TITLE PAGE

LOCATING DIFFERENCE: Alternate Narratives of Race, Gender, Class and Nationality in the Works of Jean Rhys

by

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ABSTRACT PAGE

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I examine several of Jean Rhys's narratives for ways in which they locate and sustain cultural and gender-based difference. The problem which initially presented itself to me concerned the fact that singular critical approaches towards Rhys's work appear to consistently suppress certain thematic strands in order to emphasize others. Traditional feminist interpretations, for example, while producing some extremely valuable theorizations on gender in works such as *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, nevertheless ignore the considerations of race and nationality which surround Rhys's creole heroines. In response to this problem, I adopt an approach similar to those used by recent postcolonial theorists, in which Western critical approaches are juxtaposed so as to reveal the particular agendas and limitations of each. This strategy of opposing feminist, psychoanalytic, post-colonial and, in a more limited form, class-based analyses allows me to preserve the thematic discontinuities within Rhys's work and, hence, to arrive at a new understanding of this author's cultural critique. I consequently focus my exploration on those works which emphasize the dislocations within colonial and postcolonial

societies by narrating the experiences of creole or mulatto heroines. After examining in detail three short stories and two of Rhys's novels, I conclude that each narrative represents the displacement of homogenized subject positions through differently positioned voices. For example, my first textual analysis examines Rhys's short story, "Again the Antilles," to determine that the text displaces race and nationalistic debates with the voice of the female, creole narrator. Ultimately, I conclude that disruptive reading strategies not only allow one to recover the thematic complexity of Jean Rhys's work, but that new concepts of time, historical narrative, objective knowledge and social role-playing emerge from the rupture of patriarchal/imperialist thought.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis began as a search for ways in which to read the work of Jean Rhys without manipulating or over-simplifying her subtle characterizations in order to "fit" a critical agenda. After considering various feminist, psychoanalytic, biographical, stylistic and even strictly postcolonial approaches to this author's work, I felt that each project, by itself, required the suppression of certain themes in order to explicate others. These repeated omissions, moreover, appeared to be a function of the singular thematic focus of such critical strategies (each theory privileging, by its own nature, certain themes over others) rather than a result of individual critics' conceptual limitations. Traditional feminist criticism, for example, while producing some extremely valuable interpretations of Rhys's work, has nevertheless disregarded or subordinated the elements of nationality and class difference which inform all of her novels.[1] Supporting my observation, other critics have recently observed that Rhys's texts not only do not fit into any particular literary tradition, but that they also resist conclusive explication according to current literary theories.[2] The problem which remains, then, and which I will attempt to

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[1] See the approaches taken by Le Gallez and Nebeker.

[2] See Hite, p. 2-3 and, for a more detailed discussion of the problem, Emery, p. xii and Humm, p. 9.

resolve in the following pages, is to discover a way of reading which fully considers and preserves the thematic discontinuities within a representative selection of Rhys's work.

Clearly, any analysis which aims to explore diverse thematic concerns must itself have a heterogeneous focus and, in fact, recent approaches within postcolonial theory offer the most suggestive strategies in this respect. Critics Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak have developed eclectic approaches which juxtapose the concerns of more traditional discourses with considerations of race and nationality. Spivak, for example, describes her method as a series of "negotiations" with feminism, Marxism and deconstruction in order to reveal the values and inherent limitations within each ideological approach (1993, x). One result of such juxtapositional strategies has been to develop new ways of reading which locate the differences between people and use those differences to disrupt homogenizing Euro-American stereotypes of race, gender, class and nationality. In view of Rhys's colonial background, as well as the success that these postcolonial readings have had in interpreting traditional and non-traditional texts, I propose to adopt an approach which derives from such interpretations. Through setting in opposition the concerns of psychoanalysis, feminism and

considerations of race, class and nationality, I hope to discover new ways in which to read this author's work.

Before my approach can be outlined in more detail, Rhys's cultural perspective must be located in relation to her colonial upbringing. Various biographers have emphasized the tensions which surrounded English rule in late nineteenth-century Dominica, where Jean Rhys was born.[3] Indeed, with a Welsh father and a mother who was third-generation white creole, Rhys was born into the small European population of approximately 300 who dominated nearly 30,000 native Dominican and Afro-Caribbean people. At the time of Rhys's birth, slavery had only been abolished for fifty-six years and many racial resentments persisted, while, simultaneously, the white rulers clung to European customs as a way of preserving their authority in relation to the general population (Angier 5). Clearly, her colonial birthplace did not allow Rhys to identify herself either as Dominican, or as completely British. Thus, despite the fact that Rhys spent much of her life in Europe, her work repeatedly focusses on the ways in which race, gender, class and national identities are formed and reproduced within a colonial context. For example, Maggie Humm points out that the trope of creoleness, which is used biographically in many of Rhys's novels and short stories, not only connotes a

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[3] Carole Angier, p. 3-6, offers a comprehensive discussion of the political atmosphere in Dominica, circa 1890.

"border" existence (the state of not belonging to either a dominant or colonized culture), but that the very definition of the word "creole" is ambiguous since it can refer to racially mixed people living in the colonies or to second-generation settlers of "pure" European descent (62, 82).

My own cultural perspective in relation to Rhys's work must likewise be located since, as a young, white, Canadian woman, I share only certain postcolonial and gender-related experiences with the author. Undoubtedly, as in any reading, I must acknowledge that my approach is subjective and originates from my own particular, cultural position. Such acknowledgements of subjectivity are, I believe, necessary to any endeavour which attempts to locate and preserve difference within supposedly homogeneous classificatory schemes (as I do in relation to Rhys's work, and as I believe Rhys does in relation to European society). In the following chapters, I plan to apply disruptive reading strategies to a selection of Rhys's work which appears most directly concerned with the problem of ambiguity in relation to designations of race, gender, nation and class. Although those of her novels and stories which are set in Paris explore subtle dislocations among gender, class and nationality, I have chosen to focus on works which also bring in more dramatically systematic designations of race and cultural identity. A chronological approach shows the development of this motif throughout

Rhys's work, as she repeatedly refers to the colonial administration of her West Indian birthplace. Ultimately, I propose that an interpretive strategy which juxtaposes the theoretical concerns of psychoanalysis, feminism and postcolonialism will allow the reader to locate socially disruptive themes in Rhys's work, themes which have often been hidden by more homogenous modes of interpretation.

Consequently, in the chapters of this thesis I will discuss a range of works, beginning with Rhys's first collection of short stories, *The Left Bank*, and ending with her most popular novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. I have decided to begin with the short story "Again the Antilles," which, although brief, provides an important discussion of the effects of racial segregation within colonial society and of the further displacement which gender difference entails. Rhys's third novel, *Voyage in the Dark*, continues this exploration of gender difference in reference to the "mother" country, while also exposing class and national prejudices which further segregate and homogenize groups of people. In the fourth and fifth chapters I will discuss stories from the collection *Tigers Are Better-Looking*, which, although published after *Wide Sargasso Sea*, was actually written prior to that novel. In the first of these stories, "The Day They Burned the Books," all four aspects of social categorization are brought into play, as Rhys explores possible forms of resistance against ideological

colonization. The second narrative, "Let Them Call It Jazz," provides a useful standpoint from which to discuss issues of appropriation, particularly in terms of Rhys's strategy of writing about the experiences of coloured men and women. Finally, I will argue that *Wide Sargasso Sea* offers the most complex series of dislocations. In this novel, Rhys reveals the necessary suppressions of her own narrative as written from a white, creole viewpoint, while further demonstrating the ambivalence that surrounds supposedly homogenous organizational structures. By examining these texts in the manner which I propose, I hope to (re)view this author's elusive nature in terms of a revolutionary questioning of ideological categories and assumptions.

CHAPTER 1

Due to the increasingly vocal political presence (both within the classroom and the general population) of feminist and so-called minority groups, Euro-American literary criticism is being required to revise the way in which it discusses not only the situation of women in society, but also the various positions of people involved in the colonial and postcolonial experience. Several Western-trained critics with origins in Third World cultures, such as Trinh T. Minh-ha and Gayatri Spivak, have suggested radical new ways in which to theorize colonial relationships. These critics have repeatedly noted the homogenizing tendency of Western theory and its subsequent codification of women and native peoples into easily identifiable objects, constructed for the perspective of a dominant white colonizer.[1] Spivak, for example, observes a problematic dismissal of difference even within the mainstream feminist movement, which schematizes itself as advancing the concerns of all women, but which in actuality

[1] For a succinct discussion of the ways in which Euro-American society has "neutralized" women's difference, see Trinh, p. 106.

often speaks only for white Western feminists.[2] Revisions of such homogenizing theoretical approaches ultimately require more than a simple reversal of subject and object positions and have recently led radical theorists to question traditional ideological structures and search for diversity within designations of class, gender, nationality and race (Young 157).

In view of these new challenges for literary theory, criticism of Jean Rhys's work has in general remained fairly conservative. Only Gayatri Spivak, Judith Raiskin and Maggie Humm have attempted to explore, as I propose to do in this thesis, Rhys's negotiation of essentializing categories. Humm succinctly describes the nature of Rhys's narratives:

> What is really meaningful in her writing is not just its radical *content* . . . but its portraits of authentic Black and Creole women subjects addressing the instability of difference . . . It does not present a unified category 'woman' but represents the multivocal and personal narratives of different women of different colours. (93)

Through calling into question the authenticity of race, class, gender and nationalistic stereotypes, Rhys repeatedly

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[2] Spivak defines the feminist movement in terms of Anglo-American literary theory, which she perceives as advancing a white, middle-class, feminist individualism. While undoubtedly exceptions to this rule exist, particularly in American literature, Spivak argues that these tokens of difference do not change mainstream feminism's predominantly white, Western self-image and consequently theories are constructed only in relation to that norm. See Spivak, 1985, p. 243-5.

constructs hybrid (a condition informed by both dominant and suppressed knowledges) and ambiguous states of being. In this summary chapter, I hope to establish a valid approach for locating these subject positions within Rhys's work.

Initially, one potential problem with such a strategy must be addressed, and that is the ideological difficulty of critiquing a homogenizing social structure from within. The very concept of "race" exemplifies these concerns. Since racial designations were traditionally used in Western society to classify and evaluate people based upon physical appearance, radical theorists now must negotiate discussions of racial issues without re-affirming their discriminatory meanings. How can a Western reader discuss Rhys's Afro-Caribbean characters, for example, without also evoking stereotypical images of that cultural position? As Benita Parry points out in her analysis of postcolonial theory, an apparent problem both raised and demonstrated by the work of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak concerns how to identify the essentializing categories of imperialism without reproducing such constructs within their critique (Parry 55). Robert Young writes that "the problem of the critic's own methodology must therefore be addressed if he or she is to do anything more than simply repeat the structures that are being criticized" (128). Any attempt to disrupt the forms of Western imperialism from within must therefore begin with

an acknowledgement of complicity in the culture which produced colonialism. As Spivak writes in her latest work, "at home and abroad, postcolonials and migrants are still coming to terms with unacknowledged complicity with the culture of imperialism ..." (1993, 121). Alongside this recognition of positionality, postcolonial critics are also searching for ways in which to effectively disrupt Euro-American ideologies. Homi Bhabha, for example, has explored the repetition of racist and sexist stereotypes, which he perceives as projecting a false image of otherness while simultaneously denying real difference. This inherent ambivalence in the production of cultural stereotypes suggests, according to Bhabha, both a fear of and desire for otherness, which ultimately belies Western essentialisms.[3] Spivak adopts a conceptually similar approach in which she "negotiates" with various Western theories, "preserving the discontinuities" between strategies of deconstruction, Marxism and feminism to reveal the limits of each ideological approach (Young 157). These critics thus suggest that possibilities for circumventing Euro-American ideology lie in explorations of the ambivalences and discontinuities which exist between various constructed categories.

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[3] While Bhabha writes extensively on constructions of difference within Western culture, he most specifically addresses the formation of stereotypes in his chapter on "Sly Civility," p. 93-101.

In this thesis, I propose to follow Spivak and Bhabha by juxtaposing the critical approaches, and particular concerns, of psychoanalysis, feminism and more recent theories of race, nationality and class.[4] What Spivak might term "negotiations" with these discourses can, I hope, be applied to the work of Jean Rhys in order to discover the cultural dislocations which inform her characters. As I suggested in the earlier quotation, Maggie Humm has found a similar approach useful in her chapter, "The Mother Country: Jean Rhys, race, gender and history," where she schematizes Rhys's writing as a series of "border crossings" which transgress the discursive boundaries of colonialism. Noting that Rhys does, in some respects, reproduce the forms of imperialism, Humm nevertheless applies psychoanalytic, feminist and postcolonial concepts to conclude that *Wide Sargasso Sea* disrupts paternal history through the insertion of diverse female and West Indian perspectives. As she demonstrates, such juxtapositions offer new perspectives on Rhys's social critique (a theme in her work which has often left critics baffled, since Rhys does not quite "fit" into any recognized viewpoint) (Humm 66). In the remaining pages of this chapter, therefore, I

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[4] Although my cultural position differs from those of Spivak and Bhabha, I would argue that these methods can be adopted by subjectivities positioned otherwise. The strategies which these critics promote do not require a singular viewpoint, but rather a persistent critique of conceptual categories.

will cite psychoanalytic, feminist and postcolonial readings of Rhys's texts in order to establish the ways in which they support or contradict each other. Locating the ambivalences within cultural forms will ultimately allow me to expand upon Humm's approach and trace the development of socially disruptive themes throughout the Rhys canon.

Psychoanalytic readings of Jean Rhys's work have traditionally pursued the Jungian ideal of a predominantly integrated identity. Helen Nebeker and Teresa O'Connor, authors of the two earliest detailed studies of Rhys's work, have thus schematized the heroines of *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* as women in search of a unified self. Nebeker in particular describes the development of Rhys's characters as a series of mythopoeic voyages, "Rhys employs one of the most common Jungian archetypes, the journey or pilgrimage in search of the lost Eden. This journey is, of course, the search for SELF" (viii). Other critics have proposed that a progression towards psychic unity represents the search for a white West Indian identity, suggesting, in other words, that adoption of this secondary cultural subjectivity is necessary for the psychological health of Rhys's creole characters. As Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell writes, "Antoinette's challenge is to find her place, her identity, her life's meaning in her native land or [else] to remain adrift in the mythical wide Sargasso Sea, languishing between England and the West Indies" (288). Several

feminist psychoanalysts and theorists argue that these approaches are problematic because they posit a homogeneous female subject, which is seen as complicit with patriarchal definitions (and subsequent appropriations) of women's subject space.[5] Trinh suggests that female identity must be viewed as inherently multiple, rather than in need of integration: "'I' is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. 'I' is, itself, *infinite layers*" (94). Smith and Watson theorize the need for heterogeneous identity in more political terms. "The axes of the [female] subject's identifications and experiences are multiple, because locations in gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality complicate one another . . ." (xiv). Rather than attempting to integrate or unify the subjectivities of Rhys's characters, these theorists propose that recognition of diversity, both in psychological and cultural terms, is necessary for an appreciation of Rhys's complex representations. Thus, traditional psychoanalytic interpretations of this author's work are displaced by discourses of postcolonial feminism, which propose that

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[5] See Moi, p. 139-148, for a discussion of ways in which men have traditionally essentialized women and the problems which French feminists have encountered in attempting to re-define 'woman.'

women's identity may be multiple and that difference from this norm is not necessarily a sign of insanity.

Recently, feminist theorists have suggested an alternative model for female psychological development which focusses on the girl child's experience during the Oedipal moment. Expanding upon Lacan's theorization of the mirror stage, Nancy Chodorow proposes that whereas a boy child learns to differentiate clearly between himself and the m/other, female children do not create such binary distinctions (167). Instead, Chodorow writes, a successful mother-daughter mirroring relationship allows the daughter to perceive herself as separate and yet basically related to the mother (168). Ronnie Scharfman and Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, meanwhile, have applied this model of female identity development to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, concluding that the daughter in this text cannot distinguished herself from the mother, and so remains doomed to repeat her mother's life (Scharfman 100, Kloepfer 9). These theories clearly confirm my suggestion in the previous paragraph that feminists are justified in viewing female identity as inherently diverse, multiple and less stable (in the sense that stability implies a lack of change or mutability). The dangers of this approach lie, however, in essentializing the categories of masculine and feminine. Indeed, defining femininity as directly opposite to those values which have traditionally been promoted by a masculine culture allows

the continued categorization and devaluation of women in society. Consequently, critical approaches which celebrate Rhys's heroines as symbols of her colonized homeland or as embodiments of "female" heterogeneity tend to essentialize these positions (Nunes 28). In her critique of selected feminist theory Toril Moi writes that,

> If, as I have previously argued, all efforts towards a definition of 'woman' are destined to be essentialist, it looks as if feminist theory might thrive better if it abandoned the minefield of femininity and femaleness for a while and approached the questions of oppression and emancipation from a different direction. (148)

This new direction, Moi suggests repeatedly, must be political in the sense that this term entails an attention to women's historical and material realities (xiv). While feminism itself may be seen as a political position, the limits of feminist psychoanalysis lie in their failure to address political realities.

Considerations of race, nationality and class add greater complexity to Rhys's social critique and revise certain apolitical aspects of psychoanalytic and feminist discourse. Indeed, literary critics have begun to see race and nationality as signifying important differences between people.[6] For this reason, earlier discussions of Jean Rhys's West Indian characters which focussed on drawing similarities between creole and mulatto, creole and English,

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[6] See Spivak, 1993, p. 17.

or even creole and Afro-Caribbean characters, appear extremely problematic.[7] These assimilations of difference present a kind of "repressive tolerance" which Gayatri Spivak cites as preventing real political change (1993, 18-19). In contrast, other critics, such as Kenneth Margarey and, more subtly, Mary Lou Emery, have tended to idealize West Indian culture as a positive alternative to English oppression (Emery xii). As Maggie Humm points out, these idealizations can occasionally be found in Rhys's own description and suggest her nostalgia for lost origins, a condition of colonial thought which Edward Said identifies as falsely romanticizing the colonized land and which is really a form of essentializing knowledge about difference (Humm 92, Said 1979, 58). Judith Raiskin presents perhaps the most detailed consideration of race and nationality as she examines two Rhys short stories, locating mulatto, creole and British characters in terms of the discourses which include and exclude them. Raiskin writes from the position that "The over-simplification of [imperialist representations of the 'other'] denies the interactive relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and the complexity of racial, cultural, and national identity" (51). Gayatri Spivak conducts a similar analysis in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" to conclude

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[7] For examples of this approach, see Suarez and Lopez, p. 154, Wilson, p. 67, and Vanouse, p. 133.

that the character of Christophine from *Wide Sargasso Sea* marks the limits of Rhys's text, which is written in the interest of the white creole rather than the Afro-Caribbean native (253). While these cultural positionings are necessary in order to prevent an assimilation of difference, problems nevertheless exist in the fact that, by identifying categories, a postcolonial critic reinforces the divisions of imperialism. As mentioned earlier in relation to race, such classifying terms embody the problematics of Western theory, since, in order to locate the group which is oppressed, one must recreate the forms of their oppression. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes that "Theory oppresses, when it wills or perpetuates existing power relations, when it presents itself as a means to exert authority -- the Voice of Knowledge."[8]

Considerations of class, which serve as a major theme in Rhys's novel, *Voyage in the Dark*, provide a final example of the discursive limits of Western theory. Class not only serves as another way in which to categorize and evaluate people, but in *Voyage* class is also used to construct female characters through a political focus. The historical and material realities of working-class England, for example, frame Rhys's presentation of minor and foreign women, while the protagonist's divided consciousness is emphasized by her

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[8] Trinh is not suggesting that theory is an oppressive force in itself, but rather that it becomes problematic when used in authoritarian ways. See Trinh, p. 42.

indeterminate class position. Such "divide and conquer" tactics, as Trinh terms the gradations of class in relation to race and gender, once again throw radical theory back on itself, causing Western theorists who delineate the divisions of class to ultimately reproduce the axioms of imperialist capitalism (Trinh 99). This impasse returns us to the problem cited earlier in the chapter, namely that of how to critique Western theory from within. Once again, I would argue that a heterogeneous approach which preserves the discontinuities between conceptual categories would seem to offer the most suggestive possibilities.

CHAPTER 2

As I have suggested in the preceding chapter, discussions of colonial theory often display a need for the critic to define or classify racial and sexual subjectivities. Recent theorists, such as Gayatri Spivak and Benita Parry, have noted the limiting nature of imperial and hegemonic feminist classifications, proposing instead that each position is various and heterogeneous (Spivak 1985 243-4, Parry 29). Jean Rhys, fictionalizing her own West Indian background during the 1920s, appears to recognize the complexity of racial positioning. As she recalls in a discussion of cultural conflict "I seem to be brought up against the two sides of the question. Sometimes I ask myself if I am the only one who is, for after all, who knows or cares if there are two sides?" (1979, 64). Indeed, Rhys's questioning of racial dichotomies and of her own female position in relation to West Indian and European cultures is most explicitly developed in her short story, "Again the Antilles." This short narrative describes a bitter debate which has taken place in the *Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette* between the editor, who, in accusing one particular colonizer of degeneracy, has attributed a Chaucer quotation to Shakespeare, and the English landowner, who "gets his Chaucer right, but calls his opponents 'damn niggers'"

(Gardiner 44). Using a series of mimicking or mirroring techniques, Rhys endlessly complicates representations of racial categories, while the issue of cultural appropriation becomes a problem of how to constitute the self within a colonized society. Examinations of each character in this complex narrative should reveal how Rhys reproduces (mimics) the inherent ambivalences in colonial society, as well as exposing the forms of power which writing, or cultural representation, entails.

Papa Dom, the coloured editor of a local paper, exemplifies the variousness of Rhys's racial positioning.[1] Dom is introduced in highly ambiguous terms as at once "awe-inspiring" and ridiculous:

> He wore gold-rimmed spectacles and dark clothes always -- not for him the frivolity of white linen even on the hottest day -- a stout little man of a beautiful shade of coffee-colour, he was known throughout the Island as Papa Dom. (166)

Later, the narrator proposes that Dom's rebellious attitude is due to his divided cultural identification:

> A born rebel, this editor: a firebrand. He hated white people, not being quite white, and he despised the black ones, not being quite black . . . Coloured' we West Indians call the intermediate shades, and I used to think that being coloured embittered him. (166)

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[1] Throughout her work, Rhys uses the term "coloured" to identify racially mixed (mulatto) men and women. Although this designation has become problematic in Western society, I have, for the sake of clarity, chosen to adopt Rhys's usage.

In fact, Papa Dom's response to his position "in-between" Afro-Caribbean and English cultures is highly complex. He imitates the colonizing culture and yet openly rebels against all forms of social organization (including the church, government and even mass culture). However, as editor of the newspaper, Dom writes his "seething articles" against the Church only within a forum for debate sanctioned by that very society which he attacks (the newspaper being, by its title and what is told of its organization, an imitation of English newspapers). The narrator's ironic description appears to recognize the futility, even absurdity, of Dom's social indignation, a discourse which will never transcend the limitations of its colonial medium. Indeed, what sparks the rancour of the debate is less Papa Dom's attack on Musgrave as a colonial landowner, than his mistaken reference to Shakespeare, revered figure of English culture. Thus, Dom's reasons for referring to Shakespeare and the debate which results are informed not only by Papa Dom's confused sense of cultural identification, but also by his simultaneous responses of emulation and critique.

Judith Raiskin has suggested that Papa Dom exemplifies Homi Bhabha's description of the colonial mimic:

> Rhys's analysis of this hostility of the colonialist for the "not quite white" native anticipates by fifty-seven years Bhabha's analysis of the "almost the same but not quite . . . [a]lmost the same but not white" figure of colonial society . . . a colonial subject who, while despising the English, has learned to play the role of the Englishman in many ways better than the Englishman himself. (55)

In fact, while First World critics must recognize the categorizing tendency of Western theory (see previous chapter), perhaps Bhabha's figure of the colonial mimic can be temporarily used to discuss Papa Dom's cultural conflict. In his influential essay, "Of Mimicry and Man," Homi Bhabha has located the colonial mimic in terms of a tension between regulated, or fixed, identity and certain subtle differences which disturb the authority of colonial discourses. Bhabha claims that

> It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. (86)

Papa Dom, as mentioned earlier, can be seen to occupy just such an "in-between" position, in which his outright anger and its expression as contained in the newspaper are less of a threat to colonizing landowners than his imitation (and displacement) of English culture. In a story layered with forms of mimicry, Bhabha's location of the colonial mimic and the application of this theory to Papa Dom's

ambivalent position affects both the reader's understanding of Dom's actions and perception of Mr. Musgrave.

Continuing the passage quoted above from "Of Mimicry and Man," Homi Bhabha suggests that authoritative discourses show the colonial as partial, in a "metonomy of presence" which may be seen to "orientalize" the non-English person into a self-confirming other for the colonizer. Mimicry, Bhabha maintains, "reverses 'in part' the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer's presence, a gaze of otherness, that . . . shatters the unity of man's being through which he extends his sovereignty" (89). This loss of both perceptive and textual authority is, in certain respects, Papa Dom's effect on the representation of Mr. Musgrave. While Dom's anger has proven to be an ineffectual tactic against the English, his emulation of colonizing attitudes clearly disrupts Musgrave's authority. Most strikingly, Dom's sense of propriety returns the colonizing gaze, in a sort of reverse orientalism which not only "others" or makes partial the English presence in the Antilles, but also questions the authenticity or authority of any figure who does not fulfill his particular vision. For instance, Papa Dom accuses Musgrave of "degenerating" the English stock through his undignified actions, actions which the narrator suggests simply do not agree with Dom's perceptions of what an English gentleman should be. With

Musgrave's authenticity as a colonizing authority rendered questionable, Dom feels free to assert his own textual power and edit Musgrave's racist label, "damn niggers," into a more dignified response. Mimicry becomes, as Homi Bhabha has suggested, a means of transforming ambivalent identity into the displacing gaze of the disciplined other, a gaze which "rearticulates the whole notion of *identity*" and "alienates" it from its self-confirming projections of authority (89).

Mr. Musgrave, then, remains a partially seen figure in the text, viewed mainly through the re-colonizing gaze of Papa Dom and the apparently benevolent narrator. The speaker reveals very little directly about him, essentially summarizing Musgrave's character in one paragraph:

> Mr. Hugh Musgrave I regarded as a dear, but peppery. Twenty years of the tropics and much indulgence in spices and cocktails does have that effect. He owned a big estate, just outside the town of Roseau, cultivated limes and sugar canes and employed a great deal of labour, but he was certainly neither ferocious nor tyrannical. (167)

In fact, the only striking details which the reader learns about Mr. Musgrave involve his racist attitudes and generally perceived lack of dignity in replying to Papa Dom's attack. The sketchy picture which emerges is of a slightly ridiculous, arrogant, racist, but certainly not unusual, English colonizer. Indeed, the mention of spices and cocktails would suggest that Musgrave is a very well-

preserved specimen of his type. Papa Dom's criticism that Mr. Musgrave has fallen from "true gentility" is apparently justified and yet, as Judith Raiskin writes, "no matter how scholarly or reserved Papa Dom may be in order to set himself off from the 'easy morality of the negroes,' he is nonetheless a 'damn nigger' in English eyes" (55). In fact, the description of Musgrave remains purposefully aloof and remote in the text. As an Englishman, Musgrave is not required to defend himself from attacks by inferior colonials. Moreover, when this landowner does respond to Dom's tirade, he can only do so "briefly and sternly as befits an Englishman of the governing class" (167) and, still, his act is perceived as undignified. Musgrave's final letter to the *Herald* is provoked when Papa Dom's flawed appropriation of English culture redirects the colonizer's "othering" gaze and exposes the inconsistencies of European identity. The abstract description of Mr. Musgrave thus places him outside, or other, to the debate and he is moved to aggressive action only by what Bhabha perceives as the "menace of mimicry [namely] its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (88).

While the preceding interpretation has focussed on the mimicking gaze of Papa Dom and its implications for colonial power, a consideration of the third figure in this text, the apparently objective narrator, adds greater

complexity to Rhys's racial, and now sexual, positionings. Judith Raiskin has conducted a detailed analysis of "Again the Antilles" which may be re-traced in order to locate the narrator. Citing phrases such as "we West Indians" and the speaker's intimate knowledge of Caribbean society, Raiskin proposes that the narrator was born in the Antilles (166). Furthermore, the condescending description of Papa Dom's racial position, as well as the affection for Musgrave and knowledge of what "befits" a governing Englishman, would seem to suggest that the speaker is a white creole. Similarly, Raiskin notes the subordinate perspective which is evoked in the first paragraph and which apparently places the narrator as a younger person, possibly living with her/his family ("our garden" is mentioned rather than "my garden") and who, at least in the past, has been impressed by Papa Dom's solemn convictions. Finally, the narrator's description of Mr. Musgrave as "a dear, but peppery" implies that she is female. Her position in the text is thus unique. As a young, white, creole woman, without even a voice in the cultural debate which is occurring between Dom and Musgrave, she ultimately controls the reader's perceptions of both men and asserts a formative authority over the literary discussion.

Thomas Staley has described the narrator's attitude as a "humourous insight into racial attitudes" (28) and, indeed, a facetious tone does pervade the text. For

instance, the narrator describes Papa Dom's various political causes as being on a single level of importance: "He was against the Government, against the English, against the Island's being a Crown Colony and the Town Board's new system of drainage . . ." (166). This mocking tone resembles the mimicry which Papa Dom has already demonstrated in relation to Mr. Musgrave. Judith Raiskin in fact suggests that the opening paragraph of the story sets up a second, mimicking relationship between Dom and the narrator, in which the solemn, important editor gazes through his Venetian blinds to see reflected back a young, white girl. Mr. Musgrave is similarly viewed with a mocking, othering gaze as the narrator subtly reinserts his racist remark and observes his lack of dignity in the text. Moreover, the mocking tone of the story can itself be seen as a literary form of mimicry. Homi Bhabha writes that "What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model . . ." (87-88). Indeed, the speaker's deliberate removal from the context suggests that she is not simply mimicking the racial subjectivities of both white and coloured, but also imitating the supposedly objective (generally male) gaze which historical narrators have traditionally adopted. The speaker's recognizable lack of objectivity, which allows her to mock Papa Dom's political concerns and question the

propriety of Musgrave's action, essentially presents a flawed colonial mimesis of historical objectivity. Clearly, then, mimicry is developed at several levels of the narrative, not only as Papa Dom returns Musgrave's colonizing gaze, but also as the narrator redirects the "objective," male viewpoint.

Pursuing this interpretation of narrative voice, the final sentence of the story, "I wonder if I shall ever again read the *Dominica Herald and Leeward Islands Gazette*," becomes most revealing about the female speaker. The implications of her mimesis are, as suggested earlier, to expose the ambivalences, or inconsistencies, inherent in both male interpretations of racial conflict. While thus making the men objects of her gaze, the narrator disrupts their discourse and removes their authority (causing Papa Dom and Musgrave to appear ridiculous). Yet the final sentence remains a recognition of the speaker's (perhaps self-imposed) exclusion from West Indian culture, leaving the reader with a sense of disillusionment that functions to revise the narrative. Raiskin has suggested that her concluding sentence reveals the narrator's physical and temporal distance from the Antilles, further reducing the importance of Dom and Musgrave's debate into "a bit of nostalgia" (56). Similarly, after the speaker's detailed account of racial opinions, in which the newspaper functions as a most important medium, perhaps the narrator

has simply recognized the colonizing forms which the paper embodies and reveals her own disrespect for that authority. Although such interpretations are clearly plausible, the narrator's mocking tone has already effectively subverted the colonial debate, while the final remark calls direct attention to the speaker's own particular subjectivity. Having established that she is a white, creole woman who, moreover, is a writer insofar as she is recording these events, perhaps the final sentence can be read as a recognition of her fundamental marginality to a debate which concerns not only male ways of perceiving the world, but also centres around a male literary canon. Despite her ability to mock, or disrupt the authority of male discourses, the narrator is still excluded from their dialogue as a woman, since, in order to mimic Dom and Musgrave's debate, she must adopt their form (a form which does not recognize the position of women). Thus, while mimicry functions on several levels to reveal the ambivalences of racial positioning in this text, the narrator's assertion of sexual difference marks any such non-gender-specific cultural debate as conceptually limited.

CHAPTER 3

Voyage in the Dark, Jean Rhys's third novel and first to specifically identify her narrator as white, creole and female, continues to develop a space of cultural and sexual difference. Indeed, Rhys's protagonist, Anna Morgan, repeatedly voices her social alienation as a West Indian living in pre-World War I England and as a woman experiencing various forms of sexual exploitation. Anna writes not only of her inability to "fit" a West Indian past together with her English present, but also records the sexual and economic assumptions of English society which force her into the role of a prostitute. In this chapter, I propose to apply certain feminist theories of identity formation within the postcolonial context of Rhys's narrative in order to discover strategies by which the author displaces traditional textual authority. Using various modes of splitting, parody and disjunction, Rhys reveals the excesses, or socially interested constructions, not only of colonial discourse but also of class and gendered discourses. These excesses, as I will discuss, most significantly develop a critique of traditional, paternalistic narratives while representing the female, creole space as maternally identified, non-unified and hence highly disruptive to homogenizing classificatory schemes.

Several critics have found Nancy Chodorow's theories on female development (as well as those of subsequent feminist psychologists) rewarding in an examination of Jean Rhys's texts. Deborah Kelly Kloepfer explains this application in the following terms:

> The daughter's relationship to and perception of the mother particularly interest me here, for while the male certainly has access to preoedipal experience, he experiences it differently from the female, and this gender asymmetry is crucial to what it means to write as a woman. The most significant writer to address this issue in terms of its psychological implications is Nancy Chodorow, who illustrates that the oedipal "crisis" is less of a crisis for girls than for boys and that female children do not relinquish the mother -- internally -- with the same violence that male children do. (9)

More precisely, Chodorow proposes that a girl does not turn from the mother to define herself through the father, but rather that she introduces her father into a relational group, which includes experiences of both her preoedipal and oedipal mother. This rejection of binary identifications, writes Chodorow, "means that there is greater complexity in the feminine endopsychic object-world than in the masculine" (167). Moreover, only a successful preoedipal relationship with her mother will allow the daughter to develop a separate sense of "self" which does not require the validation of others. An unfulfilling maternal relationship, meanwhile, will leave the girl child with a sense of absence, often seeking dependent relationships with others, and experiencing further psychic

complexity as "Part of its definition of self and its affective energy thus splits off experientially from its central self . . ." (78). To return to the textual implications of these theories, various critics have convincingly argued that Rhys's heroines (particularly Anna from *Voyage in the Dark* and Antoinette from *Wide Sargasso Sea*) fit into this psychological experience of maternal failure.[1] Kloepfer specifically identifies the absence of a "true" mother in *Voyage in the Dark* as resulting in Anna's psychological dependence on others, while Laura Niesen De Abruna suggests that a lack of maternal bonding is responsible for Anna's divided sense of self (Kloepfer 54, De Abruna 94). Indeed, textual passages which alternate between an English "reality" and West Indian memories, as well as repeated attempts to construct acquaintances and other non-related women (Laurie and Ethel, for example) as mother substitutes, would seem to confirm that Anna may be interpreted through this psychological sense of loss.

In order to situate female identity within the homogenizing reality of a patriarchal world, I would now like to discuss textual themes which detail Anna's interaction with English culture. One such interaction involves the protagonist's rejection of symbolic meaning. Nancy Harrison, Teresa O'Connor and Deborah Kelly Kloepfer have noted the significance of Anna's "reading" *Nana*, a

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[1] See Kloepfer, Scharfman, and Niesen de Abruna.

book whose protagonist foreshadows Anna's own life (note the "ana"-gram of their names), in terms of an almost pre-oedipal physical presence rather than through symbolic meaning. "It wasn't what I was reading, it was the look of the dark, blurred words going on endlessly that gave me that feeling" (9). In fact, Anna's conversations with her West Indian nurse, Francine, decenter the speaking "I" so that identity appears multiple. This process clearly threatens Hester, who identifies herself with English (symbolic) speech patterns, saying in disparagement to Anna "When you were jabbering away together in the pantry I could never tell which of you was speaking" (56). Kloepfer also traces a growing rejection of written language, as Anna refuses to read books ("they can't get at me like that") or write letters, thus denying the unified narrative voice that writing presupposes (72). Ultimately, textual ruptures and multiple voices dominate the last chapter of *Voyage in the Dark*, narratologically reproducing Anna's psychological state.

Rhys also exposes society's overdetermination of gender roles, as Anna's female reality differs considerably from what she has been told is the proper behaviour for women. Judith Butler has written extensively on the performative aspects of gender, pursuing the notion that imitative practices may trouble or displace socially constructed definitions of what it is to be "male" or

"female." In her controversial chapter, "Critically Queer," Butler writes

> The practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining. To the extent that gender is an assignment, it is an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is compelled to approximate. (231)

Addressing Rhys's text, Anna's femininity appears compulsory or performative not only in the literal sense that she is a chorus girl, acting an undifferentiated female role on stage, but also in the sense that Anna "puts on" aspects of her femininity, in a kind of gender mimicry, so as to appear socially acceptable. In part one, for example, as her respectability declines, Anna recalls the "rules" of being a lady: "A lady always puts on her gloves before going into the street," and "a wet patch underneath your arms [is] a disgusting and disgraceful thing to happen to a lady" (30, 36). Moreover, other gender constraints, which have nothing to do with being ladylike, exist in terms of Anna's attractiveness to Walter. Not having had time to dry her hair "properly" before meeting him, Anna describes herself as "in a prison, wandering round and round in a circle. If he had said that I looked all right or that I was pretty, it would have set me free" (66). Clearly, femininity consists of a set of performance rules, the "poses of a woman as guest" which Alicia Borinsky

describes as placing Rhys's heroines both in and outside of English society (289). While Anna's social posturing may expose the excess of gendered discourse, this parodic exaggeration also implicates her peripherally in patriarchal culture. Through her concern with conventional notions of femininity, Anna becomes a gender mimic, simultaneously participating in and deconstructing European concepts of womanhood.

Rhys's treatment of class structures in *Voyage in the Dark* further dismantles and exposes the overdeterminations of European classificatory schemes. Although much debate has surrounded the problematic relationship between gender and class, current theorists maintain that the two categories overlap, often with sex differences transversing the stratifications of class division (Armstrong 226-8). Clearly, in this text, greater ideological differences separate the two women, Anna and Hester, than they do Hester and Walter, who both embody upper-middle class pretensions. Indeed, the characters of Walter and Hester provide certain insights into the construction and perpetuation of class systems within English society. Walter, for example, displays a compulsive need to categorize and "place" Anna both in terms of his life and in terms of her own self-definition. As the love affair progresses, he not only encourages her to "get on" in her sexually and economically defined role, but he also makes

very clear the fact that she is one in a series of mistresses. "You'll be all right later on... Some people are born knowing their way about, others never learn. Your predecessor -- " (44). Moreover, when Anna recalls specific memories of her West Indian childhood, Walter quickly turns her reminiscences into broad generalizations. "Everybody thinks the place where he was born is lovely" (47). Having placed Anna as a lower-class woman who is involved in various forms of prostitution, Walter clearly does not want to encounter behaviour which would distinguish her as an individual or which would make his economic exploitation of her sexuality appear oppressive.

Hester similarly displays an intense concern with class and the preservation of class forms. As Anna describes her "English lady's voice," Hester is constantly judging and defining people. "Now that I've spoken you can hear that I'm a lady. I have spoken and I suppose you now realize that I'm an English gentlewoman. I have my doubts about you. Speak up and I will place you at once... That sort of voice" (50). Like Walter, Hester defines Anna as lower class, although her judgements are also tainted with a certain amount of nationalistic prejudice. Indeed, for Hester, Englishness seems to imply an automatic rise in class while a West Indian background presents obstacles to class advancement. As she tells Anna,

> 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. Impossible to get you away from the servants.... But I did think when I brought you to England that I was giving you a real chance. (56)

This self-aggrandizing construction of Englishness is further exposed through Germaine's dinner conversation. As a continental European, Germaine reveals some of the ways in which British society creates evaluative categories that privilege English, male viewpoints. Even English women, Germaine reveals, are subjugated by sexist, class-conscious forms of prejudice. "The women here are awful. That beaten, cringing look -- or else as cruel and dried-up as they're made'.... And everybody knows why they're like that. They're like that because most Englishmen don't care a damn about women" (70). Vincent's smug responses, meanwhile, confirm this sense of class and national superiority, while Walter describes Germaine's foreignness in the following derogatory terms. "She says she's half-French. God knows what she is, she might be anything" (68). The English class system clearly devalues any subject position other than that of the white, upper-class English male and, just as clearly, these judgements falsely homogenize the position of women such as Anna, whose difference can be theorized on various levels of gender, class and nationality.

In light of these observations on the construction of Englishness in relation to other national identities, Anna's West Indian background deserves to be considered in more detail. Homi Bhabha has recently theorized that, in an imperialist context, the colonizer's gaze confirms itself by imposing preconceived notions of (homogenized) otherness onto the native. This narcissistic vision is disrupted when it encounters a split or multiple identity which refuses to satisfy or reflect the colonizer's authority. In his essay, "Interrogating Identity," Bhabha writes

> The familiar space of the Other (in the process of identification) develops a graphic historical and cultural specificity in the splitting of the postcolonial or migrant subject. In place of that 'I' -- institutionalized in the visionary, authorial ideologies of *Eng. Lit.* or the notion of 'experience' in the empiricist accounts of slave history -- there emerges the challenge to see what is invisible, the look that cannot 'see me,' a certain problem of the object of the gaze that constitutes a problematic referent for the language of the Self. (47)

Throughout this quotation, Bhabha emphasizes the importance of the eye as a homonym for 'I' or notions of unified selfhood. As this term is ambiguously split between visual modes of perception and social concepts of identity, so Bhabha proposes that the colonial gaze splits itself between an image and reality. As the colonizer gazes upon the native, his eye is necessarily divided in that it projects an image of difference while disavowing positions

of real difference, or, in other words, projecting an "image *as* identity," and making "*present* something that is *absent*" (77, 51). Psychologists exploring female development have recently proposed similar concepts relating to the success or failure of the maternal gaze. Ronnie Scharfman summarizes these ideas best:

> The mother figure represents the first external mirror, eventually internalized, into which a girl-child looks to discover her identity . . . As [Winnicott] conceptualizes the non-reciprocal bond, when a mother reflects her own mood or the 'rigidity of her own defenses' rather than her child's, what the baby sees is the mother's face . . . [resulting in] a subject's painful inability to constitute itself as an autonomous identity, to belong to any place in any secure way . . . (89, 99-100)

Considering both these postcolonial and psychological conceptualizations of the split eye and its relation to identity, the numerous mirror references made throughout *Voyage in the Dark* demand greater examination for ways in which they show Anna as divided between a projected image and reality. Overdetermined by both gender and class categorizations, Rhys's heroine can only assert her variously defined self by making visible the false homogenizations of classificatory schemes.

Throughout the text, Anna Morgan perceives a disparity between her subjective state and the illusion which she perceives in mirrors. During her first meeting with Walter, for example, Anna is upset by the men's patronizing attitudes, and yet she watches herself in the "looking

glass," laughing and playing her socially determined role (12). Indeed, David Plante observes that Rhys favoured the term, "looking glass" over "mirror," (32) suggesting that heroines such as Anna are truly unable to see their own reflections, perceiving instead a m/other figure through the transparent glass. Anna more definitely states her lack of affinity with mirror images after her first love scene with Walter, asking, "Have you ever noticed how different some looking-glasses make you look?" and claiming that she "hates" the way his glass (in other words, his projected image of her) makes her appear "pale," "thin" and "silly" (33, 35). A final, most interesting use of mirrors in the text occurs when Walter chooses to tell the image, rather than Anna, that he is leaving the country. Her response is to "put my face nearer the glass. Like when you're a kid and you put your face very near to the glass and make faces at yourself" (72). Paula Le Gallez suggests that this reaction is not only a way of withdrawing even her image from Walter, but is also a gesture of contempt, "sticking out her tongue in the face of authority," parodying the extreme youth that first attracted Walter (102). Anna's experience of both gender and class-interested oppression allows her to see through the glass and through the social construction of images, so as to expose the excess, or denial of difference, upon which those discourses are based.

A second assertion of Anna's different identity occurs during the final passage recalling West Indian Carnival. The very concept of Carnival has, in recent years, been identified as a forum from which non-unified, subversive voices may speak. Similar to Bahktin's description of carnivalesque heteroglossia, Anna's dream sequence consists of many voices, often interrupting and contradicting each other. The opening paragraph, for example, contains several creole and English voices debating the cultural legitimacy of Carnival.

> Father said she's looking out of the window and quite right too -- it ought to be stopped somebody said it's not a decent and respectable way to go on it ought to be stopped -- Aunt Jane said I don't see why they should stop the Masquerade they've always had their three days Masquerade ever since I can remember why should they want to stop it some people want to stop everything. (156)

This passage makes apparent the fact that Carnival remains a socially sanctioned forum, despite any subversive threat which it may present to the colonizing culture. Within this legitimized space, however, Anna recognizes that coloured West Indians are disrupting the authority of racialized discourse. Indeed, the masks worn by Carnival celebrants clearly parody white uniformity as proscribed by racist ideology. "the masks the men wore were a crude pink with the eyes squinting near together squinting . . ." (156). Exposing even more directly the ambivalent denial of

difference upon which racial and sexual stereotypes are based, Anna describes the women's masks as,

> made of close-meshed wire covering the whole face and tied at the back of the head -- the handkerchief that went over the back of the head hid the strings and over the slits for the eyes mild blue eyes were painted then there was a small straight nose and a little red heart-shaped mouth and under the mouth another slit so that they could put their tongues out at you . . . (157)

Mary Lou Emery writes that "These masks clearly imitate to excess, to the point of ridicule . . ." (77) and, indeed, Anna's split self both understands and participates in this mimicry which subverts unitary, English ideology. Ultimately, then, Rhys's protagonist exists along what Maggie Humm has termed cultural "border lines," implicated in the dominant society but able to "cross over" and parody sexual and racially defined constructions of otherness.

A final subversive strategy remains to be considered as Rhys uses time disjunctively, running past and present together throughout the novel. In her letters, the author writes that *Voyage in the Dark* has "Something to do with time being an illusion . . . that the past exists -- side by side with the present, not behind it, that what was -- is" (24). Benedict Anderson has more recently proposed that time in the modern, imperial nation consists of "an archaic acting out, a dream-text of a form of historical retroversion that 'appeared to confirm on a global, modern stage antique conceptions of power and privilege'" (quoted

in Bhabha 248). This ambivalent amalgamation of past and present which forms linear history is imitated and ultimately subverted with an alternate, West Indian story in the final pages of Rhys's text. Anna's dream not only evokes the racism in which all Westerners are implicated ("you can't expect niggers to behave like white people all the time"), but also blends her present sexual and economic exploitation with an imaginative return to her mother's estate (157-80). By thus inserting a disjunctive female and West Indian identified narrative, Anna demonstrates the disturbing possibility of other geopolitical histories which are based not on the false unity of an ideology of 'Englishness,' but on the displacing perspectives of female and foreign identity.

In a 1963 letter to Diana Athill, Jean Rhys remembers her publisher's initial reaction to the last part of *Voyage in the Dark*, "written like that -- time and place abolished, past and present the same -- and I had been almost satisfied. Then everybody said it was 'confused and confusing -- impossible to understand etc.' and I had to cut and rewrite it . . ." (233). As I hope I have suggested, reasons for this initial reaction to Rhys's text may lie less in the supposed lack of clarity of her work than in the disturbing challenge which she presents to Western concepts of history, gender, class and nationality. Anna Morgan is shown to be repeatedly typed and defined by

English society in ways which are distorting and oppressive. Although Anna remains implicated in Western culture, through a variety of parodic strategies she is able to expose the overdeterminations of sexual, economic and imperialist categories.

CHAPTER 4

Continuing to read Rhys's later short stories and final novel in terms of the dislocations which they expose within English society, one increasingly finds that fundamental aspects of European cultural thought have been coerced into the patriarchal/imperialist project. Judith Raiskin, among others, has suggested that the family is one such social construct which has been exploited by white men to preserve their dominant position in relation to women and colonized people (64). In particular, Raiskin cites "the metaphor of 'family' for political relations" as setting up a series of exploitative relationships between the "parent" country and its colonized "children," a metaphor which is repeated on various levels within the social organization, since women and children are traditionally dominated by the father figure in European family relationships (59). Homi Bhabha subtly connects this concept of "father and oppressor" (or purveyor of both justice and injustice) to textual production and to representations of the English (male) book as a symbol of colonial authority (an authority which is nevertheless displaced by the text's own inherent contradictions) (95, 105). In light of these recent theorizings, Rhys's short story, "The Day They Burned The Books," because it focusses on a direct act of resistance against family and literary

constructs, requires re-interpretation. Indeed, traditional criticism of this brief narrative about a "coloured" West Indian woman, an English man and their racially mixed son, often betrays European assumptions about the dominance of patriarchal influences and the supremacy of the English literary canon. Thomas Staley, for example, describes Mrs. Sawyer's burning of English texts as "vengeful ignorance" (126) while Judith Kegan Gardiner misidentifies Mrs. Sawyer as a black (as opposed to coloured or mulatto) woman in her attempt to simply reverse the "black and white" valuations of patriarchal discourse (45-6). The following examination will re-locate Rhys's characters not only in terms of cultural, sexual and economic specificities, but will also reconsider the narrated moments of resistance for ways in which they expose already-present ambivalences in colonial ideology.

Mr. Sawyer presents some of the most contradictory aspects of the imperial phenomena. According to the narrator, his presence in the Caribbean does not comply with general notions of a suitable English colonizer:

> Nobody could make out what he was doing in our part of the world at all. He was not a planter or a doctor or a lawyer or a banker. He didn't keep a store. He wasn't a school-master or a government official. He wasn't -- that was the point -- a gentleman. (37)

In fact, the narrator, with the implied force of white Caribbean society behind her, clearly dissociates herself

from Mr. Sawyer based on his occupation, personal conduct and lower-class English accent (he "hadn't an 'h' in his composition") (37). His abusive behaviour towards his wife can therefore be condemned without directly undermining the authority of English culture, an authority which the narrator later reveals is generally unquestioned in creole society.

> [Eddie] would be so quiet when others who had never seen [England] -- none of us had ever seen it -- were talking about its delights, gesticulating freely as we talked -- London, the beautiful, rosy-cheeked ladies, the theatres, the shops, the fog, the blazing coal fires in winter, the exotic food (whitebait eaten to the sound of violins), strawberries and cream -- the word 'strawberries' always spoken with a guttural and throaty sound which we imagined to be the proper English pronunciation.
> 'I don't like strawberries,' Eddie said on one occasion.
> 'You *don't like* strawberries?'
> . . . We were all too shocked to say, 'You don't know a thing about it.' We were so shocked that nobody spoke to him for the rest of the day. (38-9)

In order to maintain this apparently indisputable colonial authority, Mr. Sawyer clearly cannot be seen as an Englishman. Instead, in a succinct reproduction of English class values, the narrator presents him as an aberration ("a strange man") whose abusive behaviour can be at least partially attributed to his lower-class background.

This delineation does not, however, fully account for Mr. Sawyer's disparaging attitude, private income, or large collection of books. As the narrator discloses, "[people] never decided why he had chosen to settle in a place he

didn't like and to marry a coloured woman" (37). Indeed, Sawyer's attitude towards his wife is both racist and sexist, as he calls her "nigger" and "half-caste" and pulls her hair in order to demonstrate the quality of his possession. Value judgements based on nationality, as well as a sense of possessiveness, are clearly linked to English culture later in the story when the narrator recounts her relations with "real English boys and girls" and as Eddie appropriates his father's Eurocentric library (39, 40). Furthermore, the family construct, of which Mr. Sawyer is the head, has been observed by both Judith Raiskin and Mary Lou Emery to perpetuate forms of sexual and political exploitation (Raiskin 59, Emery 98). Just as European countries adopted the ideological role of protective father or mother while culturally and economically exploiting their 'children,' the colonies, so men have traditionally used family rhetoric in order to sexually and economically dominate women. Mr. Sawyer's continuation of this construct of the family, as well as his value judgements and possessive attitude, ideologically link him to imperializing modes of English culture. Even more directly, the mention of Sawyer's unexplained, yet presumably substantial, private income suggests that he may be involved in further forms of economic exploitation. Several critics have also noted the "oppressive imperial role" of English literature in this story, with Evelyn

Hawthorne marking in particular the inclusion of Froude's imperialist history, *The British in the West Indies*, as a detail which signals Mr. Sawyer's participation in colonizing thought.[1] Clearly, then, despite the narrator's initial attempt to discredit and dissociate Sawyer from "true" English culture (presumably because of class snobbery and because Sawyer's abusive tendencies do not agree with European propaganda about the nobility of the colonizing mission), a closer examination of details reveals that this man is, in many respects, a full participant in the perpetuation of imperialist ideology.

Eddie, as the son of Mr. Sawyer and his coloured, native West Indian wife, is placed in a far more ambiguous racial and cultural position. Indeed, the tenuousness of Eddie's situation appears to be physically manifested in the narrator's opening description:

> My friend Eddie was a small, thin boy. You could see the blue veins in his wrists and temples. People said that he had consumption and wasn't long for this world. I loved, but sometimes despised him. (37)

Contradictions seem to surround Eddie, as the narrator reveals not only her conflicting feelings for him, but also that "he was bold, and stronger than you would think," "the living image of his father, though often as silent as his mother . . ." (39, 38). Evidently, Eddie's differences

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[1] See Hawthorne, p. 184 and, for further discussion of the historical implications of Froude's work, see Gardiner, p. 46 and O'Connor, p. 14.

originate from his mixed racial background. While Rhys has often portrayed coloured people, such as Papa Dom in "Again the Antilles" and Mrs. Sawyer in this text, as developing points of resistance against the dominant culture, Eddie presents even further complexities of difference. Similar to the creole narrator, he appears deeply involved in the colonizing culture and yet cannot accept the value judgements which English society imposes upon him. In the passage quoted earlier, for example, Eddie claims not to like the sacred strawberries or to accept his father's evaluation of flowers. "No, and I don't like daffodils either. Dad's always going on about them. He says they lick the flowers here into a cocked hat and I bet that's a lie" (39). While Eddie is thus outwardly opposed to Mr. Sawyer (refusing to cry at the funeral and suggesting that he has already hated his father when he tells his mother that he must now hate her "too"), the son nevertheless succeeds his father in possessing the authority of English culture (40-1). "My room ... my books," Eddie repeats, and he then proceeds to save the remnants of authority from his mother's "rebellion," simultaneously dismissing her as a liar and defending her physical beauty. Appropriately, the text which Eddie saves is *Kim*, Kipling's pervasively male novel about British imperialism which Edward Said reads as combining a love for India with conscious participation in the forms of colonization (1993, 190). Moreover, Eddie's

book is torn, as incomplete as he is, symbolic of his unwillingness to accept the value judgements of English culture and yet unable, as a male and the son of a colonizer, to resist involvement in the ideology of British imperialism.

During the course of the narrative, Eddie labels both his parents as liars, despite the fact that his mother remains notably silent. Mrs. Sawyer actually resists textual encoding to the extent that the narrator can only suggest negative possibilities for her speech:

> When Mr. Sawyer was drunk -- this often happened -- he used to be very rude to her. She never answered him.
> 'Look at the nigger showing off,' he would say, and she would smile as if she knew she ought to see the joke but couldn't.
> 'You damned, long-eyed, gloomy half-caste, you don't smell right,' he would say, and she never answered, not even to whisper, 'You don't smell right to me, either.' (37-8)

Apparently, Eddie's assertion that his mother is a liar is based less on specific instances than on certain cultural expectations. Homi Bhabha, in discussing the "sly civility" by which native people have turned away imperialist demands, theorizes that an essential component of the colonizer's "paranoia," or need for confirmations of his own authority, is a demand for narrative:

> The narratorial voice articulates the narcississtic, colonialist demand that it should be addressed directly, that the Other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfill its outlines, replete, indeed repeat, its references and still its fractured gaze. (98)

In frustrating her son's narrative desire, Mrs. Sawyer displaces his narcississtic attempt to m/other her and his response, as Bhabha predicts, is aggression and the projection of a "litigious, lying native" stereotype (100). Indeed, Eddie makes a clear distinction between stories, which presumably fulfill his narrative demands for authority, and lies, which undermine his authority. "She's an awful liar. She can't make up a story to save her life, but she makes up lies about people all right" (42). In drawing this disconcerting difference between stories and lies (both of which modern criticism recognizes as forms of fiction), Eddie rewrites one aspect of his mother's refusal to satisfy the colonizer's othering address, a refusal which is imitative (in that she reproduces the historical silence of women) and yet subversively resistant.

Like Papa Dom in "Again the Antilles," Mrs. Sawyer can be seen as a colonial mimic, who imitates and thereby displaces the authority of imperialist discourses. As suggested above, Mrs. Sawyer mimics the role of a "good" English wife. She maintains a "decent, respectable" home, does not confront her abusive husband and appears appropriately bereaved at his funeral, "walking like a queen behind the coffin and crying her eyeballs out at the right moment" (40). However, as Mr. Sawyer reminds her, she is not an English woman, so that her mimicry is an "almost the same but not white" reproduction of the wifely

role. Since mimicry can be read in a colonial context as that displacement of authority which exposes the ambivalence of European discourses, the effect of Mrs. Sawyer's marital imitation is to reaffirm her difference and to expose the inconsistencies of a culture which would not recognize that difference. Mrs. Sawyer's outward attempts to conform to English expectations thus unsettle imperialist ideologies of a colonial "family." Bhabha relates this disruption of the home, or perception of the "unhomely," to hybridity, a sense of "in-between" identity which,

> displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (112)

Where Papa Dom can only return the colonizing gaze in kind, involved as he is in patriarchal forms of colonial culture, Mrs. Sawyer acts out in resistance against English authority. The narrator reveals that after Mr. Sawyer pulled her hair, "her eyes had gone wicked, like a soucriant's eyes, and that afterwards she had picked up some of the hair he pulled out and put it in an envelope, and that Mr. Sawyer ought to look out (hair is obeah as well as hands)" (38). Thus, Mrs. Sawyer not only returns the colonizer's glare of racial hatred, but may also have

drawn upon her native culture to act against that oppression, resulting in her husband's death. In burning the books, moreover, Mrs. Sawyer exploits the ambivalences in European ideology which situate books both as possessions of monetary value and as symbols of cultural authority. Indeed, these ambivalences bring into play Homi Bhabha's concept of hybrid acts of resistance, a response to colonialism which he locates as being informed by both dominant and suppressed knowledges, and which can effectively reverse certain colonial processes. Clearly, Mrs. Sawyer's act may be seen as hybrid, since it originates from a subject position informed by both European and Afro-Caribbean cultures and since the result of her action is to revoke the colonizing potential of English texts.

Having argued that Mrs. Sawyer acts both from within the imperialist system, mimicking English roles of wife and mother, and from outside that system, drawing on her West Indian culture to resist ideological victimization, one must next ask how effective her moments of resistance are? Do these acts remain preserved as forms of cultural defiance, or do they become incorporated into dominant discourses through the narrative medium? Gayatri Spivak has theorized the roles of third world and postcolonial women of colour in terms of an historical silence. Citing the oppressive agendas of both patriarchy and imperialism,

Spivak analyzes the history of *sati* (or widow sacrifice) in India, to conclude that "There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (1988, 307). Without attempting to homogenize Mrs. Sawyer's experience, perhaps her silence can be interpreted as a recognition of the editing and re-writing which patriarchy and imperialism will impose upon her expression. Similarly, Mrs. Sawyer's burning of the books appears to be an uncanny revision of the *sati* practice. Although she clearly has no connection to Indian culture, Mrs. Sawyer's act effectively reverses the concept of widow sacrifice, since, through immolating her dead husband's cultural authority, she preserves her own identity. Moreover, as critic Sandra Drake notes, fire was traditionally used by Afro-Caribbean slaves to resist the impositions of European imperialists (110).

These forms of resistance do not, however, reach the reader first hand. One is constantly reminded that the narrator presents yet another space of cultural difference, that of a young, creole girl. As seen earlier, this narrator exerts her power to discredit Mr. Sawyer as a member of English society, as well as to construct romantic love scenes between herself and Eddie. Symbolically, the narrator also appropriates Mrs. Sawyer's cultural position. "Hair is obeah," the reader is told, so that when the narrator's hair is made curly for the funeral, one can assume that she resembles Mrs. Sawyer (whose Afro-Caribbean

background suggests that her hair would be curly). Since Mrs. Sawyer is silent, the narrator's suppositions as to why the woman acts are also highly suspect. Indeed, how can a young girl who quotes her father understand that "by a flicker in Mrs. Sawyer's eyes I knew that worse than men who wrote books were women who wrote books?" (41). Thus, one must conclude that Mrs. Sawyer's silence is symbolic and that her acts of resistance ultimately become incorporated into the creole girl's interpretation of events. As Gayatri Spivak writes about Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*,

> She cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native. No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other.... (1985, 253)

While Mrs. Sawyer burns the books that attempt to contain her, that act of resistance ultimately becomes incorporated into a culture which perpetuates oppressive family and narrative constructs.

CHAPTER 5

"Let Them Call it Jazz," one of Jean Rhys's later and most widely praised short stories, offers a new narrative perspective on racial subjectivity. In this story, Rhys adopts the voice of Selina Davis, a coloured woman born in the West Indies but having migrated to London, where Selina confronts various forms of discrimination within English society. If, as I have suggested in previous chapters, Rhys is exploring the complexity of colonial situations from a white, creole viewpoint, then this new voice presents certain problems. Indeed, Rhys's ability to speak as a coloured woman without "orientalizing" that subject position into a confirmation of her own viewpoint may be debated. Gayatri Spivak writes that "[the Westerner] is caught in a deliberate choice of subalternity, granting to the oppressed either that very expressive subjectivity which s/he criticizes, or instead, a total unrepresentability" (1987, 209). While neither Rhys nor Selina can be identified as completely Western or completely other, the reader must wonder why the author chose to depart from her exploration of creole consciousness and whether she manages to do so without transgressing important differences between mulatto and creole subject positions. In the following pages, I will explore Rhys's portrayal of her main character, as well as

the institutions which oppress her, in order to determine whether the approach is self-fulfilling or whether Rhys manages to negotiate a non-transgressive space from which to write.

Carole Angier has suggested that "Let Them Call it Jazz" is based on Rhys's own experience during a particularly difficult period of life. In fact, Angier notes that the sad, abandoned house, the fatherly attitude of Mr. Sims, the details of Selina's dispute with her neighbours and the time spent in Holloway prison are all similar to events in the author's life. Ultimately, this critic concludes that Rhys's purpose in writing the story was to "[bring] out [its] most general meaning, the humiliation of the outcast and despised," thus proposing that Selina's blackness is an extended metaphor for oppression and that Rhys is erasing difference between racial positions (442). While this interpretation is attractive from a biographical stance, it also identifies several extremely problematic considerations for the postcolonial reader in that certain aspects of Selina's experience do bear similarities to those of Rhys's creole characters. Indeed, the fatherly lover, the attention to living space and the growing distrust of social authority all suggest affinities between Selina and Anna Morgan from *Voyage in the Dark*. Moreover, the positive memories which Selina has of her West Indian grandmother contrast sharply

with negative descriptions of England ("to walk about London on a Sunday with nowhere to go -- that take the heart out of you"), suggesting that Rhys tends to idealize, or project a nostalgia for lost origins onto the West Indies (45). These similarities between creole and mulatto characters, as well as the tendency to project a positive image onto the West Indies, may be seen as facets of an orientalizing perspective, with Rhys molding Selina's racially divided viewpoint into a figure for her own cultural creolization.

Such descriptions of the author's intent remain far from complete, however, in that many absences or gaps underlie the text and surround the main character. Indeed, Rhys seems to have been particularly anxious that readers not identify her with Selina Davis, writing to her daughter that "It is not (repeat *not*) autobiography," and to her editor that "the black, coloured, white question [is] more complicated don't you think?" (1984, 187, 202) Furthermore, on close examination, Selina's character does not present the thorough, authoritative delineation which Said suggests a self-projecting approach would tend towards (1979, 40-1). As he writes in *Orientalism*, one aspect of European domination involves the production of intrusive knowledges about the native:

> Now at last we approach the long-developing core of essential knowledge, knowledge both academic and practical, which Cromer and Balfour inherited from a century of modern Western Orientalism knowledge about and knowledge of Orientals, their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society, and possibilities (38)

Unlike her approach towards Anna Morgan or the narrator of "Again the Antilles," Rhys does not explicate Selina's character in terms of formative childhood experience, but presents only a brief biography and focusses on events which occur in London. Nor is this protagonist constructed in terms of the identity split which has been discussed in relation to various creole characters. Where a writing approach which aimed to turn an/other into a self might define Selina's identity in terms of the fundamental split observed in Anna and, as the following chapter will discuss, in Antoinette Cosway, Selina evinces a more unified self which she ultimately preserves in the face of adversity. Critics Isabel Suarez and Esther Lopez note that despite English judicial and economic threats to Selina's identity, this character retains and reaffirms her sense of self through the Holloway song (158-9). As Selina tells herself, "'So let them call it jazz,' I think, and let them play it wrong. That won't make no difference to the song I heard" (63). Thus, Rhys's portrayal does not invade her coloured character's psychic space, moving

instead between points of creole-mulatto contact and marked absences which acknowledge difference.

To further explore these concepts of convergence and omission, I would like to examine language and textual institutions within the narrative. Clearly, Selina's dialect is written to assert her linguistic difference from grammatically "correct" creole and English characters. The use of broken English, moreover, constructs Selina's character in terms of an inferior class position (class implying, in a postcolonial context, both economic and racial hierarchies). As the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* suggest, this use of pidgin dialect in a text such as Rhys's not only signifies the presence of class difference, but also makes evident the political function of standard English (76-77). Selina's assertion of her own language in a European context affirms her different cultural and economic identity while exposing English homogenizing and elitist ideologies. Notably, the dialect itself is composed to imitate English but with the omission of phrases, tenses and word endings which a reader notes. For example, the opening paragraph ends with, "She say month in advance is usual, and if I can't pay find somewhere else," a sentence construction which marks important disjunctions by the absence of a verb ending on "say," the omission of the indefinite article preceding "month" and the exclusion of the assumed subject "[I should] find somewhere else"

(44). On a thematic level, language also undergoes a process of revision. Selina begins by identifying English people as liars and manipulators of language. The Notting Hill landlords renege on their original agreement, the neighbour perjures himself in court, while English police linguistically confuse Selina and use that as an excuse not to investigate the theft of her savings. Meanwhile, Selina experiences an increasing loss of her own voice. As Gayatri Spivak has theorized, the sexed subaltern is often silenced by oppressive mechanisms of imperialism and, indeed, Selina most significantly loses her communicative abilities when facing an English justice system:

> But I hear myself talking loud and I see my hands wave in the air. Too besides it's no use, they won't believe me, so I don't finish. I stop, and I feel the tears on my face. 'Prove it.' That's all they will say. (57)

In Holloway prison, Selina more completely rejects language, questioning textual authority ("I don't think it's at all like those books tell you"), unable to comprehend the woman asking for cigarettes, and finally adopting total silence ("So I prefer not to speak. Then I'm sure they can't trip me up") (59, 60). Ironically, Selina is in jail for wanting to sing, a form of expression which subverts logocentric thought in favour of bodily rhythms and emotion. In economic, grammatical or cultural terms, then, language becomes the means of rejecting or assuming a culture, as Frantz Fanon states: "The [coloured

Antillean] will be proportionately whiter -- that is, [s]he will come closer to being a real human being -- in direct ratio to [her] mastery of the [English] language" (18).

As the preceding paragraph has suggested, Selina Davis refuses to comply with English cultural assumptions until the end of the story. Only by the final page does she "know what to say" and what she says are lies which feed back to an English society its pre-formed assumptions about coloured women. When applying for a better job, Selina claims "I lie and tell them I work in very expensive New York shop. I speak bold and smooth faced, and they never check up on me" (62-3). At the dress store, Selina makes friends with Clarice, a light coloured woman who deals with the customers and laughs at them "behind their backs" (63). Indeed, Selina's attitude has finally become the "sly civility" which Homi Bhabha discusses in terms of imperialist paranoia.

> The refusal to return and restore the image of authority to the eye of power has to be reinscribed as implacable aggression, assertively coming from without. *He hates me* . . . [this projection] produces the repeated fantasy of the native as in-between legality and illegality, endangering the boundaries of truth itself. (100)

By the end of the story, Selina has recognized this narcissistic demand which Europeans make upon other cultures to reaffirm their authority and she reforms her speech accordingly, although without any conviction of

"truth." Thus, Selina ultimately realizes the stereotype of a "litigious, lying native" which has followed her throughout the text (Bhabha 100). Linguistically, then, the main character fulfills English imperialist expectations while simultaneously exposing the limits of that culture's understanding. As Gayatri Spivak has written about Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she "cannot be contained" by a text written in the interest of the white Creole (1985, 253) and, as I think the gaps in Selina's narrative reveal, this character can also be only partially accomodated by an English textual tradition.

As well as linguistic institutions, economic and judicial systems attempt to contain Selina within colonial culture, and Rhys's exposition of ideological limitation in these forms is even more direct. Again like Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Selina experiences civil injustice which is both class and racially motivated. The police, for example, accept her landlady's explanation that "these people" are liars rather than investigate the theft of Selina's savings (50). Similarly, when the racist neighbours complain, police are quick to assume that Selina is drunk and disorderly ("it all depends who they dealing with") and later they arrest her, recalling an image of slavery and the tread machines used to lame escapees: "As soon as I open the door the woman put her foot in it. She wear sandals and thick stockings and I never see a foot so

big or so bad. It look like it want to mash up the whole world" (55). Moreover, civil injustice is also motivated by economics. Mr. Sims tells Selina that she is a fool not to realize the social power of money and, indeed, her economic disadvantage often combines with racist assumptions to add to her injustices. Entering Holloway prison, Selina notes the deferential treatment given to the rich white girl ahead of her, whereas the warden "take my purse, then she throw me my compact (which is cheap) my comb and my handkerchief like everything in my bag is dirty. So I think, 'Here too, here too'" (58). Not only does Selina not "belong," but she does not have the money "to buy my way to belonging" and, she concludes, "I don't want to either" (63). Once again, Rhys reveals that English justice is limited to people of a certain colour and social class. Within a system which purports to administer objective forms of justice, Selina's position is deliberately ignored or misunderstood. As Lucy Wilson says, "[Selina's] insights into the uses and abuses of power . . . place her at odds with centuries of erroneous beliefs and practices initiated and perpetuated in the interests of successive power groups," groups which, I might add, have traditionally silenced or appropriated ("jazzed up") the voice of coloured women (67).

A final cultural institution which Selina exposes for the interested construction that it is surrounds the notion

of historical time. Several critics have discussed the Holloway song as a link to other times and people. Louis James interprets the song as a "link with the wider world of the dispossessed" while Maggie Humm similarly discusses it in terms of alternate histories denied by Western linear time (James 93, Humm 84). Indeed, Selina's dialect often neglects specific verb tenses and instead recounts most events in the present, while her linguistic reformation at the end is described with the phrase "everything go like a clock works," suggesting that linear time also serves English political interests (62). West Indian writer Michelle Cliff explores these concepts in an historical perspective, writing that the black, maternal figure in Caribbean literature offers an alternative history to the imposed time of English colonizers. Moreover, Cliff examines the word "ruination" (an apt description of Selina's English garden) for notions of "ruin" amidst the rhetoric of national history. "A landscape in ruination means one in which the imposed nation is overcome by the naturalness of ruin" (40). Ultimately, even Selina's personal "history" in relation to her father and his act of naming is questioned by the grandmother, who implicitly provides Selina with an alternate history. Thus, historical time, as Robert Young interprets Spivak, is "an interested construction of a particular representation of

an object," again marking the limits of English culture and its supposedly objective institutional forms (158).

To return to the question of whether or not Rhys is appropriating a subject position, the issue appears to centre less around her actual adoption of the voice and more around whether Rhys assumes an omniscient authority in relation to her character. As Gayatri Spivak argues, the critic of imperialism must acknowledge her own positionality (1988, 271) and within the fictional format of "Let Them Call it Jazz," I have argued that Rhys does this by focussing on similar experiences of alienation. Areas of difference between Rhys's creole background and the coloured character, meanwhile, are not included in the narrative because that would be an appropriation of differential experience. This process of convergence and omission functions to reveal the limits of understanding in English discourse. Without presuming to fully "know" her coloured character, Rhys draws on the similarity in subject positions to pinpoint precisely the injustice of an imperialist discourse which assumes comprehension where it cannot possibly exist.

CHAPTER 6

Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys's final novel and most critically acclaimed work, continues to question racial binaries as well as the role of white, creole women in an imperial context. More specifically, in "writing a life" for *Jane Eyre*'s attic-bound madwoman, Rhys disrupts certain stereotypical images of otherness which canonical English texts, such as *Jane Eyre*, perpetuate in European culture. This direction, as Gayatri Spivak states, revises feminist criticism in terms of a heterogeneously defined subject and allows women to read Bronte's "mother" text as written from the viewpoint of a "European feminist individualist" (a term which Spivak has coined to identify feminist practices that expose patriarchal oppression only in relation to white, Western women while ignoring the oppression of Third World and non-European women). Meanwhile, Rhys's revision, according to Spivak, promotes the creole perspective of Rochester's first wife as well as suggesting yet further possible narratives through the tangential Afro-Caribbean figure of Christophine (1985, 253). Various other critics have likewise suggested that a multiplicity of voices may be heard in the parentheses or gaps of Rhys's main narratives, thus evidencing the author's concern that each

story is constructed only through the repression of other texts.[1]

In this final exploration of Rhys's work, I propose to examine *Wide Sargasso Sea* for ways in which the text expands upon *Jane Eyre*'s identification of patriarchal practices. Having established that sexist and imperialist discourses are distinctly different projects and yet similar in their oppressive, categorizing modes of thought, I will proceed to discuss the specific strategies which Rhys uses to rewrite Bronte's original text. Where Bronte, critics generally agree, was writing a feminist tract in the interest of white, European women, Rhys builds upon that project in order to express the viewpoint of the first, creole, West Indian Mrs. Rochester.[2] Ultimately, *Wide Sargasso Sea* displaces the oppressive classifications not only of gender discourse (as is Bronte's aim), but also of nationalist and imperialist ideologies.

Throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea* the production of colonial ideologies is intertwined with gender definitions. Benita Parry explains the distinctions and overlaps between these two modes of thought in terms of Spivak's analysis of Rhys's text.

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[1] See Mezei, p. 59-60 and Harrison, p. 145.

[2] See Gilbert and Gubar, p. 338, for an in-depth feminist interpretation of *Jane Eyre*.

> Spivak argues that because the construction of an English cultural identity was inseparable from othering the native as its object, the articulation of the female subject within the emerging norm of feminist individualism during the age of imperialism, necessarily excluded the native female, who was positioned on the boundary between human and animal as the object of imperialism's social-mission or soul-making. (37)

While sexist and imperialist projects are clearly separate, then, both modes of thought can be seen to exhibit an ideological compulsion to classify and evaluate. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys repeatedly depicts English men attempting to classify, name and rationalize the subjectivities of women and natives. For example, while Mr. Mason and Rochester stereotype Afro-Caribbean people differently (Mason as "harmless" and Rochester as "malignant"), neither man can perceive West Indian natives as anything other than reflections of his own viewpoint. Maggie Humm writes that "Mr. Mason's strategic aim is to create a subject space for natives through the production of knowledges about them" (73). Humm also points out the similarity between colonial and patriarchal ideologies in their attempt to contain otherness through codification. Ultimately unable to anglicize their creole wives, Rochester and Mason adopt strategies of oppression different from those which they used in relation to Afro-Caribbean people, but with similar results. Both men classify their wives' difference as a form of madness and enlist English legal and medical institutions to confirm their "diagnosis," thereby

producing self-fulfilling knowledges about these women. In order to more clearly establish this disparate relationship between Bronte's feminist project and Rhys's imperialist critique, I now propose to examine how female identity is formed and reproduced in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

In her portrayal of the maternal relationship between Annette and Antoinette, Rhys appears to suggest that ideological victimization figures in the problematization of female identity. The protagonist's mother, Annette, is introduced to the text through a linguistic enclosure which defines her primarily in terms of sexual attractiveness: "The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self' . . ." (15). Paragraphs later, the narrator reveals that Annette's self-definition depends upon her attractiveness to men and on the possibility of having that identity reconfirmed through a second marriage: "I got used to a solitary life, but my mother still planned and hoped -- perhaps she had to hope every time she passed a looking glass" (15-6). Not only is Annette successful in selling herself to Mr. Mason, but in her adherence to patriarchal values the mother rejects her daughter in favour of a mentally deficient son, suggesting that in the symbolic order any man is better than a woman. Using Nancy Chodorow's model of female identity formation (mentioned earlier), Mona Fayad schematizes the meaning of

Annette's patriarchally informed self-definition for Antoinette's development.

> The mother cannot reflect Antoinette. She has established her alliances clearly [with the patriarchy]. . . . If her mother is her mirror, then [Antoinette] must seek to define her mother in order to define herself. But her mother eludes definition because there is no criterion other than the patriarchy by which to define her. (440)

Ronnie Scharfman has more explicitly located this maternal relationship in terms of a fragmentation and tragic repetition which is embedded in Antoinette's identity. Noting that "Antoinette" is "Annette" with the word "toi" inserted, Scharfman perceives rejection at the mirror stage as causing Antoinette to become other to herself (103). Lacanian analysis confirms that failure to be recognized as a subject at this developmental point will prevent the child from forming an ego and Scharfman concludes that, because Annette is the only available image for her daughter, Antoinette will ultimately reproduce her mother's psychological viewpoint (99). Moreover, because Annette defines herself only through patriarchal values, Antoinette (as Fayad suggests) can be seen to experience further levels of otherness in that she is a female attempting to constitute herself according to male definitions. Besides the maternal relationship, Antoinette receives a further education in patriarchally-defined female roles at the Spanish Town convent where students are lectured on

"beautiful and wealthy" saints who are "loved by rich and handsome young men" and where star pupils are praised for their coiffure, deportment and beautiful teeth (45-6). *Wide Sargasso Sea* suggests, then, that a self-definition which is formed through the axiomatics of patriarchal thought contributes as much to the problematics of Antoinette's subject constitution as Rochester's external oppression.

Within this reproduction of female identity, however, the author locates a fundamental means of displacing patriarchal authority. Annette and Antoinette's self-construction as objects of sensual desire becomes redefined in Rochester's narrative (he is again producing metonymic knowledges about women) as depravity and sexual promiscuity. "She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would -- or could.... Till she's drunk so deep, played her games so often that the lowest shrug and jeer at her" (136). In thus reproducing male codifications of women as physical objects, Annette/Antoinette reveal the limits or overdeterminations of that discourse, which defines women in terms of their sexuality, but then requires that their passions be repressed and subordinate to male desire. By returning the self-interested projections which men direct towards women with a form of narcissistic reinscription, Annette/Antoinette reveal the inconsistencies of patriarchal objectification and so

disrupt the authority of that discourse. Indeed, perhaps due to the fragmentation which Antoinette experiences at the mirror stage of development, her main means of relating to people is through imitation or mimicry. This tendency can be seen in her relationship to Tia, where Antoinette emulates the other girl's actions, ultimately attempting to become "like her" (38). Similarly, Antoinette's transformation into Bertha is effected through this imitative ability, as she becomes the woman Rochester demands her to be. "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass" (147). Ultimately, Rochester's discourse of sanity and rationality reinscribes itself through Antoinette's mimesis as the excess of madness and once again demonstrates the overdetermination of masculine classificatory schemes.

If *Wide Sargasso Sea* can thus be seen to disrupt traditional male notions of femininity, then a related examination would seem applicable for ways in which the text displaces certain constructs of imperialism. Rhys approaches the notion of cultural difference through a redefinition of the class hierarchy. Molly Hite has noted that, although the novel was traditionally a bourgeois class form which embodied the socially ascendant ethics of that group, Rhys reverses this direction to demonstrate the

far-reaching effects of social oppression as well as to question the system which creates such value judgements (25). Throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, class is constantly being contextualized and redefined. This process is most evident in Part I of the text, where the interchangeable terms "white cockroach" or "white nigger" are first used to taunt and ridicule the white settlers. These names, as Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell points out, refer (in a racist reversal) to skin color and social inferiority but do not always designate economic status (281). Indeed, in a revision of the dichotomy between "nigger" and "Englishman," the Afro-Caribbeans label Mr. Mason as a "white nigger" while calling the coloured servant, Mannie, a "black Englishman" (37). This reappropriation of terms turns the discourse of racism back on itself and exposes the ambiguity or reversability of class judgements based on skin colour. Homi Bhabha describes the ideological significance of interactions which return the colonizer's appropriating gaze as "[a] process by which the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence" (89). Contextualizing class as a set of arbitrary categories based on social belonging, Rhys suggests that the "black Englishman" is as inappropriate in a Caribbean context as

the "white nigger" is to colonial society. In thus revising *Jane Eyre*, Rhys reveals class and racial discrimination to embody many of the codifying attitudes which Bronte reveals in relation to patriarchal discrimination against women.

Other aspects of European culture which involve the ideology of imperialism are similarly displaced in Rhys's narrative. The opening description of Coulibri, for example, juxtaposes Christian myth with the reality of a West Indian environment.

> Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible -- the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. (16-7)

Recalling Michelle Cliff's schematization of "ruination," this description suggests a decolonizing process, whereby the false order of colonial authority is overcome by 'native' reality (40). Indeed, throughout Part II of *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester projects his feelings of distrust (which are a form of orientalization) onto the West Indian landscape, while Antoinette points out that

> It is not for you and not for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else. I found that out long ago when I was a child. I loved it because I had nothing else to love, but it is as indifferent as this God you call on so often. (107)

The patriarchal family functions as another kind of imperialist structure which Rhys undermines in her revision of Bronte's canonical European text. As Teresa O'Connor notes, the family served as a political model for European colonial relations and one way in which Rhys departs from Bronte's "parent" text is to create an English step-family for Antoinette (198). If this structure can be seen as a political allegory, then perhaps Richard Mason's betrayal of Antoinette can be likened to England's exploitation of its colonies. Certainly, in replicating the patriarchal family structure, Rhys reveals its potential for economic and cultural oppression.

As well as these thematic concerns, the author develops several inter-character relationships in *Wide Sargasso Sea* which express colonial viewpoints. The English colonizer (represented first by Mason, then by Rochester) and his relationship to Daniel Cosway is one such site of imperial contention. Both Mason and Rochester, as I have suggested earlier, project English cultural assumptions onto their experience of the Caribbean. Rochester in particular perceives his surroundings and the West Indian people as sinister and malicious. His opening monologue, for instance, describes Amelie as "A lovely little creature but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place" (55). In response to his paranoid fears, Rochester repeatedly

invokes his father as a figure of colonial and symbolic authority. Gayatri Spivak suggests that Rochester's rejection by the father causes him to remain in the Oedipal moment, constantly attempting to affirm his identity through language (1985, 251). This paternal preoccupation, as well as the tendency to distrust all people, is mimicked by Daniel Cosway, Antoinette's embittered half-brother. Appropriately, Daniel first addresses Rochester in writing, claiming to tell the true story and replicating the Englishman's paternal rejection and resentment. Moreover, in Rhys's text, Amelie describes Daniel as "a very superior man, always reading the Bible and [living] like white people" (99). Critic Teresa O'Connor, meanwhile, equates this description with the role of a "mimic man," suggesting that Daniel "serves as a 'coloured' mirror for Rochester" (204). Indeed, Daniel's mimicry of this subject position, in its paranoia and bitter obsessions, exposes the excess of Rochester's apparently rational discourse. Living "like white people," Daniel (like Papa Dom in "Again the Antilles") mimics and thereby displaces the "sane," paternalistic discourse of colonial authority.

Female roles within an imperial context are likewise developed through the relationships between Tia, Christophine and Antoinette. Christophine, despite her nurturing function, primarily marks the cultural limits of Antoinette's creole state. The practice of obeah, for

example, excludes Antoinette and repeatedly intervenes in their relationship. Similarly, racial difference divides the two women, with Antoinette reverting to racist insults during moments of crisis. "Christophine was waiting for me when I came back crying. 'What you want to go up there for?' she said, and I said, 'You shut up devil, damned black devil from Hell'" (111). Thus, despite the protagonist's attempts to emulate Christophine, cultural and racial differences intervene and definitively mark the Afro-Caribbean woman as outside Rhys's text.

Antoinette, in her need for female identification, can, however, be seen to mimic other subject positions, as in her childhood relationship with Tia. Although the two girls trade racist insults (with Antoinette repeating the "cheating nigger" stereotype of English colonialism), the creole girl continues to identify with Tia:

> Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her . . . As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her . . . When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (38)

Margaret Joseph interprets this scene as Antoinette narcissistically appropriating otherness and failing to perceive the inherent difference between herself and Tia (37-8). Indeed, Tia's violence in this context suggests an

attempt to shatter the colonial mirror and make visible the distinctions between herself and Antoinette. The creole girl's agenda becomes clearer during her final dream sequence when the parrot (a bird which speaks only by mimicking others) asks "Qui est la?" and Antoinette looks over the wall to see Tia. Most critics agree that this scene suggests a confirmation of the creole's West Indian identity through unity with Tia.[3] Clearly, this confirmation can only be dreamed or imagined because in reality racial difference intervenes. Antoinette thus presents multiple, competing levels of mimicry. Ultimately, the child's emulation of her patriarchally-identified mother does not allow subsequent identifications with Tia and Christophine due to the narcissism of imperialism, which posits only the false difference of racism.

A final aspect of colonial ideology that is undermined through the suggestion of other narratives is the concept of objective historical time. As in *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys traces a counter-narrative to linear progressions of time through Afro-Caribbean history and dream sequences. Sandra Drake argues that references to the West Indian history of resistance against colonial rule presents a

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[3] Interpretations by Fayad, Niesen de Abruna, and Suarez and Lopez all schematize the ending as Antoinette affirming her West Indian identity and, ultimately, triumphing over oppression.

counter-narrative to English versions of history (100). Details such as Christophine's name, the practice of obeah, the reference to being "marooned" (a name for West Indian guerilla camps) and Antoinette's final act of setting fire to the white colonizer's house all recall alternative histories. Similarly, Antoinette's narrative denies the importance of chronological time, as she says in Part III, "only I know how long I have been here. Nights and days and days and nights, hundreds of them slipping through my fingers. But that does not matter. Time has no meaning" (151). As opposed to Rochester's narrative, which constantly refers to his watch and the time of day, Antoinette suggests that "objective" time is arbitrary, just as any purportedly "objective" narrative is an interested construction suppressing alternative histories. In exposing this ambivalent denial of difference upon which Western culture is based, Rhys disrupts yet another form of imperial authority.

The preceding pages have offered a reading of Jean Rhys's text for ways in which it expands upon Bronte's original narrative and reveals the converging agendas of patriarchy and imperialism which contribute to Bertha's violent enclosure. Mimicry and a differential understanding of female identity formation can be used to establish the distinctions and overlapping classificatory schemes which exist between sexist discourse and Britain's

colonial project. In Rhys's narrative, women reproduce themselves through fragmentation and self-alienation, while class is contextualized within the problematic ideology of imperialism. Colonial organizational structures are similarly displaced to reveal the oppression which characterizes all homogenizing ideologies.

CONCLUSION

In my introduction to this thesis, I indicated that a central problem pervading the critical analysis of Jean Rhys's texts is that the narratives do not comply with established literary categories. Suggesting instead that heterogeneity is a persistent theme within Rhys's work, I examined several of her narratives for ways in which they locate and sustain difference. The obvious theoretical hindrance to such a reading lay, however, in the in-built biases which problematize any Western attempt to read outside traditionally homogenous perspectives. Although these concerns must frame my discussion of Rhys's work, I believe that certain approaches within postcolonial theory have succeeded in juxtaposing the interests of various theoretical categories and have thereby exposed the values as well as limitations of such methods. Using a similar approach, the text of this thesis sets in opposition psychoanalytic, feminist and postcolonial theories in an attempt to read Jean Rhys's work for the important dislocations which it exposes within homogenizing categories of race, gender, class and nationality. Only through such disruptive reading strategies can the larger cultural implications of Rhys's work be elucidated.

"Again the Antilles" offered a succinct introduction to the complexities which surround colonial and gender

relations. Not only does Rhys examine the parodic relations between a male, English colonizer and a West Indian man of colour in this story, but she also questions the place of white creole women within predominantly masculine debates surrounding race and cultural identity. Ultimately, the authority of the Englishman is displaced by the mimicking gaze of Papa Dom, whose authority is in turn displaced by the female creole narrator. In these ways, Western concepts of narrative authority and historical "objectivity" are rendered questionable in the story and made to appear as the interested constructs they really are.

Anna, from *Voyage in the Dark*, presents a more sustained analysis of social categorization, both in terms of gender restrictions and in terms of class and nationalistic structures. Having revealed the false homogeneity which gender roles impose upon women (whom many feminist psychoanalysts perceive as inherently diverse and multiple), Rhys proceeds, in this text, to depict the ways in which her protagonist is further categorized and then devalued according to class and national prejudices. Anna's cultural difference becomes increasingly disruptive to English classificatory schemes until, by the end of the novel, chronological time and historical truth are displaced by the dream progressions and multiple viewpoints

that are identified with female, West Indian subject positions.

In the ensuing chapters, I examined two short stories, "The Day They Burned the Books" and "Let Them Call it Jazz," in terms of their directly political applications. "The Day They Burned the Books" reveals the far-reaching levels of classification within colonial society, as Rhys depicts each character being falsely placed in some form of social category. These obvious homogenizations of difference displace colonial authority and suggest points of resistance within the text. However, as the narrator re-incorporates events into her white, creole perspective, Rhys tellingly traces the manipulative effects of language and fictional narrative. In the subsequent examination of "Let Them Call it Jazz," I apply these concerns to Rhys's own work, questioning whether a white author can, in fact, adopt the voice of a coloured woman without conducting some form of ideological appropriation. Although this issue remains controversial within literary criticism, Rhys appears to establish clear limits to her textual authority, leaving gaps in her narrative which acknowledge differential experience.

Wide Sargasso Sea presents the most complex examination of social categories, as Rhys not only explores various forms of race, gender, class and national difference, but also juxtaposes narrative viewpoints. The

characters of Christophine, Tia, Daniel, Mason, Rochester, Annette and Antoinette offer multiple perspectives on the discrimination which both patriarchy and imperialism engender. Ultimately, history is re-defined in this novel as a subjective narrative that is developed through the suppression of other, equally valid, narratives. *Wide Sargasso Sea* thus develops a powerful argument for heterogeneity, both within ideological concepts and as a theoretical approach toward Rhys's texts. Through reading disruptively, not only can one recover the thematic complexity of Jean Rhys's work, but new concepts of time, historical narrative, objective knowledge and social role-playing inevitably emerge from the rupture of patriarchal/imperialist thought.

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