Sunday-best smirking down at her....‘You shan’t go, you shan’t. I’ll call the police. If you go out of this room I’ll go straight to the police and give you up.’

These scenes seem melodramatic, but clearly Rhys is trying to convey meaning here. Marya’s desperation is driven by something more than love for Heidler, or anyone. But the effect seems other than what might be expected. Marya’s apparent self-absorption and manipulateness, in the context of what Stephan has suffered, seem monstrous. Stephan’s weakness of character does not, perhaps, earn him a great deal of sympathy, but in his own way he had always taken care of her. When he no longer can, in her eyes he has failed her. Marya is only able to relate to men, to anyone, in terms of their ability to meet her emotional and physical needs. She, herself, is incapable of nurturing anyone, including herself. When Stephan violently pushes her out of the way, she falls, striking her head, and apparently loses consciousness (Q 143). Even if she survives, she will continue to exist, like all of Rhys’s women, in the shadow of some unidentified, inexplicable malady into which moments of self-recognition flicker intermittently—insights that she is barely able to reach out and grasp, and can never hold onto as significant or

helpful intuitions.

Rhys's novels and short stories have perhaps gained their acceptance in literary circles for their style and the austerity of their language rather than for their content. Most writers, including Rhys's last editor, Diana Athill, insist that the work has its primary place in the domain of literature, and that the biographical elements should be subjugated to the fiction, although no one denies that Rhys created that fiction from the material of her life. Such a restriction (considering the narrow range of the work, which militates against its retaining more than a limited fictional interest), discourages the advantage to both psychology and literature that the fiction and the life together might offer. Rhys was not herself particularly literary. Although "she had read, and remembered in great patches, the English Romantic poets, and Shakespeare," (Plante 45) and had read much as a child, she admitted that for many years she read very little.²⁰ And although she has been widely praised by feminist writers who feel that she represents a political viewpoint on the inequalities of the social structure, Rhys denied that she wrote with any political intention.²¹ Her characters do not struggle in the cause of their own rights or anyone else's. Quite simply Rhys had an obsession to write out her own story. The problems she examined with microscopic thoroughness were directly related only to those she herself suffered, and she was often as debilitated as the figures she created. That debility and its attendant personal difficulties became familiar to her supporters as she struggled, for nine years, to complete *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She once told Plante how, at one point, she found she had written part of it over and over again.²²

Although Rhys rarely alludes more than obliquely to the actuality of mental and emotional disturbance in any of her writing, her fictions stand as studies in psychological exploration. In the interests of that exploration, and in spite of the extremities of her own functional difficulties, she creates protagonists even more disabled, less capable of living effectively than she was herself. Then she examines their behaviour minutely and repetitiously, but in the end offers only limited insight into their conduct. If, as has been said, they represent the same woman at different stages of life, it might also be said, of the earlier work, at least, that they inhabit the same novel, which she wrote repeatedly, much as she wrote her chapters for *Wide Sargasso Sea*.²³

Preoccupation with herself was characteristic of Rhys. Although she hated to be alone, she said,

I always felt best when I was alone, felt most real. [Other] people have always been shadows to me....I'm not curious about other people....I have only ever written about myself. (Plante 37)

This concentration which appears to be centred on an awareness that her problems were "different," and which led her to "delve and delve" (37) into her own psyche, evidently did not, perhaps could not, help her to find a happier existence. The comparative luxury of her Caribbean upbringing, the relative freedom from responsibility for her own care, encouraged in the women of her class and time, occasioned the same expectations of service from others with which she endowed her protagonists. These factors and a troubled personality further distressed by family conflict served to turn that dependence on others, learned from childhood, into the inertia and apathy with which, as an adult,

she met every crisis. Rhys occasionally alluded to the harm she felt she had done to others, especially to her children and her husbands. Throughout her life she alleviated her pain with alcohol and followed the alternating patterns of helplessness and rage with which she invested her characters. Although their lives were occasionally illuminated by insights into their own behaviour, they almost always laid the blame for their broken lives on others, as she was known to do. Perhaps, as the novels so often appear to suggest, she was powerless to do otherwise, and transferred that powerlessness to her protagonists as her means of disclosing her own helplessness. Perhaps that is why she draws them with no ability to transcend their devastation. Although they appear to be aspects of herself, she gives them no resources with which to combat their problems. They are unable to exceed the limited potential she imposes on them. They are victims of the fate she espouses, and as such they are, they must be, if not physically destroyed, at least emotionally annihilated.

Perhaps Rhys even saw herself this way, but her ability to write about it, and the tenacity with which she pursued that ability, suggests that she was capable of altering in herself the behaviour that destroys her female characters. She believed, after all, that she was fated to write. That effort may have been as far as her limited energy could carry her, and she inevitably sacrificed life and loved ones to it. It was, possibly, the only means by which she herself could, at least to an extent, elude the grim fate she meted out to the women in her novels.

NOTES: CHAPTER THREE

¹Rhys married Jean Lenglet in April 1919. Lenglet was jailed in December, 1924, and released in June 1926. Rhys's affair with Ford ended in September 1926.

²Joan Beauchamp, *Women Who Work* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), 13. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses in text as Beauchamp. It seems unlikely that the occupation of secretary was then, any more than it is now, except in fortunate circumstances, seriously considered "professional" in the sense that it was accorded the respect or remuneration that the training and requisite experience deserved. But it was a type of "respectable" employment, requiring rather less training than the others, that a young woman from the middle-classes might seek.

³Rhys worked briefly for a "company doing Vienna operas. She played a small part at the London Lyceum, doing *Cinderella*.... She even signed up for an appearance in a film But she became bored and cold with the waiting about, changed out of her film costume and went home" (James 13). She also worked as a government clerk in London, see Chapter One above, 25-26. Rhys writes obliquely about this work in "The Insect World," from *Tales of the Wide Caribbean* (London: Heinemann, 1985), 79-88. Rhys also did volunteer work during the war years. During her early years in Paris she worked briefly for a French family who wanted to give their children practice in speaking English.

⁴Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1952), (New York: Vintage, 1974) Trans. and ed. by H. M. Parshley, 130-132. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses in text as SdB. Men in England also voiced "opposition" during periods of high unemployment: "Seems as though it's only the women and girls can get jobs these days." (WWW 12)

⁵James F. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society 1870-1940* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981) 189. McMillan's title comes from the "celebrated phrase 'courtisane ou ménagère'" coined by Pierre Joseph Proudhon, "father of European anarchism" who believed that "women had a choice between only two possible roles..." 2. Subsequent references by page number in parentheses in text as McMillan. General information in paragraphs on the war years are from McMillan, Beauchamp, Braybon and de Beauvoir.

⁶Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 176. Unlike the French, the English apparently did not overtly demand that their women repopulate the land. Instead they were often sacrificed to the needs of the male labour force. Hostility was often aimed at middle-class women,

first because they were not quick enough to fill the needs of the labour force, and then because they would not leave it: "While working-class women were criticised for earning too much money and becoming too precocious, the mythical hoards of middle-class women were accused of 'playing at war work,' not sticking to their jobs, and searching for 'patriotic glamour'.... When it seemed...that there might be a labour shortage, and that not enough women were working, there were demands that the idle must...work...slackers must be rounded up...if necessary conscription should be introduced." At almost the same moment "journalists and propagandists assumed that women were not really going to stay in 'men's jobs': they were 'doing their bit'...only" (168). They were then subjected to exhortations on the "need to remove women from 'rough manual labour and from exhausting and morally detrimental forms of labour'"(169). Working-class women inevitably suffered the most from this often ludicrously contradictory double standard, by "the assumption which still seems to lurk at the back of most men's minds, that it is not as necessary for women to work as it is for men, and that if they cannot work all they have to do is to 'go back to their homes'" (Braybon 200).

⁷That Rhys is aware of a generalized hostility towards women seems evident in "A Solid House," *Tigers Are Better Looking* (London: Penguin, 1972). But again in this short story, she expresses her character's reaction to it in terms of the same paranoid vision and submissive attitudes towards men contained in her novels: "[W]hen she opened her cigarette case it was empty. That was because the tobacconist on the corner had refused to sell her any....He always refused women customers when there was a shortage--and very pleased he was to be able to do it. She wondered what the old beast would say if he knew she rather liked him. His open hatred and contempt were a relief from the secret hatreds that hissed from between the lines of newspapers or the covers of books, or peeped from sly smiling eyes" (113). As a further point of interest, this story again illustrates the similarity of events in much of Rhys's work. Teresa lives in a boarding house. The time appears to be during the bombing of World War II. She is recovering from an attempted suicide, and there are hints of a mental institution. "Shall I tell her that in spite of all they did I died then?" Teresa offends another boarder, and finally her landlady is also offended: "Her friendliness seemed to fade away...and she slammed the door so violently that the pictures on the walls and the little figures in the cases trembled....But silence came and patched up the rent....Teresa lay down on the sofa and shut her eyes. The sound of the crash in her head became fainter. It was off on its journey, off on its travels, for ever and ever, world without end..."(128). The story has a surreal quality in which the landlady's ghoulish interest in listening to the dead talking (presumably the recently dead--from the bombings) through a medium, makes her, also appear to hover on the edge of insanity. Rhys makes her point, but the reader's response to Teresa's behaviour is unchanged.

⁸Staley also draws attention to de Beauvoir's point, 46.

⁹Marya's contempt for the authority that will punish "anything to do with money," is reflective of Stella Bowen's comments on Rhys's attitude towards the world: "She had neither the wish nor the capacity to tackle practical difficulties.... She...showed us an underworld of darkness and disorder, where officialdom, the bourgeoisie and the police were the eternal enemies and the fugitive the only hero.... All the virtues...were summed up in 'being a sport,' which meant being willing to take risks and show gallantry and share one's last crust.... She regarded the law as the instrument of the 'haves' against the 'have nots'..., Stella Bowen, *Drawn from Life: Reminiscences* (London: Collins, 1941). The narrator's use of the phrase "swooped on" in relation to Stephan's arrest for fraud and Sasha's attitude towards the woman who gives her money again elicit responses other than what the writer seems to intend. Although Stephan has evidently been doing some "swooping" of his own on his theft victims, we are given the impression that he is the one being attacked (Q10). Sasha also feels "swooped on." She accepts the money "the woman" gives her, but she feels harrassed and angry rather than gratified.

¹⁰An aspect of Sasha's and Marya's attitude towards money is sexual. Rhys herself apparently equated sex with dependance: "It seems to me now that the whole business of money and sex is mixed up with something very primitive and deep. When you take money from someone you love it becomes not money but a symbol. The bond is now there. The bond has been established. I am sure the woman's deep-down feeling is 'I belong to this man...'"(Rhys SP 121). For her protagonists it is the commodity with which they earn "love," i.e. financial security, a pampered existence, constant care and attention, from the other. It is an exchange they offer time and again, with ever diminishing returns. Actual passion rarely enters into the picture. Each marriage, each affair begins, progresses and ends in terms of the woman's dependence.

¹¹Julia insists that her husband did not leave her, that she left him (ALMM 59), but the outcome is the same. Then, when Mackenzie leaves her she feels "he sort of smashed me up" (37). Her Uncle Griffiths and her sister, Norah, both despise her. There is no one she can trust. Finally, even her lover of years before, who she still counts on to help her now and then, tells her that he will not give her any more money. The omniscient narrator in this novel is again problematic. We are given not only Julia's feelings, confusions and paranoias, but also the feelings of the other characters. Thus, Norah, at one point does "not want to let Julia go. She hated her, but she felt more alive when her sister was with her"(77). When Julia quarrels with Norah, after Julia "had abandoned herself" at their mother's funeral, Norah "enjoyed seeing her sister grow red and angry, and begin to talk in an incoherent voice"(98), which seems to emphasize the idea that, like Sasha and Marya, Julia also has enemies, in this case her own sister who enjoys her discomfiture. The narrator, rather than reporting events, appears to manipulate the reader's response.

¹²Wendy Brandmark, "The Power of the Victim: A Study of *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark* by Jean Rhys," *Kunapipi* (1986) 8. 21. *Quartet* was a specifically autobiographical novel, written in rage and revenge against Ford Madox Ford, after he broke off his affair with Rhys. Her depiction of Stella Bowen as Lois, the pimping "species wife" was neither accurate nor fair. Although Brandmark's suggestion that Lois is "socially and economically dependent on Heidler" may be valid in the context of the novel, it is not accurate in the context of actual events. Bowen was not dependent on Ford. It was she who was supporting Ford and their daughter, and Rhys when she lived with them, with money from her own inheritance (Angier 136). See also Paul Delaney, "Jean Rhys and Ford Madox Ford: What 'Really' Happened?" *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* (1983) 16 (5), 17-18.

¹³Lois first writes her a note, inviting her to dinner (Q 32), and a few days later Marya tells Stephan that Lois has been to visit her, and she is again going out with them (36).

¹⁴See note 28 Chapter Two this text. Of *Voyage in the Dark*, Staley writes, "'[s]tarting all over again' becomes the central concern of Rhys's older heroines as they suffer similar defeats. This hope, however elusive, seems to be all that keeps them going..."(67).

¹⁵Elgin W. Mellow, "Character and Themes in the novels of Jean Rhys," *Contemporary Literature*, XIII, 4, also takes a positive view: "[René] leaves without forcing himself on Sasha and without taking her money. His not making use of her, which negative act is a recognition of her as an individual whose wishes are to be respected, bring her out of the isolation and hatred which have for so long surrounded her; and *out of compassion* she gives herself to the man in the adjoining room whom she has previously despised. The story in the four novels is that of the spiritual progress of a woman from the joy of childhood into the ordeal of adolescent love and sexual experience, through a resulting bitterness, grief, and selfish isolation, toward a position which will allow her to develop a compassionate understanding of the human situation" (462 italics added).

¹⁶From narrator's reference to the "species wife" in *Quartet*, 76.

¹⁷Elizabeth Abel, "Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys," *Contemporary Literature* XX.2 (1979): 156. Angier also views Rhys's protagonists as disturbed personalities, in the critiques of the novels, in her biography of Rhys. Deborah Kloepffer, "Voyage in the Dark: Jean Rhys's Masquerade for the Mother," *Contemporary Literature* XXVI. 4, believes that Rhys's writing is driven by her search for the mother: "[T]he women who populate her novels can neither find mothers nor can they be mothers; at every turn, maternal contact is subverted....Coincident with this

subversion is the inability of these women to operate effectively within discourse. All of their attempts to express themselves are ignored, misunderstood, or censored as the novels turn into schizophrenic monologues swept with an undercurrent of longing" 447.

¹⁸Stephan is apparently aware of the effect of strong drink on Marya. After he has been released, he and Marya meet with the Heidlrs. Marya asks for a *fine* and Stephan objects: "Don't have brandy, Mado. She oughtn't to have brandy, you know..." (Q 108). Julia tells Horsfield, "When I'm drunk it's all right. Then I can think back and I know just why I did everything. It all falls into place...."(ALMM 38).

¹⁹Bettina Knapp, "Jean Rhys: Wide Sargasso Sea: Mother/Daughter Identification and Alienation," *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* (1986) 7. 211-226, writes: "[Antoinette's] withdrawal arrests the outward flow of her libido; [she becomes *stuck* in her inner world...her personality atrophies and stagnation follows. [She] is helpless and her needs are never served."

²⁰Plante comments on Rhys's literary tastes in *Difficult Women*, 45, and Rhys discusses her loss of interest in reading in *Smile Please*, 111.

²¹She professed a dislike of women, and contempt for the women's movement. See this text Chapter One, 41,42.

²²"I did manage to fill two exercise books, but when I stopped and reread what I had done, I discovered that I had written one short chapter, and then about six more versions of it. It wasn't the chapter that appalled me so much as the fact that every one of the versions was the same. I had merely written the same thing over and over again, not changing a word" (Plante 49).

²³Idea of the sameness of Rhys's novels, that they are, perhaps, the "same novel written several times" arose from discussion with thesis supervisor Anthony Jenkins.

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