

HEROIC REVISION: THE TRIUMPH OF JEAN RHY'S DARK VOYAGE

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ABSTRACT

Despite the recent focus of feminist criticism on women's writing as a confrontation with and revision of dominant (male) traditions, the fiction of Jean Rhys remains largely neglected by such studies of a distinctively female literary mythos. Critics generally continue to read Rhys's work as simply a repeated pattern of failed heroism -- the woman-as-victim -- rather than a revised heroic of female survival. The power and success of Rhys's fiction, however, depends upon perceiving her oeuvre not as a literal duplication of Rhys's own "underdog" experience in a man's world, but as a complex narrative process in which sexual difference translates into textual differences of genre, structure, and voice. From *Quartet* (1928) to *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Rhys proposes a fictional dialogue with convention in which anger and sexuality become sources of female creative power.

Initially conceived as an antagonistic personal dialogue with Ford Madox Ford, *Quartet* begins Rhys's quest for a whole new fictional language that might resolve the disjunction between feeling and form for a woman writer in a male-dominated culture. Thus Chapter One examines Ford's *The Good Soldier* in order to outline the literary and cultural background against which Rhys struggled to develop her unique fictional mask. In *The Good Soldier* a systematic structure of signs reveals a content that is untenable for a woman writer, a social metaphor which Rhys, when she begins

her own "tale of passion," must radically revise. Demonstrating what Rhys's writing is *not*, *The Good Soldier* makes both the structural and thematic terms of *Quartet* more explicit.

Following this analysis of Ford's text, Chapter Two demonstrates how *Quartet* substitutes for *The Good Soldier's* idealism a dynamic "female realism." Consciously manipulating historical "fact," Rhys's autobiographical fiction proposes a countermythology to Ford's nihilistic rationalizations. First conceived of by Rhys as a four act play, *Quartet* develops as a kind of discussion drama that explores the ambiguity of female initiation into a patriarchal social and symbolic realm. Marya's compulsive sensibility suggests the heroic possibilities of passionate "passivity."

Rhys's final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, revises Charlotte Bronte's compromise with Victorian morality and conventional literary structures by imagining the story of Bronte's mad woman in the attic. The dynamic narrative of Antoinette Bertha Rochester becomes the culmination of Rhys's writing throughout which the erotic impulses of her heroines constitute the moral urgency of the fiction. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an erotic dream narrative that exposes a radically different female imagination. Analyzing both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* as novels of female development, Chapters Three and Four reveal the depth of Rhys's artistic vision -- her ability to subvert the involuntary codes of Bronte's realism and thus to revolutionize traditional concepts of female culture and identity. Rhys translates Bronte's Gothic restraint into Romantic excess creating, at the same time, an internalized quest motif, an authentically Female literature.

The process of Rhys's fiction identifies and, finally, explodes the characteristically feminine signification of desire, "a room of one's own" -- both Marya's inner-space and Antoinette's attic prison. In her last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys's fictional narration is liberated from the confines of personal space and expresses a more liberated desire: the firing of Thornfield Hall. Ironically, then, Rhys's first novel, *Quartet*, deconstructs Ford's fictional myth by imposing a characteristically female realism. Conversely, her final novel transposes the mimetic impulse of *Jane Eyre* -- a standard text in Victorian realism -- into mythopoesis. Discovering the "other" texts of conventional literature and patriarchal culture, Rhys's fiction develops from realism to myth. But her final "dream truth" is, significantly, the expression of an other reality. As opposed to the modernist myth of perpetual alienation, Rhys's final myth of heroic revision derives from a triumphant affirmation of the significance of female relationships -- to language, to other texts, and to each other.

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CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One	32
Chapter Two	56
Chapter Three	111
Chapter Four	139
Conclusion	183
Bibliography	190

INTRODUCTION

Subject, Self, Script: Women's Writes

The field of the writer is nothing but writing itself, not as the pure "form" conceived by an aesthetic of art for art's sake, but, much more radically, as the only area [espace] for the one who writes.-- Roland Barthes(1)

"To write," transitive or intransitive, is a transcription -- whether of consciousness or of other texts. Writing articulates an active confrontation with culture, a means of entry into the realm of authority where the word is indeed in the beginning. But for the woman writer, this w/rite of initiation is complicated by the fact that literary conventions, no less than social structures, express the dominant (male) culture: for the female artist, writing implies subverting existing linguistic codes that inscribe the world made in the image of man.(2) As Margaret Homans explains, "where the major literary tradition normatively identifies the figure of the poet as masculine, and voice as a masculine property, women writers cannot see their minds as androgynous, or as sexless, but must take part in a self-definition by contraries."(3) Outlining the "masculine tradition" as it developed out of Romanticism, Homans reveals the fundamental alienation of the woman writer from the "internalized quest" romance structure of the major literary texts themselves: "where the masculine self dominates and internalizes otherness, that other is frequently identified as feminine, whether she is nature,

the representation of a human woman, or some phantom of desire."(4)
 The concept of poetic language as "double" discourse, reveals the inherently radical nature of female literature: to write, the woman artist is compelled to "forge a self out of the materials of otherness."(5)

The autobiographical fiction of Jean Rhys, then, necessarily constitutes a process of self-determination in which the subject is the text, and the collapse of authorial distance expresses the nature of the narrative project -- to shape a life in story and in fact. As Rhys herself writes in her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please*, figuration is a dynamic process of self-definition, which is generated by instincts of survival: "I must write. If I stop writing my life will have been an abject failure. It is that already to other people. But it could be an abject failure to myself. I will not have earned death."(6) The attraction of women writers to personal forms of expression like letters, autobiographies, confessional poetry, diaries, and journals, as Susan Gubar points out, indicates the result of the conventional literary identification of female sexuality with textuality, the traditional characterization of woman as artifact: "the model of the pen-penis writing on the virgin page participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation -- a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality."(7) The female writer, by authorizing her own text, necessarily deconstructs the myth of male primacy, but "the sense that she is herself the text means that there is little distance

between her life and her art."(8)

That the biographical facts of Jean Rhys's own life apparently have a direct relationship to her fiction, however, presents an irresistible temptation to critics who would confuse the artist's personality with her art and read her novels not as coherent fictions but as covert statements on the condition of women, as the true confessions of a woman of the world. Reading her work in the context of conventional literature, critics denigrate Rhys's fiction as excessively familiar (i.e., non-literary). Further, critics deny the heroic capacity of her heroines by labelling them "passive" and "parasitic." Sondra J. Stang's analysis of *Quartet* provides a typical example of the "bad reputation" characteristically extended to both Jean Rhys and her heroines:

What strikes the reader is the closeness of Miss Rhys's identification as a novelist with the special consciousness of her heroine (and it is, of course, her special strength as a writer to project it so successfully), that of a temperament essentially passive, "soft and thin-skinned," clinging, even parasitic -- forced to live independently and unable to do it. Locked into categories of dominance and debasement, Miss Rhys sees experience simply and externally, no less so than her heroines see it, and with no distance from their bitterness and self-pity.(9)

Revealing the "special consciousness" of Rhys's heroine to be both simple and somewhat deplorable, Stang adopts the self-righteous tone of many of Rhys's critics. According to a bourgeois morality and conventional masculine paradigm in which "soft and thin-skinned" negates heroic authority, then, both Jean Rhys and her writing emerge as somehow pitiful. Rhys's fiction is repeatedly disparaged for its "lack of aesthetic distance" and misread as a simplistic

feminist diatribe. Both approaches produce closed and reductive readings of texts that are infinitely suggestive. The recent "rediscovery" of the fiction of Jean Rhys, then, though prompted by the increased attention to an approach to literature by which the nature of female experience becomes of primary interest, focuses precisely on what Patricia M. Spacks in "The Difference It Makes," sees as characterizing an outmoded critical perspective towards women's writing. Critics repeatedly point to Rhys's "circumscribed canvas," her "narrow track," and her repetition of the same "psychological type." (10) Numerous descriptions of Rhys's single female protagonist alternately present Marya, from Rhys's first novel, *Quartet* (1928), and Antoinette, from her final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), as prototypes of the Rhys anti-heroine. This type is, states Walter Allen in his review, "Bertha the Doomed," "a young woman, generally Creole in origin and artistic leanings, who is hopelessly and helplessly at sea in her relations with men, a passive victim, doomed to destruction." (11)

Allen's description, like most critical discussions of Rhys's fiction, is not only tediously reductive but also misleading. Though Jean Rhys herself was born in the West Indies to an English Creole mother, the character Marya is not Creole in origin but a British expatriate, a fact that significantly contributes to the development of Rhys's first published novel, *Quartet*. Todd K. Bender similarly reduces the pathos of Rhys's art to the pathetic self-revelations of a victimized female. Rather preposterously, Bender suggests that Rhys's personal affair with Ford Madox Ford in 1927 led to her identification with the mad woman in the attic of

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, and hence to the writing of *Wide Sargasso Sea* -- more than thirty years later!(12) Finally, Elgin Mellown, referred to by Peter Wolfe as "Jean Rhys's best critic,"(13) provides some of the most devastating comments on Jean Rhys's artistry. In his much quoted article, "The Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys," Mellown describes the Rhys character type as a "figure of degraded womanhood,"(14) and recommends that "the Rhys woman may be mistress in name, but in fact she is always a victim of love because she is at the mercy of her uncontrollable desires."(15) Mellown describes Antoinette Mason's narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, considered the culmination of Rhys's technical and thematic complexity,(16) as the "poignant memory of the frustrated nymphomaniac."(17)

The problem with most criticism of Rhys, then, whether self-consciously feminist or explicitly conventional is suspiciously similar to the one Spacks identifies in pre-Feminist criticism of Jane Austen: it is characterized by the critics inability to perceive her work in terms other than those derived from a patriarchal literary and cultural tradition, to see her autobiographical fiction not as the compulsive scribblings of another neurotic woman, but as the deviant fictions of a *female* artist. Confusing Rhys's life with the lives of her female characters, critics confine both the writer and her heroines to the acting out of female stereotypes: from the passive victim of an unalterably dismal fate -- the fate of the woman writer / the fate of the fallen woman(18) -- to the sexual woman whose desire is characterized as both masochistic and insatiable (i.e.

fundamentally perverse). Moreover, by assuming that her work is unmediated self-expression, critics limit the power of Rhys's art to transcend the real facts of oppression, to witness a revolution of the commonplace. When Thomas F. Staley claims that "even with success and great age, Jean Rhys has not escaped her own fictional heroines," he effectively denies both the woman and her art.(19) Staley's subsequent analysis of expressions of a "female consciousness" in Rhys's novels, becomes a particularly insidious form of sexist criticism, revealing, like much criticism of Rhys, significantly more about the critic than about her fiction.

Part of the strength of feminist criticism has been to re-examine the relationship between fiction and actuality, and to revolutionize conventional conceptions of literature by suggesting a specifically feminine (or masculine) imaginative mode. If literature is the language of desire, gender becomes a significant coordinate in the relation of texts. Even the most conservative feminist critics conceive of writing as not "verbal icons" but "a living body of verbal relations."(20) Feminist critics assert a revisionist polemic and a political mission. As Spacks states, "the feminist who turns her or his attention to literature says loudly that literature matters --literature as well as women -- and it matters specifically because of its relation to actuality."(21)

However, by focusing on the "authority of experience," the woman writer's point of departure from the "feminine" archetypes derived from a patriarchal tradition, feminist criticism apparently generates its own paradoxical prescripts, a new conceptual framework

for the aesthetic problem of "imitation" -- a problem that has perplexed philosophers since Plato censured art as "a copy of a copy." And the "trap of feminist literalism" -- the categorical imperative that a woman must express her experience as a woman and that it must be true -- emerges as the most serious limitation of any literary analysis of a "female imagination." As Homans argues,

although it is appropriate that readers learn to expand their notions of what constitutes acceptable poetic subject matter, this emphasis on truth implies a mistaken, or at least naive, belief about language's capacity not just for precise mimesis but for literal duplication of experience. . . . Patriarchal culture may have particularly misused language in its perceptions of women, as feminist arguments maintain, but language is inherently fictive and creates masks whether or not the speaker or writer wishes it.(22)

More recent feminist criticism, however, attempts to reconcile mimetic and expressive theories by focusing on women's writing as expressions of female talent struggling with a male tradition in which sexual difference translates into literary differences of genre, structure, voice, and plot. Analyzing the relationships between texts written by women and men, feminist critical theory has significantly contributed to progress in seeing, as Northrop Frye suggests, not more *in* a particular work, but more of it. In order to discover not the "babbling" female, the inarticulate victims of patriarchal culture and literature, but the articulate expressions by women writers of an authentically female language, feminist criticism searches for "its own subject, its own system, its own theory, and its own voice."(23) Revised critical paradigms attempt to open the texts of women rather than to suppress the female writer's claim to authority by exposing in her work a circumscribed

canvas identical with the author's own narrow existence. In these more acutely literary analyses of female writing, women emerge, as Elizabeth Abel indicates, "no longer the passive victims of male authorial desire but rather as powerful figures that elicit texts crafted to appropriate or mute their difference."(24)

To interpret Rhys's writing as the literal duplication of her experience, to read in her novels simply two categories of role and character -- "underdog"/ "top dog"(25) -- or to perceive in her work repeated episodes of sexual politics which inevitably produce the casualties of the sex war"(26) is equally to reduce Jean Rhys's peculiarly powerful fiction. But contemporary feminist criticism suggests a provocative re-reading of Rhys's fiction as the terms of a confrontation with, rather than a failure within, the dominant cultural order. Emphasizing the autobiographical aspect of women's writing as *prophetic* as opposed to *representational*, feminist criticism provides considerable insight into both the significance of Rhys's fiction and the inability of many critics to come to terms with it. Read as a process of inscribing an "ideology of difference" rather than unsuccessfully imitating masculine literary conventions, Rhys's intensely autobiographical fiction emerges not as a repeated pattern of failed heroism but a revised heroic of female survival. And the implications of this are far-reaching indeed.

Through her compulsion to "'get it right, to get it down exactly as it really was,'" (27) Rhys attempts to write herself, to inscribe femininity and hence to transcend the peculiarly female terror of

not the word made flesh but the flesh made word.(28) A feminine practice of writing, Helene Cixous predicts, "will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate."(29) Jean Rhys, excluded from the main literary tradition by virtue of her sex, and culturally unidentifiable even in terms of her native heritage -- only recently has she been claimed^{as} a "West Indian" writer -- emerges as just such a potentially revolutionary figure. Starting "from fact," Rhys's autobiographical fiction systematically resists the formal conventions which appropriate femininity in the terms of a masculine culture but, at the same time, discovers her own dynamic fictional mask, the tropes of an authentically female literature -- politically subversive by its very nature. The "circumscribed" fiction of Jean Rhys in fact presents a peculiarly female "inner space," a self-enclosed fictional world where the contents of experience are minutely explored to provide the means of entry into a mysteriously *female* "language lined with flesh." Consciously or unconsciously, Rhys's fiction is compelled by revolutionary impulses -- "to dislocate the 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it."(30) By choosing to write in the chasm separating form and content, the "immanent" and the "apparent," Rhys's autobiographical fiction reveals not a revolt against the separation of self and fiction, but, more emphatically, the female writer's search for a legitimate symbol of the writing act, where her own life is offered as textual subject and, finally, as product of the fictional process.

Culture in all aspects is a language. But women's culture --

that aspect of female experience which remains alien to men -- must be articulated by deviation from conventional discourse: "all language is the language of the dominant order, and women, if they speak at all, must speak through it."(31) Therefore, the space that Rhys finds for her own is an interval, the place between bounded "cosmologies" and discovered "fragments." Barthes suggests that *interlocution* -- "the articulation of an intersubjectivity structured within and around the discourses available to it at any moment in time" -- cannot be accomplished "simply by wishing, but only by a deep, patient, and often circuitous descent into the labyrinths of meaning."(32) The textual labyrinths of Rhys's oeuvre, moreover, effect a process of becoming -- for the fiction, the artist, and writing "Female." From the autobiographical realism of *Quartet*, to the "polyphonic" form of *Wide Sargasso Sea* which incorporates a carnivalesque structure, Jean Rhys structures a dialogical discourse that characteristically "reads another writing, reads itself and constructs itself through a process of destructive genesis."(33)

Barthes concludes his enquiry into the concept of the writer "being no longer one who writes *something*, but one who writes, absolutely," by asserting the ultimate status of the subject of the discourse:

"In the modern verb of middle voice to write the subject is immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it. The case of the Proustian narrator is exemplary: he exists only in writing."(34)

Existing only in writing, then, the voice of Jean Rhys discovers the

tenor of prophesy. Speaking through the language of the dominant order, her fiction becomes an iconoclastic process that moves not towards greater "objectivity," the logic of *distance*, but towards profound subjectivity, the logic of *relationship*. V.S. Naipaul provides one of the most poignant tributes to Rhys's final accomplishment:

Her achievement is very grand. . . . What she has written about she has endured, over a long life; and what a stoic thing she makes the act of writing appear.(35)

* * *

In order to reveal Jean Rhys's work as a complex process, therefore, I have chosen to analyze her first long novel, *Quartet*, as a confrontation with the ideological premises of the fiction of her literary mentor, Ford Madox Ford. Ford's masterpiece, *The Good Soldier*, and Rhys's *Quartet* are both considered intensely autobiographical(36) and both deal with the emotional dynamics of a love triangle. Hence my analysis of *Quartet* as a radically different kind of fiction and as a rejection of the masculine tenets of Ford's fictional heroics, follows logically from my analysis of Ford's *The Good Soldier*. In the final two chapters of the thesis I analyze Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Rhys's final work, *Wide Sargasso Sea* as both diverse and complementary versions of the female novel of development. The relationship between these two novels is both more direct and more complex than that between *The Good Soldier* and *Quartet*. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Jean Rhys attempts

to write Bertha Rochester a life, to liberate *Jane Eyre's* mad woman from the attic. Thus Rhys brilliantly challenges not only Bronte's portrait of the "'paper tiger' lunatic,"(37) but, more generally, confronts the Western cultural ideology from which Bronte's mad woman derives, an ideology in which "(sexual) pleasure (the advent of non-sense which multiplies sense) is granted to women provided it isn't discussed."(38)

Rhys's final novel becomes the culmination of her writing throughout which the erotic impulses of her heroines constitute the moral urgency of the fiction: *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an erotic dream narrative that exposes a female imaginary radically different from that expressed by conventional literary forms. As Susan Gubar suggests of contemporary female fiction, "just as sexuality was previously identified with textuality, the text itself now becomes infused with potent sexual energy."(39) Rhys incorporates the intense emotional texture of Bronte's novel but, unlike Bronte, she refuses to confine this within a patriarchal cultural script -- Bronte's domestic romance. Writing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys herself recognized her compulsive drive to create a radical form of fiction: "Why the effort to make a run of the mill "romantic novel" into something else. Because I could not help it. It walked in on me."(40) Thus Rhys translates Bronte's Gothic restraint into Romantic excess creating, at the same time, an internalized quest motif, an authentically Female literature. *Wide Sargasso Sea* becomes both a confrontation with and a corollary to Charlotte Bronte's text -- as Rhys wrote of her obsession with *Jane Eyre*, "sometimes I have wondered if Miss Bronte does not want her book

tampered with."(41) Throughout her arduous struggle to write *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys understandably longs for "an entirely new way of writing. New words, new everything. . . ."(42) My purpose in this thesis will be to outline the process of Rhys's final success. First, however, it is necessary to investigate the origins of Rhys's writing and to suggest the multiple discourses within and around which the intersubjectivity of her fiction begins to take shape.

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Female Writing and the Anxiety of Influence:

The Ford/Rhys Affair

. . . One likes, in short, to be connected with something good, and Miss Rhys's work seems to me to be very good, so vivid, so extraordinarily distinguished by the rendering of passion, and so true, that I wish to be connected with it. I hope I shall bring her a few readers and so when -- hundreds of years hence! -- her ashes are translated to the Pantheon, in the most voluminous pall, the cords of which are held by the most prominent of the Haute Bourgeoisie of France, a grain or so of my scattered and forgotten dust may go in too, in the folds. -- Ford Madox Ford(43)

The term "space" refers to very different concepts: there is a physical space and a mental space for everyone. These two concepts have in common the capacity to be invaded: one by violence, the other by indiscretion. -- Claudine Herrmann(44)

Challenging the traditional distinction between "literature" and "criticism," the deconstructionist focus on *all* language as essentially rhetorical provides an especially intriguing perspective on works excluded from the "literary canon" and stigmatized by a descriptive discourse apparently oblivious of the complex system of

values underlying all statements of "fact." Self-evident "truths" of literary interpretation, and a systematic criticism that presumes literature is an "autonomous verbal structure," disguise the language of criticism as itself historically defined, as itself a cultural mythology. As Barthes recognized, "nothing in principle prevents a meta-language from becoming in its turn the language-object of a new metalanguage." (45) But if modern literary theory largely aims to conceal its complicity in perpetuating the dominant cultural ideology, modern critical practice -- the "dishevelled amateurism" that characterizes the present crisis in literary studies (46) -- more obviously functions to confirm prejudices and reinforce the power-relations of an oppressive body politic. Thus the criticism of *Quartet*, which repeatedly faults Jean Rhys for her lack of aesthetic distance and her passive, masochistic heroine, assumes certain "formal universals" which are, finally, specific fictions -- bourgeois and sexist.

The peculiar circumstances surrounding the writing of *Quartet*, and the ambiguous reception by both early and more recent critics of Jean Rhys's first published novel (and extended to her work as a whole) demands some consideration. *Quartet*'s relationship to actual events, to other fictions, and to conventional criticism, reveals Rhys's writing as in response both to real-life pressures and conflicts and to her desperate need to fictionalize her experience in order to transcend its immediacy. *Quartet* begins under the influence of Ford Madox Ford, but concludes by asserting a counter poetic. Thus Rhys's first novel initiates her life-long struggle to discover a fictional voice to alter established values, literary and

social.

The basic situation of *Quartet* derives from Jean Rhys's own experience of being taken in by Ford Madox Ford and his wife, Stella Bowen, after her first husband's arrest on a charge of illegal entry into France and of offending against currency regulations while in Vienna.(47) The subject matter is in fact so close to actual circumstances that the editors at Jonathan Cape -- the publishers of Rhys's first collection of short stories, *The Left Bank* -- refused to publish *Quartet* because of possible libel action by Ford. Interestingly, however, though critics perceive the biographical aspect of *Quartet* as impeding authorial distance in the novel, as a serious limitation to a clarity of focus and the aesthetic enlargement of vision, the biographical content of Ford's *The Good Soldier* is considered the source of his success. Ford's indubitable artistic accomplishment in *The Good Soldier* is seen to derive from his intense personal involvement, overtly and applaudingly biographical.(48) Thus while the critical dismissal of the unrefined "realism" of *Quartet* helps to perpetuate the novel's relative obscurity, Ford's novel of "verisimilitude" standardly appears on university syllabi. *The Good Soldier* is not denigrated as narrow-minded, but celebrated as the testament of Ford's almost crippling narcissism(49) and the triumphant product of his neurotic obsession with perfect form, with the ideal of an autonomous fiction rising crystalline and pure in defiance of actual experience: "it is to be remembered," wrote Ford, "that a passage of good prose is a work of art absolute in itself and with no more dependence on its contents than is a fugue of Bach."(50) Predictably, in the terms of

mainstream criticism Ford's "madness" translates as heroic, a measure of his creative intensity: Ford's genius is autonomous.

Excluded from Ford's charmed circle by virtue of her sex, however, Jean Rhys is systematically barred from the bourgeois literary canon. For "writing slant," in Emily Dickinson's words, Rhys is dismissed as "eccentric" rather than heralded as "mad about literature." (51) Perceived as deriving, as Ford himself insists in his "Preface" to *The Left Bank*, from a "singular *instinct* for form" (my italics), Rhys's fiction is systematically reduced to that which is other than "literature" -- to confessional sketches lacking the breadth of major literary works but nevertheless possessing a certain primitive power. While Ford's work aspires to great art, Rhys's fiction remains a quirk of nature.

The vested interests of this patriarchal hegemony are only too obvious. Critical discourse is power, the power to suppress fiction which violates the ideological presuppositions of the dominant culture -- those "modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power." (52) In fact, the peculiar potential of *Quartet* to provoke from even the most phlegmatic critics vehement criticisms of the moral credibility of both the author and her autobiographical heroine marks Jean Rhys's first published novel as profoundly antithetical to the received literary tradition. The criticism of *Quartet* -- tautological and prescriptive, derived from cultural premises alien to the author's experience -- suggests, however, the crucial need for a re-reading of her work according to

an entirely new conceptual framework. Rather than failing to manipulate fictional structures, *Quartet* resists inappropriate conventions, searches for a new fictional form, and demands to be received on its own terms -- female and subversive rather than crudely realistic and derivative of Ford, Rhys's male mentor.(53) Indeed, rather than desiring to emulate or associate herself with the mastery of others, Rhys writes of her savage desire for personal (and, presumably, creative) independence: "I simply cannot understand why so many people imagine that I'm a bit of rather battered ivy waving around -- looking for any old oak to cling to, because I'm really a Savage Individualist."(54) In the following discussion I will try to suggest some of the complexity of the dialogue between historical "fact" and literary "fictions" that originates in *Quartet* and continues throughout Rhys's literary career. By outlining the context against which Rhys began to write, I hope to emphasize the radical nature of her work, the peculiar force of Rhys's fundamentally feminine voice.

As several critics note, *Quartet* blazons both Rhys's personal relationship with Ford and her tutelage in Ford's techniques of modernist writing. According to Thomas F. Staley, Ford "introduced" Rhys to modern literature by providing her with reading lists, copies of the *transatlantic review* (1923-24), and other magazines that contained the best contemporary writing.(55) Through Ford, Rhys met prominent figures of the literary world -- Joyce and Hemingway, among others -- and became well-versed in Ford's technical conception of "*progression d'effet*," the idea that "every word set on paper -- every word set on paper -- must carry the story forward

and, that as the story progressed, the story must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and more intensity."(56) "He knew all about writing," Rhys says of Ford during Staley's interview (7 June 1977).(57)

But Staley, of course, takes as straight talk what may in fact be as ironically double-voiced as Rhys's fiction: despite Ford's heralded patronage, *Quartet* is as much a revolt against the limitations of the tenets of Ford's modernism -- patriarchal and sexually exclusive, as I hope to demonstrate -- as it is an assumption of his technical devices, such as fragmentary and elliptical dialogue, time-shifts, simple diction, and "the slow building up of the narrative from a quiet start through a gradual speeding up and intensification of the reader's impression to a climax of his involvement in the feelings of the narrator."(58) Diane Athill, Rhys's editor at Andre Deutch, claims Rhys "started *Quartet* because she was very angry with Ford and wanted to pay him back."(59) But the simple impulse for personal vindication becomes a complex search for a fictive language that might identify a specifically female experience, that might transcend the conservative impulse of Ford's modernism by imposing not androgyny -- Virginia Woolf's aesthetic "flight" from sexual and social engagement(60) -- but a literature in which anger and sexuality become sources of female creative power. When Rhys begins to write, it is in some very immediate sense to "excise the phallic master."(61)

The implication of Ford in *Quartet* not only reveals Jean Rhys's

first published novel as a response to a peculiarly sexualized "anxiety of influence," but also places *Quartet* within the context of several other works that recall the Ford/Rhys affair. In his article, "What 'Really' Happened?" Paul Delany lists six texts that provide diverse versions of the same set of events and therefore "demonstrate the extreme and inescapable textuality of the affair": *Drawn From Life*, Stella Bowen's autobiography; *Barred*, Rhys's English translation of the autobiographical novel written by her first husband, Jean Lenglet; *Sous Les Verrous*, Lenglet's original text; *The Good Soldier*, Ford's "prospective" text; *When The Wicked Man*, Ford's "retrospective" text; and *Quartet*.⁽⁶²⁾ Misreadings of *Quartet*, then, derive not only from the common expectations of literary critics schooled in the elitist prescripts of "great traditionalism," but also from conventional cultural interpretations of the real-life love triangle which structures the central situation of Rhys's novel. The Ford/Rhys affair is, in fact, largely conjectural, the fictional subject of artists and critics alike, providing "unreliable stories on the one hand, and a scarcity of direct evidence on the other."⁽⁶³⁾ Therefore, the standard reconstruction of the affair as Rhys's fortunate fall and Ford's unfortunate "entanglement,"⁽⁶⁴⁾ becomes especially suspect. As Delany notes, "historical evidence of the connection between these two writers is very skimpy; literary evidence is plentiful, but the very multiplicity of the texts bearing on the affair makes the 'truth' of it more elusive."⁽⁶⁵⁾ The universally accepted view of *Quartet* as simply "the novel [Rhys] wrote about her affair with Ford,"⁽⁶⁶⁾ the literal revenge of the cast-off woman, however,

signifies the manner in which Rhys's fiction is kept peripheral and Jean Rhys regarded as a caricature of herself, a bitter old woman.

Delany's article issues a general warning to reserve judgement in the abstract arena of literary discourse where "text contends with text" and authority becomes a function of internal rather than external coherence. (67) But, in fact, *Quartet* repeatedly points beyond its own self-contained fictional world to challenge the social and literary assumptions of a male-dominated culture. Moreover, the intertextuality of *Quartet* exposes the complex attitudes towards the affairs of women in a culture in which female sexuality is fetishized and repressed, therefore denied credibility. As Vivian Gornick explains, the *idea* of woman is real -- the temptress, the goddess, the child, the mother -- but the woman herself is not real: "Here, then, the double sexual image of woman: Circe on the one hand, Aurora on the other. All that is evil, all that is ideal. Like a compress for drawing fever, woman is endowed with the sexual unreality that the race longs for, burdened with a life-destroying innocence (for make no mistake: her evil is certainly as innocent of genuine knowledge as is her goldenness) that makes of her, at one and the same time, obsessively sexual and extraordinarily asexual." (68)

Quartet's relationship to other more conventional literary works and to mainstream criticism reveals a comprehensive context within which Jean Rhys's fiction has, from the beginning, been mistaken for a kind of special pleading for personal justification. Deriving from "fact," Rhys's work is largely interpreted as the literal

language of the debased woman seeking "absolution," rather than the imaginative language of the woman writer seeking to inscribe female difference through the medium of fiction. Reconstructions of the Ford/Rhys affair, then, reveal a direct relationship between conventional literary paradigms and the ideological presuppositions of the critical tradition. But more than this, the interpretation of the Ford/Rhys affair reveals the significance of socio-political paradigms to the reading of particular fictions. As a dialogue with both literary and social convention, Rhys's fiction emphasizes that the lives we live affect the stories we tell; that the stories we tell effect the *live* we live.

More than one critic draws an analogy, like Delany, between the members of a jury and the readers of Rhys's fiction. The critical obsession with "what *really* happened," with assigning character motivation and pronouncing implicitly moral "verdicts," reveals a peculiar critical bias towards Rhys's fiction. Delany finally sees Rhys as hoping "shrewdly enough, for history to absolve her," (69) but neglects to examine precisely from what crime it is she hopes -- *shrewdly*, no less -- to be absolved. Concluding that "the reconciling of stories deserves our most careful, serious attention," Delany hesitates to suggest the broader implications of the critic's responsibility as the reconciler of disparate fictions.

If, however, we admit the credibility of Rhys's fiction and allow to Jean Rhys the potentially heroic "status personality" traditionally reserved for the male artist, (70) then the standard interpretations of Rhys's sexual and professional relationship with

Ford as deplorably parasitic and opportunistic are peculiar fictions indeed. Moreover, the discrepancy between *Quartet* and the other fictional accounts of the affair becomes more profoundly significant than simply that of "formal" variations drawn from idiosyncratic perspectives on personal events. The discrepancy characterizes a divorce between that fiction which is culturally amenable and that which is not. In his article, "Jean Rhys and the Genius of Impressionism," Todd K. Bender typically sees Rhys's "genius" as deriving from Ford and his fellow impressionists.(71) But whereas Ford's impressionistic "selection" in *The Good Soldier* is structured by an analysis of manners, a "sentimental" lament for the dissolution of a clearly demarcated social order, Rhys deliberately rejects the validity of such a vision. Rhys does not abandon Ford's general concept of principle (form), but deviates radically from his particular selection (content). As V.S. Naipaul suggests, "it would have been easy for someone of her gifts to become a novelist of manners; but she never pretended she had a society to write about."(72) In contrast with Bowen, Jean Lenglet, and Ford, then, Rhys works outside the dominant culture and her fiction proposes a *dialogue* with convention -- social and literary.

Assimilating Ford's formal sense, Rhys's sketches "begin exactly where they should and end exactly when their job is done," as Ford himself excessively praises. But Rhys's obsession with "shape" and her simultaneous rejection of the cultural script articulated by Ford's modernist techniques, creates the tension that compels her fiction, the paradox that Rhys struggles throughout her life to write-out. Initially conceived as an antagonistic personal dialogue

with Ford, *Quartet* begins Rhys's quest for a whole new language that might resolve the disjunction between feeling and form for a woman writer. Thus Rhys's technical affiliation with a modernist poetic apparently disguises, for both Ford and mainstream critics of her life and works, the more subversive impulse of Rhys's fiction: to fragment the patriarchal control of structures of language and definitions of meanings, to deconstruct the phallogentrism of the Western Humanist tradition by introducing the "other" variable -- female experience, female *jouissance*. Rhys's own version of events does not propose the *enlargement* of self (the distinguishing feature of autobiography)(73) but the *identification* of self. Her fiction structures a conceptual quest that is more than antagonistic, that is, as Cixous predicts of authentically feminine texts, "volcanic."

FOOTNOTES, INTRODUCTION

- (1) Roland Barthes, "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?," in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, Ltd., 1970), p. 144.
- (2) Domna C. Stanton examines the comprehensive effect of a male-dominated discourse on the cultural significance of the female: "The myth of creation sets forth an etiology of naming which every culture has dramatized in praxis and upheld as ideology. By God-given right, men assigned words to things, defined their meanings and thereby determined our reading, our interpretation of the real. . . . Our conceptions of genres and schools, methods and readers, first and second-rate texts, these are the ideological creations of the first, and not the second, sex. Across the span of time, sons faithfully transmitted the literary heritage of the fathers. When they dissented, in readings inevitably based on paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices from the paternal storehouse, sons proclaimed their independent identity and achieved fatherhood in their own right -- a replay of the mythic drama that predicted the exclusion of the female as subject from the symbolic." "The Fiction of *Precioste* and the Fear of Women," *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981), p. 107.
- (3) Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton, New

- Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 3.
- (4) Homans, p. 12.
- (5) Homans, p. 12.
- (6) Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (1979; rpt. Penguin Books, 1981), p. 163.
- (7) Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," *Critical Inquiry*, No. 2 (Winter 1981), p. 247.
- (8) Gubar, p. 252.
- (9) Sondra J. Stang, *Ford Madox Ford* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., Ltd., 1977), pp. 35-6.
- (10) Patricia M. Spacks, "The Difference It Makes," in *A Feminist Perspective in the Academy: The Difference It Makes*, ed. Elizabeth Langland and Walter Grove (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 7-24.
- (11) Walter Allen, "Bertha the Doomed," rev. of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys, *New York Times Book Review*, 18 June 1967, p. 5.
- (12) Todd K. Bender, "Jean Rhys and the Genius of Impressionism," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 11, No. 2 (Fall 1978).
- (13) Peter Wolfe, *Jean Rhys* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980), p. 29.
- (14) Elgin Mellown, "The Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys," *Contemporary Literature* xiii, No. 4 (1972), p. 463.
- (15) Mellown, p. 464.
- (16) A. Alvarez claimed Jean Rhys was "quite simply, the best living English novelist." "The Best Living English Novelist," rev. of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by Jean Rhys, *New York Times Book Review*, 17 March 1974, p. 7.
- (17) Mellown, p. 464.

- (18) In a letter to Selma Vaz Dias (17 September 1963), Rhys documents the personal abuse she regularly endured as a woman writer: "I am disapproved of or worse because *I try to write* (!!!) Well I resent this deeply and bitterly -- and of course it is doing me great harm. I would rather do any work, or bear any hardship than have these onslaughts on something so rooted in me." Jean Rhys, in *Jean Rhys Letters: 1931-1966*, ed. Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1984), p. 240.
- (19) Thomas F. Staley, "The Emergence of a Form: Style and Consciousness in Jean Rhys's *Quartet*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24 (1978), p. 202.
- (20) Daphne Marlatt, "Musing With Mothertongue," *A Room of One's Own*, 8, No. 4 (1984), p. 56.
- (21) Spacks, p. 11.
- (22) Homans, p. 26.
- (23) Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry*, 8, No. 2 (Winter 1981), p. 184.
- (24) Elizabeth Abel, "Editor's Introduction," *Critical Inquiry*, No. 2 (Winter 1981), p. 174.
- (25) See, Stang, p. 34.
- (26) Rosalind Miles, *The Fictions of Sex: Themes and Functions of Sex Difference in the Modern Novel* (London: Vision Press, Ltd., 1974), p. 96.
- (27) Diane Athill, in a letter to Helen Nebeker and quoted in Nebeker's *Jean Rhys, Woman in Passage: A Critical Study of the Novels of Jean Rhys* (Montreal, Quebec: Eden Press Women's

- Publications, 1981), p. vii.
- (28) Gubar, "'The Blank Page,'" p. 250.
- (29) Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," rpt. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 254.
- (30) Cixous, p. 253.
- (31) Showalter, p. 200.
- (32) Barthes, p. 141.
- (33) Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," in her *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Arts*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 77.
- (34) Barthes, p. 143.
- (35) V.S. Naipaul, "Without a Dog's Chance," *New York Review of Books*, (18 May 1972), pp. 29-31.
- (36) In a letter to Francis Wyndham (14 September 1954), Rhys reveals her own attitude toward the biographical content of *Quartet*: "I think [*Quartet*] is angry and uneven as you say, but it has some life and it wasn't autobiography, as everyone here seemed to imagine though some of it was lived of course." *Jean Rhys Letters*, p. 171.
- (37) See, Rhys's letter to Francis Wyndham (14 April 1964): "The Bronte sisters had of course a touch of genius (or much more) especially Emily. So reading "Jane Eyre" one's swept along regardless. But *I*, reading it later, and often, was vexed at her portrait of the 'paper tiger' lunatic, the all wrong Creole

- scenes, and above all by the real cruelty of Mr Rochester." *Jean Rhys Letters*, p. 262.
- (38) Julia Kristeva, "Oscillation between power and denial," *Tel Quel*, (Summer 1974); rpt. *New French Feminisms*, pp. 165-66.
- (39) Gubar, p. 252.
- (40) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 281.
- (41) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 175.
- (42) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 160.
- (43) Ford Madox Ford, "Preface: Rive Gauche," in Jean Rhys, *The Left Bank* (1927; rpt. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), pp. 26-7.
- (44) Claudine Herrmann, "Women in Space and Time," (1976); rpt. *New French Feminisms*, p. 168.
- (45) Roland Barthes, quoted in Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1982), p. 9.
- (46) Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 1983), p. 214.
- (47) Diane Athill, "Jean Rhys and her Autobiography: A Forward," in Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 11.
- (48) See, for example, Thomas Moser's "Preface" to his *The Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. ix-xi.
- (49) See, Arthur Mizener, *The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford*, (New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1971), pp. xvi-xix.
- (50) Quoted in Mizener, p. 255.

- (51) Moser, p. ix.
- (52) Eagleton, p. 15.
- (53) See also, Jennifer Waelti-Walters' discussion of an insidious double-talk in the language of criticism which particularly distorts the texts of women writers: "There is a doubleness in the language of criticism about which one hardly ever speaks in public and yet which is becoming more and more important to me; it is the split that I experience when the critic who writes about a given book does not seem to have read the book that I read, despite the fact that s/he cites the same title and author. This can occur to a greater or lesser degree for any book but when there is no coincidence of perception at all it always seems to be books by women writers that are in question." "Double-Read: On Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm*," *A Room of One's Own* 8, No. 4 (1984), p. 116.
- (54) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 275.
- (55) Thomas F. Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1979), p. 10.
- (56) Ford Madox Ford, quoted from Mellown, p. 468.
- (57) *Jean Rhys*, p. 10.
- (58) Mizener, p. 256.
- (59) Diane Athill, in a letter to Helen Nebeker, quoted from Nebeker's *Woman in Passage*, n. 202.
- (60) See Elaine Showalter, "Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny," *A Literature of Their Own: British Woman Novelists From Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 263-297.

- (61) Discussing the "terror of inspiration" for women writers as "the pain of the passive self whose boundaries are being violated," Susan Gubar suggests the negative response of women writers to the influence of male authority: "like their nineteenth-century foremothers, twentieth-century women often describe the emergence of their talent as an infusion from a male master rather than inspiration from sexual commerce with a female muse. This phallic master causes the woman writer to feel her words are being expressed from her rather than by her." "'The Blank Page,'" p. 256.
- (62) Paul Delany, "What 'Really' Happened?," *Mosaic*, XVI, No. 4 (Fall 1983), p. 15.
- (63) Delany, p. 15.
- (64) Paralleling the events of the Ford/Rhys affair with the plot of *Quartet*, Mizener outrageously casts Ford as the declining man of genius, and Rhys as the reclining opportunist. Mizener's description blatantly distorts both the fiction and the events and effectively denounces the integrity of Jean Rhys -- the woman and the artist: "After six months or so, Heidler tires of Marya and sends her off to the Riviera (which is where Stella and Ford found a job as ghost-writer for Jean Rhys). He offers her a sum of money to leave him alone, but she *clings* to him. If we can take literally Miss Rhys's next novel, *After Leaving Mr. MacKenzie*, Ford remained *firm*." (My italics). *The Saddest Story*, p. 347.
- (65) Delany, p. 15.
- (66) Mizener, p. 345.

- (67) Delany, pp. 23, 16.
- (68) Vivian Gornick, "Woman as Outsider," in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (1971; rpt. New York: Signet Books, 1972), p. 139.
- (69) Delany, p. 22.
- (70) For a discussion of the mythic pattern of the artist as hero, see, Grace Stewart, "Background: Myth, The Artist, and the *Kunstlerroman*" in her *A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine 1877-1977* (Montreal, Quebec: Eden Press Women's Publications, Inc., 1979), pp. 1-9.
- (71) Bender, p. 55.
- (72) Naipaul, p. 30.
- (73) See, however, *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), for interesting discussion of female autobiography as a distinct literary genre; especially, Patricia M. Spacks, "Selves in Hiding," pp. 112-132.

CHAPTER ONE

Falling Sky-gods and Rising Anti-heroes: The Metaphysics of Irony
 in Ford's *The Good Soldier*

Whenever we cut into a literary text, and in whatever direction, we expose, not "content," but a systematic structure of signs in which content is made apprehensible.
 -- David Lodge(1)

The novel serves as both mythic genre and social metaphor. Its patterns reciprocally express and motivate collective beliefs and behavior. Its situations recorded the particular tensions and struggles of an emerging bourgeoisie and the progressive crises of capitalism, urbanization, and loss of faith in traditional authorities. -- Lee Edwards(2)

In his 1927 Dedicatory Letter to Stella Bowen, Ford considers *The Good Soldier* (1915) his "best book," the first and last novel in which he intended to put *all* that he knew about writing: "So I regarded myself as the Eel which, having reached the deep sea, brings forth its young and dies -- or as the Great Auk I considered that, having reached my allotted, I had laid my one egg and might as well die."(3) As a crystallization of both the formal and thematic issues that had absorbed Ford for so long, then, the *The Good Soldier* becomes an especially provocative countertext to *Quartet*: demonstrating what Rhys's work is not, *The Good Soldier* makes both the structural and thematic terms of *Quartet* more explicit.

Ford's fiction aspires to a kind of formal geometry, to the

austere rendering of "the cold, clear flame" in a novel of "neo-classical clarity." (4) But the very paradoxical constructs which pattern *The Good Soldier* reveal the vulnerability of Ford's theoretical abstractions exemplified in his best book -- a vulnerability which Jean Rhys discovers and exploits. In *The Good Soldier* tension is sustained between "paradigm" and "reality," between the received social conventions and the urgent passionate drives of the individual -- conceived as inherently antithetical to social and moral ideals. But Ford's carefully wrought types of ambiguity depend upon a conventional concept of the "dual Nature of Man" which is both inherently patriarchal and inevitably misogynist. In *The Good Soldier* Woman's ontological oneness with Nature (Florence's animal concupiscence and Leonora's rabbit-like reproductive capacity, p. 214) is characteristically opposed to man's duality, his potentially human second nature which Edward Ashburnham perfectly exemplifies as the good soldier but pathetically fails to realize in the privacy of his own home. Mary O'Brien suggests the concrete manifestations of this myth of man's duality which both excludes woman from the realm of culture and authority and perpetuates masculine power structures:

This dual Nature of Man, seen as standing opposed to the single Nature of Woman, is not mere philosophical fantasy. It manifests itself concretely in the separation of public and private life. Dualist man lives in both of these realms, but . . . he lives *humanly* only in the public realm. The private realm is the realm of man's animality, the public realm that of his humanity. The first is governed by necessity and is where Woman lives. The second is created in freedom, and is the realm in which man's first nature is transcended by his second. . . . The separation, abstract and problematic though it in some ways may be, is an important one, both for ordinary man, for whom it is unreal but consoling, and for women, for

whom it is unreal but exploitive.(5)

It is not difficult to see in Ford's text that the concept of Edward Ashburnham's public heroism provides a great source of consolation for Dowell. As the narrator, Dowell represents the voice of the common man, the normative perspective against which the brilliance of Ford's irony depends. And Dowell's profound ambivalence towards Ashburnham exonerates rather than challenges Ashburnham's paradoxical heroism: the good soldier remains an enigma.

The misogynist tendency of Ford's complacent idealism also becomes obvious in *The Good Soldier*. Dangerously dwelling in the parlour, bath house, and boudoir, Ford's women exist as antithetical to Edward Ashburnham's high humanity as "the fine soldier, the excellent landlord, the extraordinarily kind, careful and industrious magistrate, the upright, honest, fair-dealing, fair-thinking, public character" (p. 89). Women, in Ford's novel, corrupt all that the good soldier stands for. Thus, contrary to what Ford maintained was true of all good prose, *The Good Soldier* is neither absolute in itself nor independent of its contents. Rather, the very dependence of Ford's formal dialectic on the content of his fiction necessitates radical structural revision by a woman writer seeking to write herself into existence, to create life fictions. Moreover, Dowell's pervasive ambivalence, the pull and counter-pull within his narrative, suggests a metaphysical irresolution that invites the "process of destructive genesis" which Jean Rhys's explicitly autobiographical fiction proposes. Just as the emergence of "unanswerable puzzles, the paradoxes that always mark the limit

of what a generative idea and intellectual vision will do" indicate the end of each philosophical epoch,(6) the paradoxical vision of *The Good Soldier* signals the exhaustion of the motive concepts of Ford's monolithic theories of fictional purity, the particular ideological presuppositions which govern the choice and execution of Ford's fictional subject. Indeed, Dowell's perplexed narrative becomes finally, "just a record of fatigue" (p. 210).

Critics generally regard *The Good Soldier* as running "parallel with the main currents of literary and artistic modernism"(7) in its dissociation from nineteenth-century assumptions about a shared community of attitudes and sense of reality, its acute self-consciousness, and its expression of Ford's absolute faith in the value of art -- "the one value [modernists] adhered to with total devotion in a universe which they knew and showed to be bewilderingly problematic."(8) By revealing that the very conflict mediated by *The Good Soldier* derives from a specifically male perspective, then, Rhys's writing confronts the ideological constraints of modernism for a female writer. Ford's characteristically modern "anti-hero" (Dowell) who, like the ancient comic hero, retains a superiority to his society, an ironic perception of the absurdity of his narrative quest, becomes a specifically male prerogative in a culture that denies female authority. Moreover, the modernist recognition of life as inexplicable horror, "all a darkness" as Dowell says, assumes a metaphysical framework which a contemporary woman writer would find difficult to appropriate. Maintaining a marginal social status, a woman's authority to profess the truly anti-social vision of Ford's

text remains severely limited. As cultural exile, woman's place is *prescribed* as outside the circle of ordinary human experience and her peripheral cultural position prohibits her from assuming the self-exile posture implied by the modernist recognition of universal darkness and chaos.

In fact, Ford's "principles of selection," derive from the standard exclusion of the female as subject from the symbolic. In *The Good Soldier* a systematic structure of signs reveals a content that is untenable for a woman writer, a social metaphor which Jean Rhys, when she begins her own tale of passion, must radically revise. Rhys undermines Ford's thematic emphasis on a causal relationship between^e the demise of Edwardian idealism and the universal demise of meaning relations, by suggesting the implausibility of Ford's ontological assumption of the dual nature of Man. By inverting Ford's heroic pattern, pathetically impoverished, as Ford's bitter irony itself insists, Rhys affirms the possibility of an alternative heroism, a female heroic pattern that delineates a quest for *reintegrating* an alienated community. And for both Jean Rhys and her heroine, this quest originates in the private realm, with intensely personal experience. Rhys's "female realism" responds to Ford's elegant formalism and implies a whole other perspective to the conceptual framework of his modernist masterpiece, *The Good Soldier*. By first exposing in Ford's fiction the "systematic structure of signs in which content is made apprehensible," then, I hope to provide the literary and cultural background against which Rhys struggled to develop her unique fictional mask and against which she translated sexual difference

into powerful literary differences of structure and voice.

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Criticism of *The Good Soldier* focuses on the epistemological question that structures the text -- What can we know other than our own perplexity? But it fails to examine the nature of the question itself. The extreme subjectivity of any knowledge of human relationships is established by the narrator's absurd unreliability as "chronicler" of this tale of passion, intensified by Dowell's rhetorical questions which insist upon a monstrous discrepancy between appearance and reality, and developed by the powerful juxtaposition of external calm and internal turmoil which characterizes "the saddest story . . . ever heard" -- the catastrophic breaking up of the Dowell's and the Ashburnhams:

Permanence? Stability? I can't believe it's gone, I can't believe that that long, tranquil life, which was just stepping a minuet, vanished in four crashing days at the end of nine years and six weeks. Upon my word, yes, our intimacy was like a minuet, simply because on every possible circumstance we knew where to go, where to sit, which table we unanimously should choose; and we could rise and go, all four together, without a signal from any one of us, always to the music of the Kur orchestra, always in temperate sunshine, or, if it rained, in discreet shelters. . . . No, by God, it is false! It wasn't a minuet that we stepped; it was a prison -- a prison full of screaming hysterics, tied down so that they might not outsound the rolling of our carriage wheels as we went along the shaded avenues of the Taunus Wald. (pp. 13-14).

Apparent social harmony is disrupted by the cacophony of individual hysterics, and while Dowell laments his bitter disillusionment,

Ford's text proclaims the efficacy of art to maintain the values of authority and orderliness amid the social chaos. In a world where nothing may be known "of the hearts of men" (p. 14), the artist functions to show -- but not reconcile -- the "'irresolvable pluralism of truths.'"(9) Propelled by the dynamics of thesis and anti-thesis, however, Ford's perspectivist fiction evades altogether the epistemological question it apparently proposes. *The Good Soldier* captures the "silent listener" (p. 167), and imposes an extreme nihilism which denies the very possibility of human community. Moreover, as Robert Green suggests, implicit in such nihilism "is the futility of attempting to change a world which cannot even be understood."(10)

Ford perceived himself a "well-intentioned English gentleman," a good soldier of British culture,(11) and his fiction "lament[s] the absence of noble values from his world."(12) Hence Ford establishes a corrupted reality as the primary illusion of *The Good Soldier*: "the past is looked back to from a debased present."(13) Initially, Ford presents Dowell's nostalgia for a past time, his bitter sense of lost innocence, as farcical, even hideously absurd:

Or again: Edward Ashburnham was the cleanest looking sort of chap; -- an excellent magistrate, a first rate soldier, one of the best landlords, so they said, in Hampshire, England. To the poor and hopeless drunkards, as I myself have witnessed, he was like a painstaking guardian. . . . You would have said that he was just exactly the sort of chap that you could have trusted your wife with. And I trusted mine and it was madness. . . . At what, then, does it all work out? Is the whole thing a folly and a mockery? Am I no better than a eunuch or is the proper man -- the man with the right to existence -- a raging stallion forever neighing after his neighbour's womankind? (p. 13).

obsessive anxieties."(21) Thus Ford translates his personal experience of a "divided self" -- the legacy of a Victorian conscience vacillating between faith and doubt(22) -- into a fictional form that attempts to express simultaneously the active impulse of the confident public hero (Ashburnham) and the "catalepsy" of the disillusioned, world-weary everyman (Dowell). Ford's "authoritarian" narrative form exemplifies as Green suggests, modernism's claim to be able to build order out of derangement: "in the matrix of this fiction Ford discovered a way of so fashioning sadness that the crystalline order of that rendering only accentuated its poignancy."(23) But finally, however, the powerful ironies of Ford's fiction characterize a moral and intellectual irresolution that may only portray the angst of existence. Ford inherits what Erich Heller describes as the passion for understanding which lured nineteenth-century minds "towards the rational conquest of the human world only in order to prove to them its absolute meaningless."(24) And his literary masterpiece perfectly exemplifies the extreme disillusionment of the Edwardian bourgeoisie: the battle of traditional "culture" is seen as lost to social "anarchy."

Moreover, the fact that Ford equates cultural upheaval with social anarchy, signifies his commitment to a conservative idealism that is both rigorously agnostic and absurdly morally righteous. In the major Victorian novels, the narrative functions as a social discourse that mediates a clash between the outer laws of a homogeneous society and the inner imperatives of the individual. The individual is finally accommodated, however implausibly, within

By the end of the novel, however, "sentimental" functions as the principle term of value in a text antipathetic to change and disorder. *The Good Soldier* articulates a disjunction between individual desire and social code. But Ford's fiction does not suggest further that outmoded conventional gestures might be revised to accommodate individual experience. Instead, the alienation of the individual within society suggests the very concept of "society" as fundamentally diseased. A corrupted normative framework -- Dowell's new world of experience -- is seen to guarantee permanent social malaise. Within the world of Ford's text, the "active, persistent, instinct" which perpetuates society, becomes antithetical to a conservative "sentimentality" perversely refusing to admit the possibility of vital process. Dowell finally conceives Ashburnham's "splendid personality" as both the only available ideal and, paradoxically, as the most profoundly ironic realization of a social vision. As the emblem of civilization, the "good soldier" represents an idealism that is remarkably lifeless.

Ford's modernist vision of a grim reality alienated from the timeless authority of social traditions negates the very possibility of authentic social expression. Thus the nature of human discourse -- modernism's characteristic theme -- is articulated in *the Good Soldier* as a series of disjunctions between the word and world, sign and signified. The ironic separation of expression and meaning becomes the central thematic structure of *The Good Soldier* where recurrent "speech acts" reveal the one certainty of the text -- that of non-communication. Moreover, those moments identified as "epiphanic" in Ford's novel all center on questions of language.

The Luther-protest scene, Edward's "final outburst," the telegram requesting Dowell to return to Branshaw for "a little talk" with Edward, Dowell's drive with Edward and Nancy to the railway station, all reveal speech as mere affectation. Meaningless language, which disguises rather than discloses reality, becomes the horrifying burden of a "fallen civilization." Silence becomes the only authentic response to experience. The narrator repeatedly demands the reader's silence as a prerequisite of his tale of passion, and Dowell's silence precedes Edward's suicide (p. 229).

Florence's mindless encyclopaedic chatter, Dowell's use of words to distort a reality which he cannot come to terms with, the notorious silence between Edward and Leonora in their private domestic life, the "good soldier's" monologues -- "martingales, Chiffney bits, boots; where you got the best soap, the best brandy, the name of the chap who rode a plater down the Kyber cliffs; the spreading power of number three shot before a charge of number four powder . . . by heavens, I hardly heard him talk of anything else" (p. 30) -- all testify to the severance of meaning from social gesture. Dowell's final discovery of a language that reveals rather than negates personality, however, is not a liberation from the "weary baffled space of pain," but the final discovery of hell on earth. Arriving at Branshaw following Edward's urgent request, Dowell imagines the Ashburnham's problem to concern an undesirable attachment between their young ward, Nancy Rufford, and "one of the several young fellows about." Instead, Dowell is initiated into the Gothic dimensions of the Ashburnhams' private hell. Dowell's initiation, moreover, emphasizes the power of speech to enforce a

vicious reality:

Yes, Leonora wished to bring her riding whip down on Nancy's young face. She imagined the pleasure she would feel when the lash fell across those queer features; the pleasure she would feel at drawing the handle at the same moment toward her, so as to cut deep into the flesh and to leave a lasting wheal. Well her words cut deeply into the girl's mind. . . . (my italics, p. 190)

Language -- not the absurd cliches of social conversation, but a passionate language of illicit desire -- communicates real horror. "Talk" undermines affectation only to reveal the human heart as a dark underworld:

What had happened was just Hell. Leonora had spoken to Nancy; Nancy had spoken to Edward; Edward had spoken to Leonora -- and they had talked and talked. And talked. You have to imagine horrible pictures of gloom and half lights, and emotions running through silent nights -- through whole nights. You have to imagine my beautiful Nancy appearing suddenly to Edward, rising up at the foot of his bed, with her long hair falling, like a split cone of shadow, in the glimmer of night-light that burned beside him. You have to imagine her, a silent, a no doubt agonized figure, like a spectre, suddenly offering herself to him -- to save his reason! And you have to imagine his frantic refusal -- and talk. And talk! My God! (p. 182)

Doing and knowing *nothing*, Dowell is the quintessential anti-hero, and his "digressive" narrative becomes the perfect vehicle for Ford's image of life as incomprehensibly miserable. Dowell's own circular discourse asserts, again and again, the futility of language to imagine a world other than that represented by an absurdly antiquated feudal idealism, or that revealed by the horrifying "talk" of individuals no longer concerned to "keep up appearances." Dowell's script alternates between conceiving an absurdly sentimental terrestrial paradise where "amidst the

whispering of the olive-trees, people can be with whom they like and have what they like and take their ease in shadows and coolness" (p. 132), and baldly stating the "real story" of all men's lives: "broken, tumultuous, agonized and unromantic lives, periods punctuated by screams, by imbecilities, by deaths, by agonies" (p. 241). Wholly unable to conceive value in human relations, to express life as a rhythm of regeneration, or to comprehend the destruction of old ideals as a process of social revision, Dowell's language articulates as spiritual imperative an abysmal misanthropy: "It is no longer in the olive hills that I shall find my Heaven; because there is only Hell" (p. 210). Dowell simply reports the eternal suffering of mankind, the slow extinction of all civilization -- "so life peters out" (p. 227). And his narrative abdicates all responsibility for alternative vision. Constantly fussing about giving "a false impression," Dowell successfully discloses a moral void.

Within the world of Ford's text, then, language defines not the divine potential of human imagination, but the profound unintelligibility of human nature. Negating the very concept of the social manifestation of authentic personality, *The Good Soldier* focuses finally on the "grand passion" of Edward -- on a chivalric code absurdly "ill-timed," and a courtly love tradition undermined by the real unworthiness of both the devoted lover and the beloved. Expressing not the full development of individual personality but the fulfillment of pathetically anachronistic romantic delusions, Edward Ashburnham's drama is remarkably void of tragic intensity:

I call this the Saddest Story, rather than "The Ashburnham Tragedy," just because it is so sad, just because there was no current to draw things along to a swift and inevitable end. There is about it none of the elevation that accompanies tragedy; there is about it no nemesis, no destiny. (p. 151)

Just as speech is revealed as hopelessly inauthentic in the face of chaotic experience, so Edward's acts of high drama become the hollow gestures of debased traditions -- mere theatricality.

Edward's potential heroism as "the model of humanity, the hero, the athlete, the father of his country, the law-giver" (p. 107), is effectively negated by a vulgarized allegory of love that defines desire in terms of self-idolatry:

With each new woman that a man is attracted to there appears to come a broadening of the outlook, or, if you like an acquiring of new territory. . . . But the real fierceness of desire, the real heat of passion long continued and withering up the soul of man is the craving for identity with the woman that he loves. He desires to see with the same eyes, to touch with the same sense of touch, to hear with the same ears, to lose his identity, to be enveloped, to be supported. For, whatever may be said of the relation of the sexes, there is no man who loves a woman that does not desire to come to her for the renewal of his courage, for the cutting asunder of his difficulties. And that will be the mainspring of his desire for her. We are all so afraid, we are all so alone, we all so need from the outside the assurance of our own worthiness to exist. (p. 109)

Edward's "mad passion" does not affirm the ennobling power of love but the unheroic type of self-consummation. Passion translates as suicidal despair: "Edward was dying -- actually and physically dying -- of love" (p. 204). And Edward's last passionate battle is fought to possess the territory of death: in the final footnote of the Saddest Story he slays himself with a small pen-knife.

The Good Soldier defines passion as self-consummation and speech as, alternatively, a "fantastic display of cruelty" and the hopelessly inauthentic language of lost souls. In the end, Edward's "final outburst" is a collapse into silence. Ford's good soldier, then, represents the timeless ideals of civilization as irretrievably lost in the chaotic flux of the contemporary world. And Edward Ashburnham's pitiless tragedy expresses pure nostalgia -- Ford's longing for a mythology that has vanished. Idealist concepts in which man's free-floating second nature transcends through the artificially created realms of civility, politics, and philosophy, the contingencies of biological being, (14) are revealed to Dowell as cruel lies. Suicide, madness, silence, logically extend Ford's nihilistic metaphors, and the sad despair of the good soldier's story reiterates the paradoxical attitude of the novel: "a gentle, idealizing nostalgia . . . counterpointed with a scatological rejection of illusion." (15)

In *The Good Soldier* Ford writes about life as he sees it, "a series of meaningless episodes beneath the shadow of doom." (16) His own horror upon discovering the insubstantiality of existing social paradigms, however, implies his attachment to those same patriarchal traditions. Professor Hynes describes Ford's "romancing habit of mind" as, in fact, the controlling vision of *The Good Soldier*: "[Ford] came to see his own world as one in the process of transition from a past dominated at the top by moral values -- honor, fidelity, humaneness -- which were assumed without question, to a new system dominated by unreined ego and materialistic values." (17) Hence Ford's portrait of a masculine heroic ideal

fading into extinction -- Dowell, at last, describes himself as a "fainter" version of Edward's courage and virility (p. 227) -- betrays Ford's own investment in the degenerating process. Ford has, apparently, too much to lose to reject, unconditionally, the myth of the good soldier.

But if, as Hynes insists, Ford celebrates Edward Ashburnham as the embodiment of civilized values, as proposing "models of behavior which make honor possible in a dishonored world," then his celebration remains largely inaccessible to that segment of society categorically excluded from such heroic codes. Relegated to the margins of rather than entrenched in the prevailing cultural traditions, a female writer could not conceive of Ford's desperate disillusionment. *The Good Soldier* defines the ironic incongruity of masculine heroics in the contemporary world, but Ford's paradoxical language refuses to recognize the full implication of patriarchal traditions as *construct*. The lost significance of particular cultural mythologies need not entail a descent into chaos, but may in fact signal the emergence of a countermythology, new structures of meaning. Robert Green argues that Ford maintains "a precarious balance between his delight in the elegance of old traditions, the good people, and an acknowledgement of the murky depths." (18) *The Good Soldier* remains allied with the "virile system" that it satirizes.

Thus predictably, perhaps, Ford's novel shows a debased present as deriving not from the inadequacy of the good soldier's world-view, or from Dowell's failure to discover sense in the surrounding

nonsense, but from women -- Western culture's opposing self -- as the primary agents of corruption, the violent intruders on a masculine paradise. Dowell's narrative develops from ironic considerations of Florence's fragile "heart," of Leonora's stoic English Catholicism, and the innocence of Edward's adultresses, to extraordinarily misogynistic caricatures of women as both sexually repulsive and fundamentally corrupting. Thus *The Good Soldier* typifies what Lee Edwards suggests is the increasing paranoia of the bourgeois novel with female sexuality: "between the earliest eighteenth-century examples and the later works of Meredith, Hardy, James, and Dreiser, the novel on both sides of the Atlantic evinces a growing and horrified awareness not only that female sexuality does exist but that its existence is incompatible with existing moral and aesthetic structures." (19) In the opening of the novel Dowell idylly contemplates the virgin/whore dichotomy of female nature: "was that last remark of [Leonora's] the remark of a harlot, or is it what every decent woman, county family or no county family, thinks at the bottom of her heart? or thinks all the time for the matter of that?" (p. 16). From the beginning, Dowell suspects the society of women, "all the teaching of all the mothers to daughters" (p. 16). But in the conclusion of the narrative -- the exegesis of "this sweltering hell of ours" (p. 190) -- Florence figures as the Babylonian Whore, as Venus of the fallen world rising daily from her place of fornication (p. 85). Leonora becomes the corrupted Virgin, whose chastity betrays a hideous sadism (p. 191). And Nancy Rufford, descended from the Blessed Virgin (p. 125), and daughter of a prostitute (p. 195) emerges as the culmination of all women, past

and future.

Nancy's original naivete is fundamentally absurd:

Then came the desperate shock of the letter from her mother. Her mother said, I believe, something like: 'You have no right to go on living your life of prosperity and respect. You ought to be on the streets with me. How do you know that you are even Colonel Rufford's daughter?' She did not know what those words meant. She thought of her mother as sleeping beneath the arches whilst the snow fell. That was the impression conveyed to her mind by the words 'on the streets'. (p. 204)

But her final smile, "as if she were a thousand years old" (p. 195), expresses her true association with mortal sin and carnal knowledge: "yes, she desired to see Edward suffer. And, by God, she gave him hell" (p. 214). Thus, if the male heroic grows fainter throughout Ford's narrative, the female principle -- fundamentally hysterical, hence corrupting the very order of civilization -- grows monstrously powerful. Edward's former women are mere shades of Nancy Rufford, the object of Edward's final debilitating passion: "[Edward's] passions -- for the mistress of the Grand Duke, for Mrs. Basil, for little Mrs. Maidan, for Florence, for whom you will -- these passions were merely preliminary canters compared to his final race with death for her" (pp. 109-10). As the archetypal temptress, Nancy sets "her seal" on the imagination of the good soldier, the emblem of civility, once and for all.

The narrator's final identification with Edward in the novel's conclusion proves what we have suspected all along: "The Ashburnham Story" is, rather, *Dowell's* story. Not surprisingly, then, in Dowell's uninterrupted monologue "society" comes increasingly to

represent an inherently diabolical force:

Conventions and traditions, I suppose, work blindly but surely for the preservation of the normal type; for the extinction of the proud, resolute and unusual individuals. . . . So Edward and Nancy found themselves steamrolled out and Leonora survives, the perfectly normal type, married to a man who is rather like a rabbit. For Rodney Bayham is rather like a rabbit, and I hear Leonora is expected to have a baby in three months' time.
(p. 214)

But the society of *women*, the "feminine commonweal," is depicted as particularly terrifying. Moreover, female language, the definition of that communal solidarity, is the original source of horror throughout the novel: Florence's "unstoppable talking" is what specifically characterizes her repulsive sexuality. Leonora's desire above all things "to keep a shut mouth to the world" (p. 163) establishes her peculiar virtue -- her "English Catholic conscience" -- which functions to suppress, for a time at least, her destructive sexuality. When, however, Leonora lets slacken "her standards, her conventions, and her traditions," when for the first time in her life she acts "along the lines of her instinctive desires" (p. 184), she is liberated from her "long duel with unseen weapons against silent adversaries" (p. 121). Women's "talk" defines an intimate solidarity between herself and Nancy Rufford -- and all hell breaks loose: "[Leonora and Nancy] sat crouching together in each other's arms, and crying and crying; and they lay down in the same bed, talking and talking, all through the night" (p. 208). The "swift-solidarity" of Leonora and Nancy is described in the terms of Gothic horror and their monstrous destruction of Edward and the code of honor that he champions, assumes cosmic proportions:

It was as if Leonora and Nancy banded themselves together to do execution, for the sake of humanity, upon the body of a man who was at their disposal. . . . They were like judges debating over the sentence upon a criminal; they were like ghouls with an immobile corpse in a tomb beside them. (p. 215)

The end of *The Good Soldier* arrives, just as Dowell has assured us it will, like clockwork, as inevitably as the fulfillment of train schedules, meal times, and the seasons of the town of Nauheim, by which Dowell measures his own tired existence. The passionate *individual* self-destructs into solipsistic imbecility, "for there was a great deal of imbecility about the closing scenes of the Ashburnham tragedy" (p. 213). And a barbaric society survives, propogated by the perverse capacity of females to reproduce the (demoralized, hence essentially extinct) human species. "Yes, society must go on; it must breed, *like rabbits*" (my italics, p. 227). The conclusion of Ford's narrative, then, satirizes the comic rhythm of regeneration, the festive celebration of life and community that conventionally concludes the structure of comedy:

When I come to look at it I see it is a happy ending with wedding bells and all. The villains -- for obviously Edward and the girl were villains -- have been punished by suicide and madness. The heroine -- the perfectly normal, virtuous and slightly deceitful heroine -- has become the happy wife of a perfectly normal, virtuous and slightly deceitful husband. She will shortly become a mother of a perfectly normal, virtuous slightly deceitful son or daughter. A happy ending, that is what it works out at. (pp. 225-26)

Balancing all the ambiguities of the text in a final baffled vision of incomprehensibility, Ford proposes the banal nature of human desire -- the human comedy as farce:

Well it is all over. Not one of us has got what he really wanted. Leonora wanted Edward, and she has got Rodney Bayham, pleasant enough sort of sheep. Florence wanted Branshaw, and it is I who have bought it from Leonora. I didn't really want it; what I wanted mostly was to cease being a nurse-attendant. Well, I am a nurse-attendant. Edward wanted Nancy Rufford, and I have got her. Only she is mad. It is a queer and fantastic world. Why can't people have what they want? The things were all there to content everybody; yet everybody has the wrong thing. Perhaps you can make head or tail of it; it is beyond me. (p. 213)

Throughout *The Good Soldier*, Dowell's rhetorical questions function to affirm the absurd circularity of the search for truth and knowledge. As Dowell's analogy aptly demonstrates (p. 14), the fruit which the tree of knowledge bears is rotten at the core. But the end of Ford's text is unconditionally bleak. Like the figure of mad Nancy Rufford, "enigmatic, silent, utterly well-behaved as far as her knife and fork go" (p. 227), Dowell's narrative portrays an extraordinarily perfect "picture without meaning." That is "the great desideratum of life." That is the conclusion of Ford's story (p. 228).

Ford's doubling of his hero (Dowell/Ashburnham) in the closing scenes of *The Good Soldier*, makes explicit the divided mind characterizing the entire narrative, Ford's obsession with the dual nature of man.(20) Moreover, the ambiguous heroic structure of *The Good Soldier* is, as Mizener explains in his major biography of Ford, symptomatic of Ford's own divided self-conception. Experiencing a radical antagonism between his public and private selves, Ford perceived a calamitous division between his idealistic conscious self, heroically conceiving cultural projects like *The English Review*, and an inner anti-heroic of "paranoid suspicions and

society. But in Ford's fiction the dialectic of external and internal realities reveals the notion of "community" as essentially farcical. Edward's love for Nancy enacts an elaborate ritual of self-deception. His drama reveals the pathetic failure of romantic illusions in the antiromantic, *phenomenal* world. And Dowell reveals his own "love" for Edward to be, finally, a solipsistic self-love: "But I guess that I myself, in my fainter way, come into the category of the passionate, of the headstrong, and the too-truthful. For I can't conceal from myself the fact that I loved Edward Ashburnham -- and that I love him because he was myself" (p. 227). Unredeemed by moral passions or romantic ideals which are in the end all false, society remains a chaotic association of self-serving individuals. In Ford's narrative, only the single voice of the author remains: ". . . the Dowell who is telling the story knows everything that Ford does and thinks all the things that Ford did about human affairs." (25) The art of *The Good Soldier* exists for its own sake, and the pervading emphasis on the artist-as-hero reinforces the novel's exposition of a hopelessly alienated community. the text is a soliloquy on the limited heroic potential of the individual (male) artist in a dark material world of unfathomable human horrors.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER 1

- (1) David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, Ltd., 1977), p. xii.
- (2) Lee Edwards, *Psyche as Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), p. 19.
- (3) Ford Madox Ford, "Dedicatory Letter to Stella Ford" (1927); rpt. *The Good Soldier: The Saddest Story Ever Told* (1915; rpt. Penguin Modern Classics, 1977), p. 6. All further references will be to this edition.
- (4) Robert Green, *Ford Madox Ford: Prose and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 85.
- (5) Mary O'Brien, "Feminist Theory and Dialectical Thought," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1981), pp. 147-48.
- (6) Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed. (1942; rpt. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 11.
- (7) Green, p. 88.
- (8) Peter Faulkner, *Modernism* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1977), p. 75.
- (9) Samuel Hynes, quoted in Green, p. 90.
- (10) Green, p. 102.

- (11) Mizener, p. 263.
- (12) Samuel Hynes, "Ford and the Spirit of Romance," *Modern Fiction Studies*, IX, No. 1 (Spring 1963), p. 23.
- (13) Hynes, p. 23.
- (14) See, O'Brien, p. 147.
- (15) Green, p. 96.
- (16) Ford Madox Ford, quoted from Patricia McFate and Bruce Golden, "The Good Soldier: A Tragedy of Self-Deception," *Modern Fiction Studies*, IX, No. 1 (Spring 1963), p. 60.
- (17) Hynes, p. 23.
- (18) Green, p. 97.
- (19) Edwards, p. 26.
- (20) The *doppelganger* figure reappears significantly throughout Ford's fiction, as Mizener notes: "Ford had experimented before, less successfully, with the doubling of his hero, with Robert Grimshaw and Dudley Leicester in *A Call* and with Mr. Blood and Mr. Fleight in *Mr. Fleight*. In both cases we have one active, decisive, confident man and one passive, indecisive, unsure one." *The Saddest Story*, p. 263. See also, Ford's extensive use of the haunting *doppelganger* in *When The Wicked Man*, his "retrospective" countercontext to *Quartet*.
- (21) Mizener, p. 263.
- (22) See, Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians* (New York: New York University Press, 1969). Critics of Ford frequently note his "intense sense of belonging to the nineteenth century" (Stang, p. 11), and his indebtedness to Victorian aesthetics. Ford's grandfather was the

painter Ford Madox Brown and his uncles by marriage were the editor and writer William Micheal Rossetti and the poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

(23) Green, p. 109.

(24) Erich Heller, quoted in Grace Stewart, *A New Mythos*, p. 7.

(25) Mizener, p. 265.

CHAPTER TWO

Marya Meets the Good Soldier: *Quartet's* In/version
of the Heroics of War

It is probable . . . that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values -- and to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. And for that, of course, she will be criticized; for the critic . . . will be genuinely puzzled and surprised by an attempt to alter the current scale of values, and will see in it not merely a difference of view, but a view that is weak, or trivial, or sentimental because it differs from his own -- Virginia Woolf(1)

What Ford omits from his text -- the world as Idea (noumenon, symbol, artefact) -- Jean Rhys develops in terms of a female consciousness of a contiguity between word and world. Ford's "real" world as Will (phenomenon, thing, fact), the world of masculine heroics and feminine hysterics, is revealed by Rhys to ignore the dialogical process of exchange from one subject to another. Ford's concept of the dual nature of man leads to paradox and enigma, dark broodings by the solitary narrator on the alienation of mankind. *The Good Soldier*, however, derives from a specifically masculine paradigm in which, ideally, the individual man discovers and seeks to maintain an identity separate from the more familial world, the female world, of nature and necessity. The very vulnerability of Ashburnham's public heroism to the private vices of his women is

precisely the source of profound irony in Ford's novel. Sexuality is explored in terms of Gothic horror where women are both corrupting of and *necessary* to the good soldier's noble habits: "Perhaps [Ashburnham] could not bear to see a woman and not give her the comfort of his physical attractions" (*TGS*, p. 89).

Translating the facts of female experience into a very different kind of fiction, *Quartet* incorporates a characteristically feminine impulse for sympathetic association as opposed to the masculine impulse for self-sufficiency. As Nancy Chodorow argues in her influential study, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, the dual identity of the mother and daughter in the pre-oedipal period is not interrupted by adult initiation but endures and sets the feminine pattern for all later experiences of relatedness.(2) For a woman, "the delimited, the autonomous, separated, individuated self does not exist (although much of our discourse still functions as if it did)."(3) Marya, then, the developing female consciousness of *Quartet*, rejects Dowell's habitual categorizing and adopts instead an obsessive drive for relationship with the world and a language that might express that relationship. The title itself suggests a deviance from the monological preoccupation of Ford's "The Good Soldier" with identification and formal strategies of libidinal containment: from the opening episode of "Quartet," Marya's search is not for intellectual classifications but for emotional association.

Like Psyche's myth, Marya's story "fuses power's needs with love's," and her quest emphasizes the potential transformation of

existing ideas of community and the possibility of human interchange. Consciously manipulating historical "fact," Rhys's autobiographical fiction proposes a countermythology to Ford's nihilistic rationalizations -- a feminine contradiction to the masculine drive for self-extinction. As Lee Edwards argues of modern Female fictions, "once the heroic figure is free to invent new modes of human intercourse, she moves from the periphery of a hostile society to the center of a new communal form. Impelled by her yearning to construct a self independent of culturally constructed norms, the woman hero, like her male counterpart, has upset the tyranny of social fact and revealed its contingency." (4) Whereas Ford's "classical" fiction (5) seeks to defy active engagement with history, Rhys's exclusion from the masculine and bourgeois tenets of modernist formalism necessitates her development of an alternative fictional form that is conscious both of its subversive sexual status and of its radical perspective on historical "reality." *Quartet* substitutes for *The Good Soldier's* enervated idealism a dynamic "female realism."

In Rhys's fiction, then, speech is not portrayed as the antiquated relic of a lost civilization, and the nature of human discourse does not exemplify a modern agnosticism, the irreparable severance of expression and meaning. Instead, throughout Rhys's narrative the quest for authentic voice functions as the controlling metaphor and proposes the potential means of reconciling individual passion with social reality. Marya's dilemma is thus the reverse of Dowell's sad perplexity. Dowell's problematic dispassion -- "I had thought nothing; I had said such an extraordinary thing" (p.99) --

contrasts with Marya's passionate railing against the impotence of conventional modes of speech to express what she comprehends all too intensely:

Marya sat in an empty cafe out of the sun and looked for a long time at the blank sheet of writing paper in front of her, imagining it covered with words, black marks on the white paper. Words. To make somebody understand. (p. 121)

Quartet does not reveal diverse ways of seeing -- the perspectivist ideal of Ford's fiction which finally expresses not the "irresolvable pluralism of truths," but the utter subjectivity of truth relations. Instead, Rhys's fiction proposes ways of *feeling*: the freely associative language of Marya's interior monologue imitates the fluid ego boundaries of female subjectivity and initiates Rhys's narrative quest for a feminine signification of desire. Alienated from history, from the definitive, teleological "story of man" implied in Ford's *progression d'effet* (as well as Joyce's "epiphany" and Conrad's aesthetic faith in a universal "solidarity" of man), (6) Marya's story, unlike Dowell's "sentimental" narrative, takes place wholly in the sensational present. Her story attaches itself to the dynamic process of the world-in-the-making and develops less constrained by past traditions or future cultural predilections.

As Mary Daly envisions a "new space" located "on the boundary . . . of patriarchal institutions, . . . on the boundary of all that has been considered central," within which political upheaval may be generated, (7) Rhys's fiction encourages a revolution of the cultural consensus by insisting upon a positive re-evaluation

of woman's "marginality." *Quartet* responds to Ford's nostalgia for hierarchalism and warrior-like exploits by affirming the heroic potential of a female "inner space." As opposed to a public realm within which even the good soldier may no longer be accommodated, the private realm of Marya's intense subjectivity becomes the place of moral insight and human sensibility. As Edwards argues, "precisely because patriarchy has assigned women characteristics that are other than or alternative to those assigned to men, making femininity and masculinity complementary rather than overlapping categories, the woman hero can make use of culturally feminine traits in order to challenge the belief that society as an idea must rest on war and conquest." (8) Rhys's fiction imaginatively transforms conventional power relations by revealing their limitations as constructs -- as created by particular people at a particular time for particular reasons. There is in Rhys's fiction no sentimental regret for the vulnerability of time-honoured traditions to contemporary history. In *Quartet*, the victim becomes the hero, thus fracturing traditional concepts of the hero as military leader -- "commanding, conquering, and above all, male" -- and conventional myths, "patriarchal, hostile, preoccupied with rank," (9) which give birth to the hero of Western culture. Whereas Ford's satire of the good soldier depends upon a normative framework which fundamentally preserves the conventional heroic concept, Rhys's narrative assumes the revolutionary function of art, which is, as Stanley Aronowitz asserts, "to work to smash the cultural conformity that contains consciousness within social rituals of domination." (10)

Marya is emotionally and physically devastated by the very relations that she establishes throughout the course of the novel; in contrast with Dowell's misanthropy, however, Marya's faith in the liberating *potential* of individual relationship persists throughout her narrative. Sondra Stang suggests that Dowell's opposing impulses are "to hate or to nurse -- to make himself and his passion felt, or to efface himself in a role that both conceals and suggests impotence -- he wishes for both. . . ." (11) In *Quartet*, however, Rhys's emphasis is unambiguously on making Marya's passion *felt*. But in contrast with Dowell's discourse which characterizes desire as the longing for absolute unity, complete self-possession (*TGS*, p. 108-9) Marya desires to comprehend her individual experience within a plural social context: (12)

The drone of the concertina sounded from the courtyard of the studio. The man was really trying to play "Yes we have no bananas." But it was an unrecognizable version, and listening to it gave Marya the same feeling of melancholy pleasure as she had when walking along the shadowed side of one of those narrow streets full of shabby *parfumeries*, second-hand book-stalls, cheap hat-shops, bars frequented by gaily-painted ladies and loud-voiced men, midwives premises . . . (p. 9)

Disparate images do not horrifyingly undermine myths of cultural harmony, Dowell's tranquil "minuet," nor does Marya's narrative express Dowell's single reasoned belief in the "chaos of experience." Instead, the streets of Montparnasse provide a kind of language that allows Marya to formulate feelings of "melancholy pleasure." Rather than posing rhetorical questions of meaning, Marya's narrative affirms the truth of complex emotional realities. Marya discovers her own identity reflected rather than dissipated by

the multifarious community that surrounds her. But this sense of self, as Marya herself perceives, is fundamentally disinterested. The interior language of Marya's aimless wanderings expresses a kind of pre-linguistic sense of self. It is a semiotic -- "pre-oedipal, chronologically anterior to syntax, a cry, the gesture of a child"(13) -- as opposed to a symbolic discourse. Socially unattached, Marya recognizes that her lack of a "necessary fixed background," of concrete social and sexual identity, limits her self-actualization. Thus she accepts Miss De Solla's initial offer to introduce her to "the Anglo Saxons in Paris" and anticipates her entrance into a community that might realize her personal force throughout a social realm.(14) *Quartet* records Marya's heroic, but essentially doomed, quest for personal relationship and authentic voice -- beyond her own interiority and within society.

Seeking to define herself beyond pure subjective consciousness, however, Marya acts out a female tragedy in which Sartre's dialectics of otherness -- where full self-realization depends upon the objective recognition of one's self by another -- creates profound self-alienation. Through her engagement with society, Marya encounters destructive relationships of otherness. In Sartre's words, the others steal her world from her. But the threat of personal annihilation for Marya remains particularly acute: Marya's initiation into society dramatizes the naive investment of her self-image in others, and her cruel betrayal by those upon whom she comes to depend for her very existence. First conceived of by Jean Rhys as a four act play, "meant to be read not acted,"(15) *Quartet* develops through dialogue and situation, as a kind of

discussion drama which explores the tragedy of female initiation into a patriarchal social and symbolic realm. Marya's pre-linguistic sense of self is lost amid the "confused murmur of voices" of a hostile cultural milieu. In a series of vignettes, Marya encounters Miss De Solla's essential impotence as a woman artist, the deception of Lois's female commonality, H.J.'s sexual exploitation, and, in the final scene, the horrifying capability of Stephan to betray the pathetic remains of Marya's self-image to a masculine heroic that systematically destroys what it cannot possess.

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The narrative process of discovering the signification of female experience and desire, of developing an "*écriture féminine*" -- the "inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text"(16) -- begins for Jean Rhys in a backstreet, in the closed quarters of the painter, Miss De Solla, where Marya is invited to enter:

Her studio was hidden behind a grim building where the housewives of the neighbourhood came to wash their clothes. It was a peaceful place, white-walled, smelling strongly of decayed vegetables. (p. 8)

Though none of Rhys's critics refer to this opening scene, Marya's association with Miss De Solla locates, for both Jean Rhys and her heroine, the issue of feminine identity within the confines of a culture that depicts aesthetic ideals -- beauty and truth -- in female form. Thus striving for her own subjective status, the

heroine of a female writer struggles with a profound conflict between conventional images of woman as selfless muse, inspiring men to great works, and the author's own commitment to the heroic potential of the self-expressive woman artist.

The homosexual overtones of Miss De Solla's interaction with Marya and her masculinized "dogmatic voice," establish the perverse self-conception of the woman artist -- she must deny her own sexuality, she must "see" herself as a man. As an artist, Miss De Solla has stepped beyond the bounds of conventional female identity and her status reveals both her triumph and her pathos. As cultural "outsider" De Solla possesses the potential to penetrate the circle of ordinary human experience: "For while [s]he shares the characteristics and recognizable elements of all other human beings, the mere distance of the outsider has acted as a force of an economical kind of perception, a perception that is trained on the irreducible; thus, the outsider is denied the filtered vision that allows men to live without too troubling an insight." (17) Marya's attraction to De Solla signals her recognition of De Solla's significant (though limited) freedom: the very existence of Miss De Solla, as a female artist, threatens the authority of the patriarchal society which Marya fears. Hidden behind a grim building amongst other impoverished women, however, De Solla is unable to exert real personal force in the world. In the terms of conventional culture and society, Miss De Solla is largely ineffectual as both an artist and a woman, as she herself recognizes: "It's pretty awful to think of the hundreds of women round here painting away, and all that, isn't it?" (p. 10).

(Predictably, Miss De Solla is curiously unavailable when, following Stephan's arrest, Marya flees to her for consolation.)

In Miss De Solla, Marya recognizes her fellow "outsider" status and is both attracted and repelled. Despite De Solla's dogmatic speech on the "unreality" of the English expatriates, Marya is fascinated by her intimate contact with that same community, perhaps recognizing, ironically, that it is this very relationship which constitutes De Solla's own reality. But the figure of Miss De Solla also exemplifies the consequence of the perverted identity of a female artist forced, as Grace Stewart suggests, to "defy the cultural definition of artist or of woman if she is ^{to} remain artist and woman." (66) De Solla's "fanatic asceticism," her masochistic femininity, reveals her compromise with the society that spurns her. She lives a life of stringent self-denial: surrounded by her austere studio and the putrid smell of rotting vegetables, "the Jewess's hunger for the softness and warmth of life was naked in her eyes" (p. 11). Thus Marya's ambivalence towards Miss De Solla indicates her resistance to De Solla's perverse self-repression, the compromising of her sexual identity and agonized exclusion from the "warmth of life."

Miss De Solla's intimate revelation of erotic drawings by a male Hungarian artist represents the central gesture of the novel's opening episode:

Marya, helped by the alcohol, realized that the drawings were beautiful. Groups of women. Masses of flesh arranged to form intricate and absorbing patterns. (p. 8)

The standard objectification of the female body defined by the prevailing masculine aesthetic, encourages the female artist to participate in the very process of the dehumanization of women, to contribute to her own sexual debasement. Marya's (alcohol-induced) perception of beauty in the masses of female flesh is fundamentally equivocal and reiterates her ambivalence towards her own sexuality. As Vivian Gornick suggests, since woman is "defined primarily in her society as a sexual object -- either one of lust or one of chastity," she becomes obsessed with her own *desirability*, rather than her sexual desire.(18) Marya's attraction to the drawings which De Solla provocatively unveils, reveals her own ambiguous erotic impulse -- both towards and away from heterosexual exchange in which, as a female, Marya's victimization will be the measure of her sexual potency.(19) Imaging female flesh as territory to be arranged and absorbed (possessed) by the creative will of men, the drawings nevertheless create a uniquely female bond between Marya and Miss De Solla. As fellow voyeurs, the two women become accomplices in a common crime -- the abstraction of their own sexuality.

De Solla's explication of a social world which characteristically perverts female sexuality and reduces the female body to a cultural fetish, prefigures Heidler's actual violent initiation of Marya into sexual debasement. Marya's interaction with De Solla provides a kind of emotional rationale for her later disastrous attraction to Heidler. De Solla's introduction prepares for Marya's recognition of the inevitability of Heidler's sexual exploitation and for Marya's acceptance of her fate -- on which her cultural identity depends. For, as Gornick suggests, "implicit in the dream of rape

is a woman's true sense of herself, her true subconscious understanding of the actual position of value which she occupies in the life of the culture, her dread, her long-felt conviction that she is not real to men. . . ." (20) The opening episode of *Quartet*, then, establishes the subconscious rape fantasy that functions metaphorically throughout the novel as the encounter with the dark "other" -- threatening, paradoxically, to both destroy and create Marya's sense of self.

Miss De Solla's calm, "her deep and masculine voice" suggests to Marya "that her own existence though delightful, was haphazard. It lacked, as it were, solidity. . . . A bedroom, balcony and cabinet de toilette in a cheap Montmartre hotel cannot possibly be called a solid background" (p. 10). Marya accepts De Solla's offer of initiation into the Anglo Saxon community which she has hitherto avoided, and goes with her to meet the Heidlrs, the small, coherent society of British expatriates whose most seductive characteristic is also their most hideous -- their elaborate pretense of solidity, their enormous investment in the maintenance of the status quo:

They were fresh, sturdy people. Mr. Heidler, indeed, was so very sturdy that it was difficult to imagine him suffering from a nervous breakdown of any kind what-ever. He looked as if nothing could break him down. He was tall, fair man of perhaps forty-five. His shoulders were tremendous, his nose arrogant, his hands short, broad and so plump that the knuckles were dimpled. The wooden expression of his face was carefully striven for. His eyes were light blue and intelligent, but with a curious underlying expression of obtuseness -- even of brutality. (p. 12)

Significantly, Heidler's eyes give him away. His penetrating gaze signals a voyeurism that is a specific form of female

oppression: Heidler's eyes possess the masculine power to dominate Marya as the object of his all-consuming passion. Heidler spectates; Marya will become the spectacle of his desire. Just as De Solla's paintings show Marya that the only acceptable form of female sexuality is abstracted and objectified, so Heidler's eyes emphasize Marya's fate as the victim of man's externalizing of all that is worst in his own view of himself. Woman herself, as Gornick notes, is not locked in this profound struggle with the self -- "she is only the catalyst for man's struggle with himself." (21) Indeed, Heidler's sexual exploitation of Marya is precluded by various intimate conversations with her in which he expresses hideous feelings of personal inadequacy and self-hatred:

"No, sit down for a minute," Heidler said. "What a fidget you are!"

He wore spectacles. She thought that he looked kinder, older, less German.

"Don't rush off," he said. And then, "Oh, God, I am so utterly sick of myself sometimes. D'you ever get sick of yourself? No, not yet, of course. Wait a bit, you will one of these days."

"No," answered Marya reflectively. "I'm not sick of myself. I'm rather sick of my sort of life." (p. 53)

Though Heidler believes his obsession with Marya derives from his insatiable sexual desires, his sex drive merely masks his dangerously repressed terror of felt sexuality -- a terror which he attempts to assuage by projecting his self-loathing onto Marya, by making her the object and cause of his own debased sexuality:

He wasn't a good lover, of course. He didn't really like women. She had known that as soon as he touched her. His hands were inexpert, clumsy at caresses; his mouth was

hard when he kissed. No, not a lover of women, he could say what he liked. He despised love. He thought of it grossly to amuse himself, and then with ferocious contempt. (p. 92)

The Anglo Saxons frequenting the Paris cafes are, in fact, the sons and daughters of British Imperialism, the decent "brutes" of civilized society, and their predatory impulses are only too evident -- they discuss eating as the greatest pleasure in life. They talk of Marya in the third person "as if she were a strange animal or at any rate a strayed animal -- one not quite of the fold" (p. 12), and their awesome power to dehumanize the world is characterized by Heidler's small, almost insignificant gestures of humiliation:

He looked kind, peaceful and exceedingly healthy. His light, calm eyes searched the faces of the people passing on the Boulevard Montparnasse, and his huge hand lay possessively, heavy as lead, on her knee.

Ridiculous sort of thing to do. Ridiculous, not frightening. Why frightening?

She made a cautious but decided movement and the hand was withdrawn.

'It's very cold here,' said Heidler in his gentle voice. 'Let's go on to the Select Bar, shall we?' (p. 13)

The Heidlers' exploitation of Marya, however, goes beyond simply taking advantage of her personal vulnerability. As Terry Eagleton explains, "Imperialism is not only the exploitation of cheap labour-power, raw materials, and easy markets but the uprooting of languages and customs -- not just the imposition of foreign armies, but of alien ways of experiencing. It manifests itself not only in company balance-sheets and airbases, but can be tracked to the most intimate roots of speech and signification."(22) Marya's

overwhelming fear of encroachment, then, derives specifically from the imposition of the Heidlers' language of aggression -- a formal structuring of social reality which is fundamentally foreign to Marya's sensibility as an "outsider."

Rather than proposing the inevitability of personal annihilation within a fundamentally amoral, phenomenal world, Marya's ironic insights into the real hypocrisy of the Heidler's *Haute Bourgeoisie* presupposes an authentic moral context which has been transgressed and against which the Heidler's society appears dehumanized (hence de-sexualized). Marya's ambivalence about the "English people" represents her instinctive resistance to a *particular* realm of culture and signification in which, as a woman, she must renounce her sense of self and assume the role of scapegoat determined for her by a society which has come to value death over life: "And the voice of that funny little man. What was his name? The little sculptor. 'You're a victim. There's no endurance in your face. Victims are necessary so that the strong may exercise their will and become more strong'" (p. 58).

Paradoxically, then, Marya recognizes that her longing for attachment, for relationship with her English compatriots contradicts her desire for a living relationship -- which may only be temporarily discovered in the subversive society of Stephan Zelli, her foreigner husband:

Most people hesitated. They fumbled. They were so full of reticences and prejudices and uncertainties and spites and shames, that there was no getting anywhere at all. One felt after a time a blankness and a jar -- like trying to walk up a step that wasn't there. But, good or bad,

there Monsieur Zelli was. Definite. A person. (p. 16)

Stephan's absent-minded "lies," in contrast to the Heidler's elaborate systems of hypocrisy, represent a peculiar kind of integrity. Stephan is unrestrained by social codes -- "he was without bourgeois prejudices." His great charm is his empathy, his ability to transcend the formal social and sexual limitations of desire, of passionate communication. Like Marya, "a vagabond by nature," this "stranger and alien" lives outside the order of law, and Stephan's criminality allows him to understand the secretive nature of Marya's own fugitive desires:

Stephan was secretive and a liar, but he was a very gentle and expert lover. She was the petted, cherished child, the desired mistress, the worshipped, perfumed goddess. She was all these things to Stephan -- or so he made her believe. Marya hadn't known that a man could be as nice as all that to a woman -- so gentle in little ways.
(p. 20)

With Stephan, Marya perceives her own identity through an empathic submission to a chaotic (illegal) order of things, through discovering coherence in the very association of dissimilar "subjects." Marya emotionally comprehends the intimate relationship between "the lights winking up at a pallid moon, the slender painted ladies, the wings of the Moulin Rouge, the smell of petrol and perfume and cooking" (p. 20) and her own illogical place in the world. Thus Marya's narrative expresses not disillusionment -- Dowell's rationalized disbelief -- but an abiding faith in a vital relationship between subjective and objective realities. Marya perceives the liberating possibilities of difference, of an alternative or "other" subjectivity which does not petrify but

liberates one's sense of self. Thus she begins to inhabit the metaphysical realm of an identifiably female shadow-space:

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

Marya's Romantic perception of a sympathetic relationship between the phenomenal world and her own inner emotional discourse, however, is violently interrupted when she returns one night to the Hotel de l'Univers and the *patronne* informs her of Stephan's arrest. Her husband's arrest realizes Marya's earlier dread of some "vague, dimly-apprehended catastrophe" (p. 20), and the horror, not so much of desertion, but of utter isolation -- a lost sense of community. Significantly, Marya's immediate impulse is to find De Solla, and her anxiety is specifically characterized as a desperate need to speak her mother-tongue, the language of the cultural outsider: "Marya emerged from the Metro on to the Place Denfert-Rochereau, thinking: 'In three minutes I'll hear somebody talking English. In two minutes, in a minute'" (p. 23). Unlike Ford's *The Good Soldier*, then, Rhys's fiction does not affirm the certainty of non-communication, the nature of human discourse as an ironic separation of word and world. Marya's alienation, rather, derives from the direct imposition of a foreign language on Marya's fugitive consciousness. Alienation is not symptomatic of the universal demise of meaning relations. It is the immediate experience of particular circumstances. Marya's failure to locate Miss De Solla and subsequent discovery of an almost hallucinatory image of the formidable Heidlars, makes the context of her emotional crisis

explicitly concrete:

They were walking against the wind, both sheltering under the huge umbrella. A gust of wind flapped Heidler's mackintosh like a flag, caught the umbrella and blew it sideways. She saw his annoyed face. (p. 23)

Consciously pondering the significance of this appearance -- "She thought: 'What's it got to do with them, anyway?'" (p. 23) -- Marya subconsciously connects the Heidler's invulnerable society with the fear that pursues her, the fear of being overwhelmed by unknown (unknowable) forces: "it was a vague and shadowy fear of something cruel and stupid that had caught her and would never let her go. She had always known it was there -- hidden under the more or less pleasant surface of things" (p. 28). Paris has never held a "homey familiarity" to Marya.(23) But following her vision of the Heidlers on the Rue Denfert-Rochereau, Marya's street walking assumes a new tenor. Her originally aimless "wanderings in sordid streets" which helped Marya to identify her own passionate feelings of "melancholy pleasure" (p. 9), become a form of anxious retreat from ritualistic dread:

You could argue about hunger or cold or loneliness, but with fear you couldn't argue. It went too deep. You were too mysteriously sure of its terror. You could only walk very fast and try to leave it behind you. (p. 28)

Rhys characterizes Marya's initiation into conventional society specifically in terms of loss -- the loss of Stephan, "withdrawn from her, enclosed in the circle of his own pain, unreachable," and the loss of Marya's own "vagabond" system of psychic preservation. Once the type of Marya's own "delightful" though haphazard

existence, the inordinately long streets of Paris become the place of nightmare -- the terror of the inscrutable labyrinth:

But as soon as she put the light out the fear was with her again -- and now it was like a long street where she walked endlessly. A redly lit street, the houses on either side tall, grey and closely shuttered, the only sound the clip-clop of horses' hoofs behind her, out of sight. (p. 29)

Engulfed by "a confused murmur of voices," Marya's only means of survival is an ironic detachment from the world whose grand judicial systems define an inhuman hierarchy of oppression: "Shining gates, ascending flights of steps. *Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite* in golden letters; *Tribunal de Police* in black. As it were, a vision of Heaven and the Judgement" (p. 25). As Barbara Godard argues, "official discourse, which gives meaning and value to existence, is that of the holders of power in our society, men. For women, language does not mirror any political, social or psychological reality." (24) Thus, in contrast with Dowell's sardonic posturing in which irony functions to undermine "society" as an idea, Marya's passive dissociation from social reality is a direct response to her experience of an inappropriate rather than a fundamentally diseased social discourse. Marya's "passivity," with which critics consistently take issue, (25) represents not a kind of moral laxity that inevitably leads to Marya's final debasement. It is the result of her inability to express herself in social terms, her alienation from the dominant modes of discourse. Even Stephan's language becomes incomprehensible -- "she had suddenly ceased to be able to understand French" (p. 31). Within a social context, Marya's own associative language begins to become strangely foreign and she is

overwhelmed by self-doubt: "her tired brain would only conjure up *disconnected* remembrances" (my italics, p. 38).

Making strange, however, is the particular linguistic faculty of the Heidlars and their company who interrupt Marya's perception of an illogical poetic contiguity between herself and the world of her wanderings, and violently dissect the world into "Types" and "Characters," "The Beautiful Young Man, the Dazzler, the Middle Westerners, the Down-and-Outs, and Freaks who would never become anything, the Freaks who just possibly might" (p. 48). Jeremy Hawthorn notes that in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rochester starts to transform Antoinette into another person "just as the white colonialist turns the black person into someone or something foreign to his or her real identity.(26) It is a common technique, Hawthorn explains, "of the imperialist and the colonialist to impose an alien language with alien terms on to the people who are to be exploited, so that they start to see themselves as their oppressors see them." But Rhys characterizes this technique^u_λ of exploitation throughout her fiction. Thus, as early as *Quartet* the foreign language of the Heidlars is seen to force a division between Marya's external persona and her internal self. A kind of schizophrenia becomes peculiar to Rhys's heroines generally(27) -- a personality split which is, as I argue later, finally resolved by the feminine mythopoeia generated by *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Marya's "passivity," then, derives from her failure to adopt the dominant social code and thus to manipulate social power. Rhys's narrative rhythm of innocence lost assumes a peculiarly feminine

dimension: experiencing alienation from the logic of social discourse, Marya becomes imprisoned in the silent room of her own world. Just as Miss De Solla lives condemned to a deviant sexuality, hidden behind grim buildings on the edge of society, Marya must appropriate a social persona alien to her experience of self.

In contrast with the dual nature of man, then, the social identity of woman does not constitute but negates her humanity. Marya's tragic fate is not death but "fallen womanhood." Her loss of innocence parallels not the social realization of personality but the violent confrontation with a language that destroys rather than articulates personality. For Marya, finding a social place means being named by a system that denies female autonomy and designates the female subject an object of desire or aversion: "L'Enfant Perdu," "hussy," "prostitute," "*une grue*," signify Marya's social identity. The development in Marya's narrative of a kind of "negative narcissism" is similar to the dangerously circular language of writers excluded from the main literary currents and threatened by cultural colonization: "But if we live in a space which is radically in question for us, that makes our barest speaking a problem to itself. For voice does issue in part from civil space. And alienation in that space will enter and undercut our writing, make it recoil upon itself, become a problem to itself."(28)

Speechless within the chic social setting of the Heidlers, Marya cannot communicate her own longing for "all the fun and sweetness of

life," and her ability to voice her resistance to a type of colonization by the Heidlars (always waiting for her on the other side of "bad health, destitution, and shattered nerves") becomes increasingly threatened, intensifying her nightmare of pursuit. Marya's vulnerability to the Heidler's terrifying offer of "the spare room in the studio," of paternal shelter and eternal obligation, is her inability to "make up her mind" (p. 40), to rationalize her instinctive revulsion. Moreover, her lack of social voice creates a psychic split from what Marya herself refers to as her "idiotic body of a woman" (p. 43), floating through the outside world, and her obsessive inner discourse endlessly recoiling in upon itself. Marya's final apathetic acquiescence characterizes not "amoral" passivity,(29) but a schizoid state of psychic detachment from the physical world in which Marya is labelled "victim" and condemned to act out a single role.

But the passive external self which Marya exhibits in the world of her story, counterpoints the internal persona characterized by her narrative: Marya's inner voice of female anger and sexuality grows increasingly powerful. Indeed, Jean Rhys was later to remark on her own disguised inner reserves of strength: "This morning someone wrote for God's sake don't be so meek. Meek !!! When I long to slaughter for a week or more. All over the place. . . . It is only outwardly that I'm a light weight person."(30) Interestingly, Marya's external passivity and Dowell's "catalepsy" resemble the opposing qualities of a "zombi," as defined in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: "A zombi is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead."(31) Just as *The Good Soldier* examines

Marya and Lois establish the full context of Marya's nightmare where Lois's reiterated claim to see Marya's "point of view" exposes the macabre dimensions of Marya's isolation: "Lois was . . . insensitive to the point of stupidity -- or was it insensitive to the point of cruelty? Which?" (p. 48).

Unwillingly, Marya is led by Lois "up a narrow staircase to a little room which smelt clean and cold" (p. 44), and it is Lois who makes the final arrangements for Marya's residency with the Heidlrs -- remarkably reminiscent of the naive Maisie Maiden's arranged residence with the Ashburnhams in *The Good Soldier*: "it had looked very well -- the benevolent, wealthy couple, acting as saviours to the poor, dark-eyed, dying young thing" (*TGS*, p. 63). Lois's single display of emotion and vulnerability initially convinces Marya that she is a "fellow-woman, hurt and bewildered by life even as she was" (p. 43). But Lois reveals her duplicity when, once she has established Marya in the Heidler household/"harem" she immediately begins setting Marya in her place -- just as she has placed the doll dressed as an eighteenth-century lady who "smirked conceitedly from the divan, with satin skirts spread stiffly" (p. 41). Specifically, Lois's painting of Marya represents an outrageous display of power in which she not only means to strip Marya of her subjectivity by reducing her to an object of contemplation, but to force Marya to listen to her perverse rhetoric -- a particularly insidious form of intimidation: "Lois . . . discussed Love, Childbirth (especially childbirth, for the subject fascinated her), Complexes, Paris, Men, Prostitution, and Sensitiveness, which she thought an unmitigated nuisance" (p. 49).

Lois speaks with a "healthy voice," with the complacency of one who intimately knows and abuses the power of patriarchal law. But when she begins "talking common sense about prison and the punished in her young man's voice," and recommends that Marya "cut loose" from Stephan, from the only person with whom Marya has even vague remembrances of commonalty, Marya's "longing to assert her point of view" becomes a desperate urge to express her sense of demoralization:

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

She muttered: 'You don't understand.' (pp. 51-2)

But Marya's fantasy of violently disrupting Lois's complacency, of expressing what she longs to scream, remains just that -- a fantasy. Her inadequacy, however, is not a question of moral fortitude or personal will, but a question of language -- Marya lacks words, her native tongue has been systematically silenced. And throughout *Quartet* Marya's rage remains directed at the perfidious voices of "fellow-women" who have denied the community of women in order to surviveⁱⁿ a man's world:

'Oh, I know I've got a terrible tongue,' Lois would say complacently. And Marya, watching her, silent, would think: 'One of these days just when she's thought of something clever to say about me for her friends to snigger at, just when she's opening her mouth to say it, I'll smash a wine-bottle in her face.' Sitting there silent, her hands cold and a little fixed smile on her face, she would imagine the sound of the glass breaking, the sight of the blood streaming. (p. 97)

Marya's own victimization is a consequence of her determination, unlike both Miss De Solla and Lois, not to disguise her sexuality in a culture where being female threatens one's ability to survive.

Lois's duplicitous "touch" -- Marya "could never make up her mind whether she liked or intensely disliked Mrs. Heidler's touch" (p. 39) -- and fraudulent language forces Marya into a kind of solitary confinement. Thus Stephan's actual incarceration provides the metonymic type of Marya's own emotional imprisonment. Prison becomes both a real institution, the specific representation of the way in which "the top class and sex punish those below them," as Judith Kegan Gardiner suggests, (33) and the metonym for Marya's own subjective experience. Contemplating Stephan's confinement, Marya discovers the vehicle for conceptualizing her own anxiety: "Fancy being shut up in a dark little dirty cell when the spring was coming. Perhaps one morning you'd smell it through the window and then surely your heart would nearly burst with the longing for liberty" (p. 54). Similarly, it is by recalling her place with the other women who must stand neither fully inside nor outside the prison, but pressed against each other in a long line of diseased humanity, that Marya is able to articulate her own desire for release:

A tram-car lumbered past her, and she began to think of the women who stood in the queue at the prison of Fresnes and of the way they would edge forward mechanically and uselessly, pushing her as they edged. So that she was always forced to stand touching their musty clothes and their unwashed bodies. She remembered her tears and her submissions and the long hours she had spent walking between two rows of street lamps, solitary, possessed by pity as by a devil. 'I've been wasting my life,' she thought. 'How have I stood it for so long?'

And her longing for joy, for any joy, for any pleasure was a mad thing in her heart. It was sharp like pain and she clenched her teeth. It was like some splendid caged animal roused and fighting to get out. It was an unborn child jumping, leaping, kicking at her side. (pp. 58-9)

By characterizing Marya's passion as imprisoned and mute (unborn), and defining Lois's access to power negatively -- as directly proportionate to her repression of real feeling (authentic "voice"), to her devaluation of a specifically feminine sensibility -- Rhys subverts the stereotypical conception of a passive and masochistic feminine "nature." Lois's perverse "feminine" masquerade, which masochistically denies and violates female sexuality, is necessary for her social survival. Similarly, Marya's debasement does not derive from her own moral weakness, but is enforced by an alien social code, a meaningless legal language in which Marya's violent protests may be repeatedly ignored: "'You can't lay down the law about me because you don't know anything,'" Marya screams in horrified frustration (p. 61). Neither woman's neurosis derives from *nature*, neither woman's sexual abasement is the fulfillment of deviant subconscious desires. Their respective positions characterize the arrangement of women in patriarchal structures -- the two possible roles of women (good or bad) which, as Leslie Fiedler discovers, are equally doomed: "the dream role and the nightmare role alike deny the humanity of women, who, baffled, switch from playing out one to acting out the other." (34) Lois's material prosperity cannot ultimately disguise her real insubstantiality -- "Lois was a shadow, less than a shadow. Lois had simply ceased to exist" (p. 65). Conversely, Marya's interiority predicts her material demise. Throughout *Quartet*, then,

the relationship between Lois and Marya demonstrates the paradox of female acculturation: "If woman remains true to herself, and continues to think in terms of harmony rather than struggle, of giving rather than exchange, she will be ruthlessly crushed. If she adopts masculine values along the way, like coldness and imperialism, she will succeed only in destroying herself, and she will surely be an object of ridicule."(35)

Where Lois appropriates a fraudulent voice and duplicitous language in order to undermine Marya's autonomy, Heidler's authority derives from the unquestioned right of the male master. Heidler's "love-making" proclaims his absolute right to take advantage of Marya's accessibility: "I know that somebody else will get you if I don't. . . . That's truth and all the rest is sob stuff," (p. 57). Unlike Lois's double-voice, Heidler speaks the language of explicit confrontation: "talk" is Heidler's weapon of conquest, talk delivers the hard facts of male coercion and female defilement. Heidler pursues Marya with the voice of authority and a tyrannical single vision:

"Now you've got to listen. Your door is open because I come up every night and open it. Then I look at you and go away again. One does meaningless things like that when one is tortured by desire. Don't you know that I wanted you the first time I saw you? . . . I knew that I could have you by putting my hand out, and I kept off you. I thought it wouldn't be playing the game. But there comes a limit you see." (p. 57)

Heidler's encounter confirms Marya's vague and shadowy sense of cruel pursuit, and his announcement that Marya's time is running out issues a warrant for her "smash-up." Marya responds appropriately.

Her fear becomes utter desolation and her struggle for self-preservation becomes a form of madness: "a profound conviction of the unreality of everything possessed her. She thought: 'I wonder if taking opium is like this?'" (p. 65).

When Marya reaches the point of absolute despair, however, a ^ll_Aison with Heidler appears her only possible appropriation of power, of a connection with the living. Her submission to Heidler dramatizes Marya's desperate imagination that attachment to him may provide a means of psychic survival, of human resurrection. Finally, Marya's obsession with Heidler acts out the ambiguity of female sexual desire in a culture that places women outside of sex: "And, of course, in the end that's it: the final mythic outsideness of woman is that ultimately she is beyond sex. Steeped in sex, drugged on sex, defined by sex, *but never actually realized through sex*, she has gone beyond it, she has gone through it, she is on the other side." (36) Fulfilling the dream of rape subliminally operating throughout the narrative, Marya's seduction signals her internalization of a paradoxical female sexual identity dictated by the phallogentric culture of which she is now a part:

'Hullo, H.J.,' she said, and sat up quickly. He was too formidable standing over her. 'Listen. I've been telling Lois that I want to ~~to~~go -- I think I'd better.'

'Oh, I think I'd better. I think I'd better,' she kept on saying in a little, pitiful voice; but when he took her in his arms she thought: 'How gentle he is. I was lost before I knew him. All my life before I knew him was like being lost on a cold, dark night.'

She shivered. Then she smiled and shut her eyes again.

He whispered; 'I love you, I love you. What did you say?'

'That you don't understand.'

'Oh, yes, I do, my dear,' said Heidler. 'Oh, yes, I do.' (p. 66)

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Bodily rape is merely the acting out of a daily ideological reality. / Rape is an initiation / they say we are becoming women, / we say that we are being forced to enter the legal system. / Rape does not exist / they say it's nature, / we say; it's the law / Rape exists; it's reality. The raping of silent little girls by fathers, by brothers; the raping of isolated women by men. / in any case it exists in women's minds as fear, as anguish. / it exists in men's minds as a right.(37)

Progressing from interrogation, aggression and insult, to actual rape, Heidler's seduction of Marya demystifies a specifically patriarchal paradigm of power: "there is only one master, he who possesses. The master is nothing but a proprietor."(38) Heidler's mastery depends upon the annihilation of Marya's own naive self-image -- "rape leaves you helpless, voiceless, paralyzed, frigid, traumatized."(39) Thus Marya develops a pathological attachment to Heidler as a corrupted "God-the-Father" image who now possesses the capacity to destroy at will her very existence. Following Marya's initiation into Heidler's vision of "love-as-defilement," Heidler informs her she is "in a different world now" (p. 70). In this new world, Marya perceives more intensely than ever, that her personal survival depends on her ability to maintain an obsessive interior dialogue, on her ability to live wholly outside the continuity of history and inside the sensational moment:

No past. No future. Nothing but the present: the flowers on the table, the taste of wine in her mouth. She glanced at the rough texture of Heidler's coatsleeve and longed to lay her face against it. (p. 67)

Situated between Lois and Heidler, in the middle of some macabre "game" that she doesn't know how to play (p. 70), Marya becomes "haggard, tortured by jealousy, burnt up by longing" (p. 77), and her capacity to feel anything but inexpressible pain, is prescribed by her pathological dependence on Heidler's authority: "her heart felt as if it were pinched between somebody's fingers" (p. 78). Attempts to explain herself are now "vain repetitions," "quite incoherent," and Marya's sense of unreality begins to include the Heidlers' "love" triangle and her own emotional involvement in their drama, a domestic farce:

[Marya] began to think how ridiculous it all was, that it was chilly, that she wanted to go upstairs, that she had only imagined the love and hate she felt for these two, that she had only imagined that such emotions as love and hate existed at all. . . . When she woke the next morning the whole thing seemed very unreal and impossible. But even while it was going on it had seemed unreal. She had felt like a marionette, as though something outside her were jerking strings that forced her to scream and strike. Heidler, weeping, was a marionette, too. And Lois, anxious-eyed, in her purple dressing-gown. (p. 82)

Marya's hotel bedroom, once a "refuge" (p. 28), finally becomes the place of sickness and despair -- "A bedroom in hell might look rather like this one'" (p. 93). And Marya is ^{literally} transformed into a streetwalker:

What mattered was that, despising, almost disliking, love, he was forcing her to be nothing but the little woman who lived in the Hotel du Bosphore for the express purpose of being made love to. A *petite femme*. It was, of course, part of his mania for classification. But he did it with

such conviction that she, miserable weakling that she was, found herself trying to live up to his idea of her. (p. 92)

Heidler acquaints Marya with his idea of sex as "a ferocious thing," -- "'Terrible as an army set in array. Terrible and pitiful and futile,' [Heidler] thought" (p. 101). Marya gains intimate knowledge of a "Logic and Common Sense" (p. 93) that denies the possibility of passionate interchange and defines relationships in terms of a carefully ordered aggression:

. . . of course it wasn't a love affair. It was a fight. A ruthless, merciless, three-cornered fight. And from the first Marya, as was right and proper, had no chance of victory. For she fought wildly, with tears, with futile rages, with extravagant abandon -- all bad weapons. (p. 91)

Marya conceives herself as conquered territory: "She never reacted now. She was a thing. Quite dead. Not a kick left in her" (p. 96). But her absolute submission -- "She was quivering and abject in his arms, like some unfortunate dog abashing itself before its master" (p. 102) -- articulates a peculiar form of resistance. Rhys reveals Marya's "passivity" to be calculated "indifference" -- "isn't not caring a damn nice feeling?" (p. 60). Denial becomes Marya's only means of revolt against an alien authority (the "virile system"), of assuaging "the fear she lived with -- that the little she had would be taken from her" (p. 96). In a rare moment of intimacy, Marya tries to explain her method of psychological survival to Lois: "The moment comes when even the softest person doesn't care a damn anymore; and that is a precious moment" (p. 42). Marya's embrace of death and impassioned journey towards darkness

resists the dialectic of power politics which divides the world into oppressors and victims, the living and the dead. Marya, then, assumes the posture of victim but on her own terms, and retains some sense of autonomy by resisting the code of masculine heroics which, like the good soldier's story, are always "played out in the face of death," in spite of life:

Once you understand what the hero wants, you also understand why he can never be happy. He knows he will die one day and for him this idea is intolerable. Because after his death the world will go on turning. A world rich and pregnant with all the things the hero was unable to possess but also, O cruel fate! with all the things he had succeeded in possessing.

Death will relentlessly steal from him all that he considers his own, real or potential, and death is his greatest torment.

It is death that raises the hero's temperature. Not life; that leaves him cold.(40)

Thus Marya, though conquered, refuses to finally internalize the values of Heidler, to speak the language of colonization, a patriarchal language of conquest and propriety in which "death" signifies the final enemy, and self-consummation the final erotic exploit. Marya resists suicide and despite Heidler's grotesque cruelty -- "I have a horror of you. When I think of you I feel sick" (p. 115) -- Marya speaks instead an incomprehensible litany of love: "A delicious relief flooded her as she said the words and she screamed again louder: 'I love him! I love him!'" (p. 142). Marya's obsession, "arid, torturing, gigantic, possessing her as utterly as the longing for water possesses someone who is dying of thirst" (p. 91), is with life, with the potential for (re)birth. Just as throughout the novel Marya has been associated with ritual

decomposition, the living dead, in the conclusion of Marya's narrative "death" functions not as an external enemy to be conquered, but remains a necessary coordinate in Marya's inner emotional discourse: "If I were dying, that would be the last thing I would say, that I loved you" (p. 121).

Throughout *Quartet* dream narratives are an essential part of Marya's self-preservation. Moreover, the ambiguity of dreaming, where sleep simulates death ("sleep was like falling into a black hole," p. 58) and the cycle of rebirth, characterizes the nature of Marya's desire as "unborn" rather than annihilated. Marya perceives her place not with the eternally damned but as "a soul in limbo" (p. 114), and her association with the "joy wheel" throughout the novel (pp. 46, 67, 84), represents both her desperate dependence on fortune, and her affiliation with a regenerative cycle. Dreaming is a means of consolation: "sometimes she would feel sure that her life was a dream -- that all life was a dream. 'It's a dream' she would think; 'it isn't t real' -- and be strangely comforted" (p. 96). And dreaming recalls the specific cultural context of Marya's nightmare experience:

She lay back and shut her eyes and saw Heidler kneeling down to pray in the little church and looking sideways at her to see if she were impressed. He got up and walked out of the church into the room. "God's a pal of mine," he said. "He probably looks rather like me, with cold eyes and fattish hands. I'm in His image or He's in mine. It's all one. I prayed to Him to get you and I got you. Shall I give you a letter of introduction? Yes, I might do that if you remind me. No trouble at all. Now then, don't be hysterical. Besides, Lois was there first. Lois is a good woman and you are a bad one; it's quite simple. These things are. That's what is meant by having principles. Nobody owes a fair deal to a prostitute. It isn't done. My dear girl, ^hat would become of things if it

were? Come, come to think it over. Intact or not intact, that's the first question. An income or not an income, that's the second. (p. 125)

Ford sets up an ironic dichotomy between Catholic restraint, Leonora's perverse "conscience," and Protestant excess, Florence's vulgar sexuality. But, as opposed to Ford's formal oppositions, Rhys's references to organized religion are wholly devoid of a kind of abstract complacency. In Marya's nightmare, Heidler's obscene rationalizations of his personal brutality directly express the ideological premises of cultural institutions. Thus, as Gardiner suggests, Rhys "emphasizes the specific perversion by which bourgeois morality seizes religion to enforce its social controls," and demonstrates the real and substantial horror, for a woman, of the institutionalization of "the patriarchal dichotomy virgin/whore that divides and oppresses women."(41)

Stephan's return from prison provides a temporary release for Marya's own caged sensibility, a brief and charming interlude in which Marya momentarily recovers her "vanished youth," her naive vision of a liberating differentiation and subjective association. Significantly, Marya's time with Stephan is characterized as dream-like: "the next few days passed like a dream. Lovely days, fresh, washed and clean. And the knowledge that this was the irrevocable end of their life in Paris made every moment vivid, clearly cut and very sweet" (p. 110). But as the *legal* enforcement of a patriarchal society, prison brands Stephan with an unalterable social status. He comes out, as Gardiner notes, "at the bottom of a male hierarchy of money and power."(42) Thus Stephan's estrangement from Marya has

been permanently defined by his imprisonment within the institutions of a bourgeois morality which he once eluded. As Stephan himself remarks, "you don't come out. Nobody ever comes out" (p. 106). With the irretrievable loss of Stephan's sympathy, moreover, Marya is permanently exiled to a hallucinatory existence, to "unreality" and "sleepwalking." Stephan's "little boy's voice" disguises a newly acquired ferocity -- "there was something wolf-like about his sharpened features" (p. 132). And his final vow to seek revenge on Heidler reveals his affiliation with the heroic code from which Marya remains fundamentally alienated:

Be he crusader, nazi, highwayman, cop, or revolutionary,
it's always the same mixture. The courage of the hero.

And courage is worthless in itself. Less than
worthless. Courage is not beautiful. Courage is not
great.

It is wretched, hateful, swollen, puffy, deathly, since
its mission is to subdue, oppress, and repress all living
things.(43)

Stephan becomes the archetypal alien in Marya's nightmare --
"What am I doing here with this man?' she thought. 'This foreigner
with his ugly voice?'" (p. 139). Once the only person who
understood Marya's alien nature, Stephan finally emerges as the
image of a terrible, implacable oppression of female desire, female
voice:

Suddenly he had become the symbol of everything that all
her life had baffled and tortured her. Her only idea was
to find words that would hurt him -- vile words to scream
at him.

Stephan's departure for Argentina to live by his wits in the world

of masculine exploits, is signalled appropriately. Stephan's leave-taking is violent and irrevocable: he strikes Marya, leaves her for dead, and departs with Mademoiselle Chardin -- "' *Encore une grue, 'he was thinking*" (p. 144). Sacrificed to Stephan's sense of transgressed honour, Marya's narration is itself interrupted, traumatized, discontinued. Stephan concludes the novel: his heroism survives.

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CONCLUSION: CHAPTER 2

Power Politics and Female Aesthetics: The "Doomed Soul" as Heroine

Physical or mental, man's space is a space of domination, hierarchy and conquest, a sprawling, showy space, a *full* space.

Woman, on the other hand, has long since learned to respect not only the physical and mental space of others, but space for its own sake, *empty* space. It is because she needs to maintain protective distance between herself and the men she has not chosen. As for those she may have chosen, there too, in order to avoid total annihilation, to escape man's habitual urge to colonize, she must conserve some space for herself, a sort of no man's land, which constitutes precisely what men fail to understand of her and often attribute to stupidity because she cannot express its substances in her inevitably alienated language.

The *void* is for her, then, a respectable value. --
Claudine Herrmann(44)

Paul Delany suggests that all six texts recounting the Ford/Rhys

affair have in common a preoccupation with "the different ways power may be exercised: in the class system, in the male/female hierarchy, through money, and through sexual possession and its display." (45) However, Jean Rhys's conceptualizing of power from a female perspective deviates radically from both Ford and the literary tradition which reveres him. In *Quartet*, the power politics of dominance and oppression significantly characterizes the society within which Marya finds herself hopelessly victimized, within which authority is sex-determined. Thus, Marya's initiation into a social realm is not, as in conventionally male paradigms, a shift from naive self-sufficiency to adult self-awareness, but from an "innocent belief in one's own autonomy to an image of oneself as victim of a brutal force." (46) Marya is pursued by Heidler's eyes which (much like the eyes of Doctor Eckleberg in *The Great Gatsby*) suggest the corrupted vision of a monstrous materialism. And her social initiation prescribes rape as a rite of passage. In contrast with Ford's "sentimental" vision of desire as "withering up the soul of man," (*TGS*, p. 109), and of sexual relations as self-destructive, however, Rhys does not perceive an eternal war between the sexes as the natural condition of society. Marya's perspective -- the impressionistic centre of the novel -- reveals Heidler's power as both arbitrary and perverse. But her passionate struggle to maintain an emotional bond with her oppressor also urges a *renegotiation* of social relationships rather than an unconditional retreat from human society. Unlike Ford, Rhys does not "transform into fiction personal knowledge that man is the suffering, cruel, helpless victim of his irrationality and his sexual passion." (47)

Whereas Ford creates moral dilemmas in which sexual passion vulgarizes noble impulse, the very moral urgency of Rhys's fiction derives from her heroine's compulsive and explicitly erotic sensibility.

In *Quartet*, then, the direct relationship between developing an authentically female voice of fiction and inscribing female desire in the text becomes unequivocal. By means of an intensely particular exploration of sexual politics, Rhys implies that the reconciliation of personal tragedies through a liberation from female self-censorship and male brutality, might in fact furnish a model for reintegrating a fractured society. Rhys's narrative retains a faith in the potential for social revision in which, as Lee Edwards suggests of the emerging Psyche myth in contemporary women's literature, "changing the relationship of men and women to each other, to heroism and society, might provide the basis of a new cultural order."(48)

Stella Bowen's view of the Ford/Rhys affair is, as Delany indicates, incompatible with Rhys's portrayal of Marya in *Quartet*. But this incompatibility is perhaps more significant than Delany perceives. Curiously, Delany suggests that "Bowen's version of the story is much closer than Rhys's to current feminist interpretations."(49) But, in fact, by employing conventional female stereotypes and outlining the sexual dynamics of a *menage a trois* legislated by patriarchal conventions, Bowen's autobiography corroborates the phallocentrism which alienates Rhys's work. Not only is *Drawn From Life* the only text that claims to provide a

strictly factual account of the relations between Bowen, Ford, and Rhys, but it is, besides Rhys's novel the only other female text. *Drawn From Life* thus presents a provocative countertext to a re-reading of *Quartet* as other discourse, as deliberately proposing an ex/centric version of the politics of experience. In her autobiography, Stella Bowen casts Ford as the grand literary master with a penchant for pretty young women, Rhys as the pathetically dependent female -- "a doomed soul, violent and demoralized"(50) -- and herself as the Angel-in-the-House:

Ford had fallen in love with a very pretty and gifted young woman. He had got over it in due course, but the affair had taught me many new things. It cut the fundamental tie between himself and me, and it showed me a side of life of which I had had no previous knowledge. The girl was a really tragic person. She had written an unpublishably sordid novel of great sensitiveness and persuasiveness, but her gift for prose and personal attractiveness were not enough to ensure her any reasonable life, for on the other side of the balance were bad health, destitution, shattered nerves, an undesirable husband, lack of nationality, and a complete absence of any desire for independence. When we met her she possessed nothing but a cardboard suitcase and the astonishing manuscript. She was down to her last francs and she was sick.(51)

Later, Bowen discards even the pretense of bourgeois sympathy and her portrait becomes a virulent polemic, the distinctly bitter confession of personal oppression. Specifically, Bowen is outraged by her subjection to the arbitrary assignment of social roles, and her incapacity to limit the potential power -- the potential humanity -- of the "underdog":

Here I was cast for the role of fortunate wife who held all the cards, and the girl for that of the poor, brave desperate beggar who was doomed to be let down by the bourgeoisie. I learned what a powerful weapon lies in

weakness and pathos and how strong is the position of the person who has nothing to lose, and I simply hated my role.(52)

Judith Kegan Gardiner suggests that Lois in *Quartet* (the fictional version of Stella Bowen) "pigeon holes people in a terror lest they escape from their places and reveal the precariousness of her place, her comfortable respectability that is dependent on her husband's position."(53) Similarly, Bowen's obsession with categories is particularly revealing. Bowen partakes of Ford's world view in which women figure as the objects of temptation, the seducers of man's moral will. Her barely submerged rage over a situation she was utterly powerless to affect is finally directed at Rhys -- despite the fact that the "powerful weapon" which Bowen envies is simply Rhys's momentary attraction of Ford's generous affections. Rhys herself is as incapable of real manipulation in the systems of the patriarchy as Bowen. And Bowen's stereotypical portrayal of the *ménage a trois* effectively maintains the status quo in which she, like Rhys, may only play a prescribed role, passive and servile.

It is not difficult, then, to see *Quartet*, first published under the title "Postures," as Rhys's inversion of this bourgeois paranoia. As a contemporary perspective on the events which Rhys chooses as the starting point of her fiction, Stella Bowen's autobiography indicates the crucial sense in which Jean Rhys's novel is not "drawn from life." Appealing to the "facts" in an effort "to assert unique knowledge of that unique subject, the self,"(54) Bowen characteristically appropriates the language of mastery, the

language which "tends to valorize phallic dominance, associated with the privileged father-daughter relationship." (55) But where Bowen fancies Rhys the diabolical *femme fatale* ("Ford's girl," as Bowen refers to Rhys, was in fact thirty-four) who inhibits her own access to power by deflecting the eyes of the father-husband, Rhys works instead towards subverting the conception of power as an attribute of the powerful. By working towards establishing the credibility of the underdog and thus conceptualizing power as a potentially reciprocal relationship which preserves the humanity of two independent subjects, Rhys suggests an alternative arrangement of power politics to the conventional dialectic of mastery and submission. Bowen's autobiography valorizes cultural stereotypes, Rhys's fiction creates a rival myth. (56)

Critics eagerly embrace Bowen's autobiography as validation of a "reality" that denies both women independent artistic identity, that sees both as "disciples of Ford" and rivals for his ultimate approval -- of their art, of their sexual identity. Rather than revenging herself of Ford's sexual rejection by publicizing the private vices of the "white father," however, Rhys attempts to posit an alternative vision to Ford's. Elaine Showalter's analysis of the affect of Dorothy Richardson's personal affair with H.G. Wells on Richardson's writing of *Pilgrimage*, provides valuable insight into the remarkably parallel circumstances of Rhys's writing of *Quartet*. Like Rhys, Richardson wrote the first volume of her novel in the aftermath of her affair with a larger-than-life literary figure-head and, as Showalter demonstrates, defines a female artistic identity in opposition to Wells: "I think we can assume that when she said

that *Pilgrimage* came from her effort to 'produce a female equivalent of the current masculine realism' it was chiefly Wells's realism she had in mind Eventually she wrote the anti-Wellsian novel."(57)

Unlike Richardson, Rhys did not consciously work out a literary theory that opposed Ford's, a female aesthetic that saw "shapelessness as the natural expression of female empathy, and pattern as the sign of male one-sidedness."(58) But Richardson's attempt to define herself in opposition to her male mentor, to create a specifically "female realism," provides considerable insight into the significance of Ford's influence on Jean Rhys's early fiction and, more importantly, indicates the relation of Rhys's first published novel to the final direction of her oeuvre. More directly than in any of Jean Rhys's other novels, *Quartet* adopts the order of realism and the mimetic structures of an externally and empirically apprehensible reality. Accordingly, the opening of *Quartet* proposes a time and a place: "It was about half-past five on an October afternoon when Marya Zelli came out of the Cafe Lavenue, which is a dignified and comparatively expensive establishment on the Boulevard du Montparnasse" (p. 7). But *Quartet's* "life-like" authenticity is deceptively simple. Though closer to a "self-present living speech" than any of her later more "writerly" texts, the language of *Quartet* expresses a peculiar self-consciousness in which the formal symbolic structure of Jean Rhys's final work, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, originates. By exploring the realistic details of female experience in *Quartet*, Rhys begins to develop a countermyth to the masculine tradition, social and

literary, from which she remains hopelessly alienated.

In her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please*, Jean Rhys quotes a comment that struck her as particularly witty: "English novelists always start with a quotation. The text before the sermon." (59) It is worth noting, then, that Rhys's own epitaph to *Quartet* is taken from "The Hermit," a sonnet by the poet recluse, R.C. Dunning (1873-1930). (60) Dunning's sonnet is a kind of tragi-comedy where the tragic isolation of the "Bleeding Heart" is ironically reconciled with an indomitable social persona -- "the smile that villains wear." Ironically, Dunning's own life -- a kind of solitary confinement -- dramatizes the violently thwarted development of female personality traditionally characterized by fictional structures: "markedly detached from people and things, he spent most of his life laboring slowly over a small group of poems in his room on rue Notre dame des Champs, which Paris *Tribune* columnist Wambly Bald called 'virtually a wooden box,' furnished only with a cot, a stove, a bookcase, and a single chair." (61) Considered by Pound to be "one of the four or five poets of our time" and referred to by Ford as "the living Buddha of Montparnasse," Dunning eventually starved himself to death. (67) Dunning's premature death, however, contrasts the great age of Jean Rhys, who lived and wrote beyond her eighty-eighth birthday. By incorporating Dunning's poem Rhys's own prefatory "text" presents a parable of self-preservation: *Quartet*, Rhys's "sermon," affirms a faith in one's capacity to survive.

For Jean Rhys, *Quartet* becomes a medium of self-affirmation, a

response to both her personal alienation from Ford's privileged elite and her cultural alienation from the central question of *The Good Soldier*: "In short, how can men find a workable relationship between their instincts and their civilized life?"(62) Not only must Rhys reject Ford's question concerning the dual nature of Man, but her marginal cultural status prevents her from authoritatively side-stepping the unresolved conflicts which the real issues of Ford's text create. Focusing directly on the world of her experience, Rhys rejects Ford's abstract enquiry into the nature of civilization and attempts to create a fiction from her life, a life from her fiction. Moreover, her fictionalization of female survival necessarily contradicts the pattern of masculine heroics. Rhys's "passive" heroine rebels against the heroic code that denies feminine will and characterizes women as objects of desire or debasement: Marya asserts the primacy of relationship, and her very desire for passionate exchange (an essentially erotic impulse) presupposes the possibility of conceiving a "community" that is not circumscribed by possessive individualism. Rhys's heroine does not elude the horror of bourgeois society through an ironic detachment from the world of experience; but with a perverse faith, Marya pursues relationship with that world in an effort to demystify the power structure that outlaws female experience, female personality. Marya explores the dark shadow-space which she imagines must finally identify her own fugitive sensibility -- "surely at the end of this long and glaring row of lamps she would find it, the friendly dark where she could lie and let her heart burst" (p. 117).

Responding to Ford's tutelage in her own words, Rhys discovers an

alternative discourse in which she exchanges the bitterly ironic antiheroism of *The Good Soldier* for the female heroics of relentless passion. Passion as dissected by Rhys, however, is other than Ford's fierce "craving for identity" (*TGS*, p. 109), for possession of the love object. As V.S. Naipaul suggests of Rhys's fiction:

Passion is dependence, a further diminution of the capacity to survive. And dependence is, curiously, like a drama in the head, something worked up and willful, yet in the end real and necessary: it is the woman's half-world. *Demi-monde*: exile and independence give the words an exact meaning.(63)

Rhys's language of fiction, then, substitutes for Ford's authoritarian nihilism an emotional order in which "passivity" translates as "indifference" -- willed resistance to an alienating system. As opposed to Dowell's profound disillusionment and consequent "catalepsy" in *The Good Soldier*, Marya's passivity does not signal the inevitable submission of pathetic individuals to universal suffering, to an oppressive hierarchy eternally perpetuated. In Rhys's fiction, rather, passivity preserves the moral sensibility of the heroine from the ultimate brutality of a corrupted society. Passive resistance -- not Dowell's exhausted collapse into muteness -- provides the only defence against the quintessential fear that pursues Marya following her initiation into the Heidlers' society: "that the little she had would be taken from her."

Thus Rhys's most "realistic" text reacts against Ford's expressionism by revealing the "real" contingency of *The Good Soldier's* subtext, the barbarous individualism that undermines

Ford's myth of a transcendent formal harmony. Unlike Ford's *tour de force*, Rhys's fiction does not demand the reader's apprehension of aesthetic unity in the "chaos of experience," as defined heroically by the final accomplishment of the individual artist. Rhys herself claimed, "I don't believe in the individual Writer so much as in Writing." (64) Expressing the discontinuity of female social experience, and the dissolution of female identity within conventional society, Rhys's fiction imitates the violently discordant rhythms of collective cultural alienation rather than the emotional "drive to neutrality" characteristic of Ford's modernist comedy of manners.

The excruciatingly intimate analysis of the dissolution of Marya's personality, rather than "discouraging empathy," demands the reader's own sympathetic comprehension of the "subject" of *Quartet*, the lost voice of Marya's identity: the living dialogue of Marya remains the fundamental link between the reader and the text. Within the context of the "story" of *Quartet* Marya is increasingly silenced. Social initiation prescribes Marya's inability to effect her personality in the external world: "she went on in the voice of someone talking aloud in an empty room" (p. 138). But Marya's growing inability to speak in the novel is paralleled by the increasingly participatory role of the reader as the only auditor of her discourse -- the nonsensical forms of inviolate desire, "passionate dependence." As the heroine dissolves into a "quivering and abject . . . dog abashing itself before its master," survival becomes a function of the *telling* of the story itself, the narrative process through which the reader and the author become bound by a

text that gives voice to passionate silence. The text itself presupposes an active communal empathy with the reader rather than Ford's "silent listener."

Based on historical events -- indeed, bits of description and dialogue recorded in *Quartet* may be found in the various versions of the Ford/Rhys affair -- *Quartet* stands as Jean Rhys's most "realistic" novel. The linear pattern of *Quartet* anticipates a kind of moral conclusion to Rhys's own "tale of passion." However, by obliterating the narrative "subject" (Marya), Rhys effectively refuses the teleology of realism: the melodramatic conclusion of *Quartet*, often objected to by Rhys's critics as "unrealistic," indeed makes non-sense of an ending. With her heroine, Jean Rhys abdicates authority and retreats into the non-rational, the mechanical pathos of the cycle. Moving into a ritualistic mode, then, *Quartet* abandons the illusion of realism and the archetypal sacrificing of Marya, (65) suggests the mythopoeic structures of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The conclusion of *Quartet*, moreover, while violating the expectations of realism, in fact predicts the emergence of a distinctively female myth, where the passive descent into silence provides the possibility of recovered voice. Marya's forced submission to the cycle of regeneration and her ritualistic identification with death and decomposition, intimates a rebirth, just as Antoinette's destruction by fire symbolizes the potential for dynamic reconstruction: the myth of Phoenix, rising.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER 2

- (1) Virginia Woolf, "Women in Fiction" (1929); quoted in Edwards, *n.* 257.
- (2) Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
- (3) Marianne Hirsch, "Mothers and Daughters," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1981), p. 211.
- (4) Edwards, p. 237.
- (5) With reference to Ford's own demand in 1914 for "a novel of neo-classical clarity," I am using the term "classical" in a general sense such as Dominique Secretan outlines in his "Preliminary Remarks" to *Classicism*: "Encyclopaedias use such phrases as an *aesthetic tendency characterized by a sense of proportion, by a balanced and stable composition, by a search for formal harmony and by understatement; imitation of ancient writers; aversion to the exceptional; well-nigh exclusive interest in psychological and moral analysis; control of sensitivity and imagination; submission to rules governing specific kinds of writing, and so on. Classicism has been equated with Beauty, with Reason, with Health, with Tradition. . . . Classicism is one of the aesthetic streams that flows through the changing landscapes of history.*" *Classicism*, "The Critical Idiom Series" (London: Methuen & Company, Ltd., 1973), [p. xiii].

- (6) In his "Preface" to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad asserts the function of the artist to speak "to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity and beauty, and pain, to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation -- and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity -- the dead to the living and the living to the unborn."
- (7) Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, quoted in Edwards, n. 286.
- (8) Edwards, p. 9.
- (9) Edwards, p. 4.
- (10) Stanley Aronowitz, quoted in *Psyche as Hero*, p. 9.
- (11) Stang, p. 79.
- (12) Rhys's repeated references in her letters to her own agonized loneliness, suggests that though she often craved time alone to write she was devastated by her general exclusion from social intercourse. Neither Jean Rhys nor her heroine are driven towards solitude, a self-contained inner-life, but towards relationships -- if not with "society" as a political abstraction, then certainly with the society of individuals.
- (13) Hirsch, "Mothers and Daughters," p. 210.
- (14) Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (1928; rpt. Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 10-11.
All further references will be to this edition.
- (15) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 100.
- (16) Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," p.

185.

- (17) Gornick, p. 126.
- (18) Gornick, p. 139.
- (19) Susan Brownmiller asserts that "The psychic burden under which women function is weighted by a deep belief, borne out by ample evidence, that our attractiveness to men, our sexual desirability, is in direct proportion to our ability to play the victim." Quoted in Grace Stewart, *A New Mythos*, p. 49.
- (20) Gornick, p. 135.
- (21) Gornick, p. 137.
- (22) Eagleton, p. 215.
- (23) See, Wolfe, p. 68.
- (24) Barbara Godard, "Ex-centriques, Eccentric, Avant Garde," *Room of One's Own* 8, No. 4 (1984), p. 62.
- (25) See especially, Frank Baldanza, "Jean Rhys on Insult and Injury," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 11, No. 2 (Fall 1978). After suggesting some thematic comparisons between Rhys's heroine and Dostoevsky's underground man, Baldanza concludes that Marya, however, is "much more passively helpless than the underground man, to a degree that taxes my own sympathies: if one behaves like a rag-doll, one's right to complain about rag-doll treatment is therefore qualified," (p. 60). In Baldanza's terms, the inhumane treatment of Marya is not just a consequence of circumstances but of "rights" and just deserts! What, incidentally, is his criterion for "rag-doll behavior"?
- (26) Jeremy Hawthorn, "Race, Relationship and Identity: William Faulkner and Jean Rhys," from his *Multiple Personality and the*

Disintegration of Literary Character: From Oliver Goldsmith to Sylvia Plath (London: E. Arnold, 1983), p. 105.

- (27) See, Elizabeth Abel, "Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys," in *Contemporary Literature* XX, 2 (1979).
- (28) Dennis Lee, quoted in Godard, "Ex-centriques, Eccentric, Avant-garde," p. 61.
- (29) See Thomas F. Staley's article, "The Emergence of a Form: Style and Consciousness in Jean Rhys's *Quartet*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24 (Summer 1978), pp. 202-225, for discussion of Marya's "fundamental amorality," and the "exploration of passivity . . . which lies at the heart of the novel."
- (30) Rhys, *Letters*, pp. 172, 245.
- (31) Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; rpt. Penguin Books, 1982), p. 88. All further references will be to this edition.
- (32) Gerda Lerner, quoted in Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," p. 199.
- (33) Gardiner, "Rhys Recalls Ford: *Quartet* and *The Good Soldier*," in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* (Spring 1982), p. 73.
- (34) Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 2nd ed. (1960; rpt. New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1967), p. 314.
- (35) Claudine Herrmann, "The Virile System," *New French Feminisms*, p. 89.
- (36) Gornick, p. 139.
- (37) "Rape is an abuse of power," *Le quotidien des femmes* (May 3, 1975); rpt. *New French Feminisms*, p. 195.
- (38) Annie Leclerc, *Woman's Word* (Grasset, 1974), rpt. *New French Feminisms*, p. 81.

- (39) "Rape is an abuse of power," p. 82.
- (40) Leclerc, p. 82.
- (41) Gardiner, "Rhys Recalls Ford," p. 75.
- (42) Gardiner, "Rhys Recalls Ford," p. 71.
- (43) Leclerc, p. 86.
- (44) Herrmann, p. 169.
- (45) Delany, "What 'Really' Happened?," p. 18.
- (46) Susan Brownmiller, quoted in Grace Stewart, *A New Mythos*, p. 49.
- (47) Moser, p. x.
- (48) Edwards, p. 6.
- (49) Delany, p. 17.
- (50) Stella Bowen, *Drawn From Life*, quoted from Stang, p. 33.
- (51) Stella Bowen, *Drawn From Life*, quoted from Mizener, p. 345.
- (52) Mizener, p. 346.
- (53) Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Rhys Recalls Ford: *Quartet* and *The Good Soldier*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, (Spring 1982), p. 73.
- (54) Patricia M. Spacks, "Selves in Hiding," p. 112.
- (55) Julia Kristeva, in "Oscillation Between Power and Denial," argues that there are two extremes in the writing experience of women: the first in which the writer "tends to valorize phallic dominance, associated with the priveleged father-daughter relationship," and the other in which the writer tends "to flee everything considered 'phallic' to find refuge in the valorization of the silent underwater body, thus abdicating any entry into history" (p. 166). Her analysis provides an

interesting perspective on the incompatibility of Rhys's fiction and Bowen's autobiography.

- (56) See Barbara Godard's argument that central to both feminist concerns and avant-garde literature is "the issue of intransigent language which has become detached from reality." "Ex-centrics, Eccentric, Avant-garde," p. 61.
- (57) Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 253.
- (58) Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 256.
- (59) Rhys, *Smile Please*, p.161.
- (60) The Hermit)

Bleed, O my heart, bleed slowly but take care
That no one hears thy bleeding. In the night
Let not thy bedfellow divine thy plight.
Bleed softly, O my heart, and in the glare
And heavy silence of high noon, beware
Of good Samaritans -- walk to the right
Or hide thee by the roadside out of sight
Or greet them with the smile that villains wear.

Bleed slowly and bleed softly, O my heart.
Go hide in nameless mountains of the north
Or deep in monstrous cities play they part
O Bleeding Heart whereby the world's aflood --
But shun all congregations loving blood
Let some fool on a banner bear thee forth.

R.C. Dunning, from his "Twelve Poems," *the transatlantic review*, II, No. 5 (November 1924), p. 480.

- (61) JoAnn Balingit, "Ralph Cheever Dunning (1878-1930)," *Dictionary of Literary Biography IV*, p. 126.
- (62) Stang, p. 72.
- (63) Naipaul, p. 29.
- (64) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 103.
- (65) Stephan's violence against Marya appropriately concludes the

narrative throughout which Marya has been defined as quintessential "Outsider." Marya is alienated from both the dominant cultural milieu and, finally, from the subversive society of Stephan. Her demise logically extends her role as cultural outcast: "A look at culture and literature will confirm that the life of woman, like the life of every outsider, is determinedly symbolic of the life of the race: that this life is offered up, as every other outsider's life is offered up, as a sacrifice to the forces of annihilation that surround our sense of existence, in the hope that in reducing the strength of the outsider -- in declaring her the bearer of all the insufficiency and contradiction of the race -- the wildness, grief, and terror of loss that is in us will be grafted onto her, and the strength of those remaining within the circle will be increased. For in the end, that is what the outsider is all about: that is what power and powerlessness are all about; that is what inclusion and exclusion are all about; that is what the cultural decision that certain people are "different" is all about: if only these *Steppenwolfs*, these blacks, these Jews, these women will go mad and die for us, we will escape; we will be saved; we will have made a successful bid for salvation." Gornick, pp. 128-29.

(66) Stewart, p 14.

(67) Balingit, p 126.

INTRODUCTION

Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway: Gothic Quest Versus Romantic
Epiphany in the Female *Bildungsroman*

Only a dialogue with the past can produce originality. --
Wilson Harris(1)

In light of the recent emphasis by feminist critics on the continuities of women's writing, on "a core of feminine self expression" persisting throughout an evolving female literary tradition, Jean Rhys's final work, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, emerges as an extraordinarily provocative contemporary text. By telling the story of the madwoman in the attic of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* -- because, as she wrote, "I've never believed in Charlotte's lunatic"(2) -- Rhys not only suggests a complex resolution to the conflicts and themes running throughout her life's work, but also radically revises a cultural script which traditionally evades and denies female sexuality and personal autonomy. If, as Kathleen Tillotson asserts, *Jane Eyre's* "perennial appeal is ensured by its universality and immediacy, and by the intimacy with which the reader knows its heroine,"(3) then the power of *Wide Sargasso Sea* derives from its conscious disruption of this comfortable familiarity. First published in 1847, *Jane Eyre* created an "alarming revolution" in women's writing.(4) But Bronte's retreat, finally, into a patriarchal cosmos and "the ostensible triumph of

the secular, moderate-liberal, sentimental point of view over the mythical, tragic point of view"(5) in *Jane Eyre*, signals Bronte's compromise with Victorian morality and conventional literary structures. The potency of Bronte's domesticated myth derives, as Rosalind Miles asserts, from her "recapturing the old rather than building the new."(6)

David Lodge suggests that "in the war of earthly elements, in preserving a precarious equilibrium between opposing forces, Jane Eyre finds the meaning of life."(7) *Equilibrium*, however, is precisely what, in Rhys's fiction, Antoinette Cosway cannot maintain. The "Story of the First Mrs. Rochester" -- Rhys's provisional title for *Wide Sargasso Sea* -- both incorporates and explodes the dimensions of an antiquated tradition in which the victimization of the female is rationalized within masculine paradigms of power and authority. In her final novel, Jean Rhys seeks to create a "dream truth" rather than a "realistic truth." Thus there is in *Wide Sargasso Sea* no careful balancing of oppositions, no commitment to imitating a "reality" defined by the dominant male culture, and no formal structures of libidinal containment: "excess" becomes Rhys's theme and value, the term of Antoinette's blazing triumph. Rhys transposes Bronte's Gothic terror and sentimentality -- in which "the mad wife locked in the attic symbolizes the passionate and sexual side of Jane's personality, an alter ego that her upbringing, her religion, and her society have commanded her to incarcerate"(8) -- into Romantic revolution, the structuring of a distinctively Female mythic quest for the reintegration of subjective and objective realities. No

longer constrained by the woman writer's need to "forge a self out of the materials of otherness," Rhys generates an authentically female myth from the original stories of her own autobiographical fiction and from the story of repressed female anger and sexuality paradoxically disclosed and disguised by Bronte's domestication of the mythical.

The coupling of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* not only reveals a complex relationship between Victorian realism and twentieth-century modernism but, most dramatically, demonstrates the evolution of a female literary tradition from, in Elaine Showalter's terms, "Feminine" fiction to a self-consciously "Female" literature. Covert expressions of women's experience disguised and submerged in the forms of the prevailing dominant literary tradition become metamorphosed in the process of discovering authentically Female fictions: *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not simply the story Charlotte Bronte chose not to write, but "the one she could not have written." (9) In both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, the developing sensibility of the heroine provides an intensely subjective record of female growth into adulthood. Both novels, then, may be interpreted as female versions of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Bronte's novel dramatizes the fate of the adolescent heroine of nineteenth-century fiction who, as Patricia M. Spacks indicates, "must either grow up or die"; in such novels, moreover, growing up "means, almost always, conforming." (10) In Jean Rhys's fiction of female development, however, the heroine is no longer the sprightly Jane Eyre -- in fact, Rhys insisted on "leaving out Jane!" (11) -- but the first Mrs. Rochester, the monstrous symbol of

demented female personality and the obstacle to the domestic romance in Bronte's fiction. An analysis of the two texts as novels of female development, then, provides a provocative perspective on Bronte's most successful work and reveals the depth of Rhys's artistic vision, her ability to subvert the involuntary codes of Bronte's realism and thus to revolutionize traditional concepts of female culture and identity -- both fictional and actual.

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CHAPTER THREE

Jane Eyre: Apprenticeship

My feet they are sore, and my limbs they are weary;
 Long is the way, and the mountains are wild;
 Soon will the twilight close moonless and dreary
 Over the path of the poor mountain child.
 -- *Jane Eyre*(12)

Jane Eyre, perhaps more successfully than any other female novel of development, adapts the linear structure of the (implicitly male) *Bildungsroman* and thus, in Elizabeth Abel's terms, internalizes the pattern of "apprenticeship," the narrative structure within which the adult resolution provides some closure to the heroine's initiation.(13) Jane's pilgrimage leads her from her foster home at Gateshead to "Lowood Institution," Thornfield Hall, Moor House, and, at last, to Ferndean Manor where she is reconciled with Rochester on her own terms, according to conventional principles that she has acknowledged and claimed as her own. The surface realism, or physical journey from dependent waif to independent woman, enacts the progress of the heroine's personality, and is, therefore, paralleled by an internal psychical journey that manifests the threefold structure of initiation ritual -- separation, transition, and incorporation. Jane Eyre separates from her childhood identity, the "poor orphan child" of Bessie's ballad, when she leaves Gateshead Hall for "remote and mysterious regions" (p. 41); her schooling at Lowood -- lessons in female self-censorship and

Christian martyrdom -- prepares her for a "new servitude" at Thornfield Hall, the place of transition; and, finally, the discovery of her true family at Marsh End and her marriage to Rochester at Ferndean, denotes Jane's incorporation into a social and sexual realm, the successful conclusion of her *rites de passage*.

The suppression of desire and the relegation of violent passion to the level of the subconscious, essentially defines the passage of the child into adulthood. The opening chapters of *Jane Eyre*, then, dramatize the intense emotional experience of the child, revealing the chaotic impressions and monstrous fantasies that must be recontained and subdued in the social or adult persona. Jane's ordeal in the red-room and her revolt against the confinement of childhood predicts her subsequent "long journey," the "entire separation from Gateshead," and defines Jane's entrance into a quest for a new identity: the child's rebellion signals the beginning of her search for appropriate means of ordering her experience. Thus the red-room episode -- the archetypally feminine "fantasy of enclosure"(14) -- encodes the separation rites of Jane's initiation by revealing the central issues that the process of Jane's quest for a fully integrated personality must resolve.

In his famous anthropological study, *Rites de Passage*, Arnold Van Gennep reveals rites of initiation as, essentially, rites of separation from an asexual world, followed by rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality -- rites that make the individual a man or a woman.(15) Appropriately, then, John Reed's violation of Jane's shrine of "double retirement" and his violent confrontation with her

in the breakfast room is an implicitly sexual challenge, to which Jane at last responds with a new instinct for survival: "'Wicked cruel boy!' I said. 'You are like a murderer -- you are like a slave-driver -- you are like the Roman emperors!'" (p. 43). Master John's subsequent cruelty expresses the tyrant's fear of insurrection and, significantly, an instinctive revulsion for Jane's new sexual awareness. The sexual dynamic between Jane and Master John exemplifies the archetypal psychological drama which the child enters as part of the process of separating from the asexual world of childhood. As Dianne F. Sadoff explains:

To enter the symbolic realm of culture . . . the child must understand sexual difference, this initial "binary opposition." Sexual difference signifies retroactively to the child the menace of castration, the fear of symbolic loss. To the boy: I must lose it. To the girl: I must have lost it.(16)

Like the other father surrogates Jane will meet throughout her quest, Master John freely exercises his aggression upon Jane as an accepted sign of his growing social and sexual potency. But Jane's self-defence, her revolt against the patriarchal oppression of her sex, inevitably confines her to a Gothic chamber of horrors, and finally exiles her from everything and everyone she knows. Expressed rage and undisguised sexuality condemns the pre-pubescent Jane to intolerable physical and psychical torture. It is to be liberated from this monstrous oppression and inhuman isolation that Jane Eyre embarks on her allegorical journey for social place and propriety.

Terror and horror, the fundamental attributes of Gothic

expressionism, significantly characterize Jane's experience in the red-room -- the central motif, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, of Jane's pilgrimage from enclosure to escape.(17) Bronte effectively employs the psychological landscape of the Gothic mode to present the internal torment of Jane's confrontation with an alien personality -- her potentially rebellious self. In the red-room Jane discovers the reflection of her own self-division, the passionate Double of her normally passive nature, which threatens to "escape from insupportable oppression" at all costs. As in traditional Gothic fiction, the atmosphere of evil and brooding terror represents the interior mental processes of the heroine, where the enclosed and remote world of the red-room is used to delineate the "naked soul" of sensibility, the intensely subjective perception of the place of evil in the human mind. But as the point of departure from childhood in the *Bildungsroman* structure of *Jane Eyre*, the Gothic symbolism of the red-room assumes an even greater complexity. The consideration of aberrant psychological phenomena that the Gothic tale encourages becomes, as an integral part of Jane's maturation, a consideration of specifically female psychological processes. Fear becomes the affective manifestation of a fundamental dualism not between external representations of good and evil, the quasi-allegorical symbols of the male Gothic mode, but between conflicting self-images, between the "Angel in the House" -- the Victorian feminine ideal -- and the debased woman. Thus the characteristic ambivalence toward the female (chaste versus corrupt woman) in traditional Gothic fiction becomes internalized by the heroine in Charlotte Bronte's autobiography: moral and emotional

ambiguity characterize the heroine's own self-conception, and the female development towards self-knowledge becomes a horrifying experience of self-doubt and impotent rage.

Revolt against her social and sexual status locks Jane in her own psychological prison, and rage over the injustice of her imprisonment creates the nightmare experience of self-disgust, self-hatred, and the impetus to self-destruction characteristic of a specifically Female Gothic Fiction.(18) Ellen Moers suggests that "nothing separates female experience from male experience more sharply, and more early in life, than the compulsion to visualize the self"; and though "despair is hardly the exclusive province of any one sex or class in our age, . . . to give visual form to the fear of self, to hold anxiety up to the Gothic mirror of the imagination, may well be more common in the writings of women than of men."(19) Typically, then, the mirror in the red-room focuses an intense moment of self-loathing, and images a monstrous reflection of Jane's fear of herself:

Returning, I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming up out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers. I returned to my stool. (p. 46)

Elizabeth MacAndrew outlines the function of the mirror in traditional Gothic as "the device that gives us the reflection of the villain, . . . giving the wicked man a monstrous shape, while

the hero is mirrored faithfully." (20) In the red-room, however, the mirror does not reflect the distorted features of the enigmatic villain, but the hated features of Jane's self-conceived criminality. Moreover, the young Jane's inability to repress her own monstrous identity, to imprison the violent and passionate self she herself perceives as loathsome, brings Jane to the point of ritual death. It is her own uncontrollable imagination of "some coming vision from another world," that elicits Jane's blood-curdling scream, and precipitates her climactic descent into madness:

My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings: something near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort.
(p. 49)

Jane's frantic anguish and wild sobs only increase the severity of her punishment and the duration of her confinement. She descends, like other nineteenth-century heroines who cannot reconcile their psychic needs to social prescripts, from madness to a death-like void: "I suppose I had a species of fit: unconsciousness closed the scene" (p. 50).

The horrifying experience of self-division becomes the fundamental dilemma of Jane's new struggle for adult consciousness. The dialectic of passionate revolt (the realization of independent will), and passive submission (the condition of social survival), focuses the internal drama of Jane's quest for self-authenticity. But from the beginning of her travels which are, as she now perceives Gulliver's, most desolate wanderings in "most dread and

dangerous regions" (p. 53), self-reproach subverts rebellious self-will. When Jane rightly accuses Mrs. Reed of treating her with "miserable cruelty," her soul's strange new sense of freedom and triumph is duly repressed by a self-annihilating moral conscience:

A ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring, would have been a meet emblem of my mind when I accused and menaced Mrs. Reed: the same ridge, black and blasted after the flames are dead, would have represented as meetly my subsequent condition, when half an hour's silence and reflection had shown me the madness of my conduct, and the dreariness of my hated and hating position. (pp. 69-70)

For Jane, there is no joy in passionate self-assertion. As a female initiate into patriarchal society, Jane's heroic self-expression yields an extraordinarily dreary and isolated existence, a kind of "madness." Significantly, a *deathly* self-hatred checks Jane's momentary passion in what will become the habitual pattern of her adult identity.

The "preternaturally long" journey from Gateshead to Lowood takes Jane through rain, wind, and darkness, and delivers her to a world of bitter cold and semi-starvation. Jane's experience at Lowood, her ordeal of hunger, cold, and humiliation, punctuated by bells and endless routine, comprises "an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted tasks" (p. 92). Situated between the place of childhood innocence (Gateshead) and the place which will challenge Jane's adult self-knowledge (Thornfield), Lowood represents the place of instruction. At Lowood, Jane must internalize various lessons in acculturation. What was originally offered as the condition of Jane's liberation

from the red-room -- "perfect submission and stillness" -- becomes the absolute condition of female survival in the world of patriarchal institutions, social and religious.

Miss Temple serves as Jane's spiritual "guide" (p. 75), but Mr. Brocklehurst acts as the Master Tutor at Lowood. The true disciple of a pedagogy that delineates the subservience of women and the natural supremacy of man, Mr. Brocklehurst administers cruel lessons in humiliation. At Mr. Brocklehurst's school, Jane learns that in the eyes of God as in the eyes of his earthly representative, Mr. Brocklehurst, a women's physiology alone declares her inherent sinfulness. According to the laws of God and man the female body must be denied existence. Appropriately, then, Jane's primary role models at Lowood remain the Virgin Mother (Miss Temple) and the disembodied saint (Helen Burns).

If Miss Temple represents Jane's spiritual mother (whose relationship with Jane becomes irreparably severed by her marriage and domesticity), and Mr. Brocklehurst looms as the tyrannical father, the overlord of female oppression, Helen Burns perfectly exemplifies the teachings of both Miss Temple and Mr. Brocklehurst. Jane's friendship with Helen establishes her affiliation with a cultural script that declares unearthly spirituality the highest female virtue. Following Jane's passionate outburst in which she unreservedly proclaims the value of revolting against inhuman confinement, of resisting those who punish her unjustly and disliking those who persist in disliking her, Helen explains her own method of preserving her humanity without rebelling against the

status quo:

We are, and must be, one and all, burdened with faults in this world: but the time will soon come when, I trust, we shall put them off in putting off our corruptible bodies; when debasement and sin will fall from us with this cumbrous frame of flesh, and only the spark of the spirit will remain -- the impalpable principle of life and thought, pure as when it left the Creator to inspire the creature; whence it came it will return, perhaps to pass through gradations of glory, from the pale human soul to brighten the seraph! . . . [W]ith this creed, revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low: I live in calm, looking to the end." (p. 91)

Sublime tolerance of the crimes of others and severe self-denial, however, inevitably culminates with death, the final aspiration of Helen's creed. For the remainder of her narrative Jane will struggle to resolve the paradoxical lesson of Helen: that within a patriarchal cosmos female heroism derives from a conscious psychic separation from the concrete world. From Helen's other-worldliness Jane learns that desire for an atemporal, aspatial realm of pure spirituality constitutes the only accepted manifestation of female ambition and personal pride. Helen's rigorous self-abnegation demonstrates the status of female personality within the confines of Western culture: "in social, sexual, and symbolic experiences, being a woman has always provided a means to another end, to becoming something else: a subject-in-the-making, a subject on trial."(21) Absorbed, silent, abstracted from everything around her, Helen Burns characterizes the archetypal heroine in the *Spiritual Bildung*.(22) Helen's creed demands the complete separation of body and soul: she endeavors to live not in the corruptible body of the flesh but in a world of her own spiritual reverie. Finally, as Lowood's ideal

disciple of self-flagellation and physical repression, Helen Burns becomes the tragic victim of Mr. Brocklehurst's mission "to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh" (p. 96), and her death manifests the inevitable self-consummation that female obedience to the patriarch effects.

Both symbolically and actually Helen Burn's death frees Jane, albeit momentarily, from the burden of Helen's ideal of saintly self-renunciation. Helen's death realizes Jane's instinctive conviction that devotion to "an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits" is not enough to sustain her in the present. Attachment to the concrete world of human affection and sensuality is as necessary to Jane's survival as her own good conscience (p. 101). Helen's sickness and the typhus epidemic at Lowood yields a kind of ritualistic reign of darkness and death. Classes are broken up, rules relaxed, and Jane is allowed "almost unlimited licence." Rambling in the woods with Mary Ann Wilson, a companion who indulges Jane's fancy and does not attempt to put a curb or reign on anything she says (p. 109), Jane discovers primitive emotional affiliations with a Saturnalian world of freedom and excess, a green world beyond the "high and spike-guarded walls" of Lowood (pp. 107-109). Physical conditions at Lowood improve following this crisis, but the departure of Miss Temple formally completes Jane's separation from the rigid emotional confines of Lowood's pedagogy. ^{Since Jane is} no longer personally bound to Lowood's system of self-abnegation, the school becomes a "prison-ground." Without the guidance of Miss Temple, Jane can no longer rationalize her self-repression:

I walked about the chamber most of the time. I imagined myself only to be regretting my loss, and thinking how to repair it; but when my reflections were concluded, and I looked up and found that the afternoon was gone, and evening far advanced, another discovery dawned on me -- namely, that in the interval I had undergone a transforming process; that my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple -- or rather, that she had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity -- and that now I was left in my natural element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions. It did not seem as if a prop were withdrawn, but rather as if a motive had gone: it was not the power to be tranquil which had failed me, but the reason for tranquility was no more. (p. 116)

Jane is overwhelmed by the desire for liberation from her female place of exile:

My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; and now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils. (p. 116)

Jane's prayer for liberty, however, "seemed scattered on the wind," and her humbler supplication for change, stimulus, "swept off into vague space" (p. 117). Her final desperate cry for "at least a new servitude!" is answered by Mrs. Fairfax, and Jane's longing for life and movement, for attachment to the "living world," once more confined to a circumscribed "place" -- this time to the secluded Gothic mansion, Thornfield Hall.

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What crime was this, that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor

subdued by the owner? -- What mystery, that broke out, now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey? (p. 239-241)

The red-room experience begins Jane's journey for selfhood by dramatizing the horror of female sexuality and the violent potential of unreigned imaginative will. Perfect submission and stillness become the conditions of escape from madness and death, the conditions of Jane's growth into adulthood. Thus internalized rage over her social and sexual status only generates Jane's self-reproach for the sin of pride, and Lowood appropriates the guilt that Jane must assume as the burden of female physiology. At Lowood Jane learns to adopt self-censorship and physical repression as inviolate law derived from a powerful theological ideal that "requires female submission to masculine authority as an asymmetrical sign of God's power and humanity's sinfulness." (23) But Jane's final encounter with the mystery of Thornfield Hall presents the central ordeal of her quest for social accommodation, the objective representation of Jane's inner conflict of passionate desire and social conscience. Here Bronte transforms the Gothic psychological landscape of the red-room into Gothic allegory. The secluded setting, the ancient mansion with its "chill and vault-like air" and subterranean passages, premonitory storms, howling dogs, demonic laughter, mysterious villain-hero, and intimations of aberrant sexuality, create an atmosphere that does not represent Jane's own intensely subjective experience but the objective place of Jane's coming of age. (24) Jane's own experience in the red-room of the subversive and thus inherently diabolical potential of female

sensibility is, at Thornfield, displaced and objectified by the mad woman in the attic. Bertha Rochester, the monstrous realization of what has already become an internal figment of Jane's nightmare of female initiation, becomes the fundamental object of reflection.

Role-playing and disguise, confused social categories and ambiguous family relationships at Thornfield, create the "realm of pure possibility" characteristic of the transitional phase of initiation. Gothic machinery, then, provides the vehicle for isolating and exaggerating the constituent factors of Jane's experience, and her trial of initiation necessitates resolving these ideas and sentiments according to internal principles of order and proportion, in reconciling her own self-division (reason and passion) and thereby overcoming the prevailing Gothic threat of dissolution.

As part of her development towards a new self-awareness, Jane's role-playing -- governess, mother, fairy, "wild boy," girl-bride -- significantly represents a progress in personality, participation in, rather than observation of, her cultural milieu. Jane's initiation, however, essentially focuses on the dynamic confrontation of fact and fantasy -- romantic daydreams of personal and sexual fulfillment juxtapose with the nightmare reality of severely limited possibilities for the expression of female desire. Throughout her residence at Thornfield Jane's passionate outbursts -- feminist protests against the restriction of her longing for "life, fire, and feeling" -- are underscored by the "low, slow ha! ha!" of the mad woman's tragic, preternatural laugh. Desire

habitually turns to self-loathing, and Jane severely admonishes herself for spinning imaginative tales of liberty, for rejecting the real and devouring the ideal. Chastizing her vulnerability to romantic love and sexual desire, Jane enslaves her own passion with an oppressive rationality (a measure of her progress towards social accom^modation):

It is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unrestrained and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, *ignis-fatuus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication. (p. 190)

As cruel punishment for the indulgence of sexual fancy, Jane orders herself to paint a self-portrait and to write under it, "Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain," and to place beside this a delicate miniature of Blanche Ingram entitled, "Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank" (p. 191).

Jane Eyre's passionate desire to possess Thornfield as her home (p. 281), expresses her desire for self-affirmation, for the reconciliation of imagination and reason in a spatial and temporal reality. According to Freudian theory, the house in dreams and fantasies symbolizes "the human figure as a whole." Thus despair follows Jane's early recognition that she may never fully inhabit Thornfield or, symbolically, achieve complete self-possession: "I see the necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death" (p. 281). At this point, however, Rochester offers Jane the greatest fantasy of all -- marriage to the man of her dreams, the complete realization of her physical and psychic self.

Jane accepts Rochester's proposal of marriage in the "eden-like" garden under the rising moon, but the storm that follows and the famous splitting of the chestnut tree, predicts Jane's growing apprehension of her own self-division, her disillusionment with her "aerial" role in the patriarchal tale of pursuing knight and coy mistress: "I had rather be a *thing* than an angel," Jane tells Rochester. Betrothal signals the beginning of Jane's "degradation," and the courtship of Jane and Rochester threatens to conclude as Jane earlier claimed all such tales promise to end: "in the same catastrophe -- marriage" (p. 228). Rochester, who has been the cause of much of Jane's role-playing and her "master" in the transition phase of her rite of passage, now threatens to devour his submissive initiate, to possess her body and soul. Jane struggles for her life to resist his charm, just as she rejects Rochester's new name for her (p. 287).

The climactic confrontation of Jane's fairytale daydream and Gothic nightmare occurs on the eve of her wedding when, in the haunted landscape of shadows and moonlight, howling wind, rain, and striking clocks, Jane recounts to Rochester her dream of the terrified child and of Thornfield Hall as a dreary ruin. Significantly, the point at which daydream and nightmare (the ideal and the real) intersect, is rendered as a tale within a tale and not, as in the red-room episode, experienced directly. Charlotte Bronte's epistolary method, characteristic of Gothic narrative structures, not only provides "a sense of the transitoriness of life and the fragility of evidence,"(25) a sense of temporal limitations and impending fate, but, most significantly, serves to abstract the

psychological phenomena of Jane's internal development and to emphasize the allegorical significance of the Gothic symbolism. The child of Jane's dreams is, obviously, her innocence, which she loses upon discovering both the insubstantiality of Thornfield Hall and the deceptive nature of Rochester's paternal authority. In her dream Rochester flees both Jane and her child when they are most desperate:

I sat down on the narrow ledge; I hushed the scared infant in my lap: you turned an angle in the road; I bent forward to take a last look; the wall crumbled: I was shaken; the child rolled from my knee, I lost my balance, fell, and woke. (p. 310)

As in Romantic imagery, the child symbolizes the primitive impulses of human feeling. The child of Jane Eyre's dream, however, is not Wordsworth's "Child of Joy," but "a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk, . . . which shivered in my cold arms and wailed piteously in my ear" (p. 309). Starved and half-frozen, the wailing child mirrors the condition of Jane's own infant sensibility, her passionate desire for personal fulfillment which remains unsustainable by the acting out of romantic daydreams.

But the dream of infanticide is, as Jane tells Rochester, "the preface, sire; the tale is yet to come" (p. 268). Waking, Jane discovers the real horror of her female quest for self-discovery. As in the red-room, the mirror reflects a phantom vision of the alien Other. Symbolically linked with the catastrophic childhood scene, the mirror reflects Jane's own fragmented self and Jane's recognition of the mystery of Thornfield signifies self-disclosure. Jane's vision of the "foul German spectre -- the Vampyre" reveals

the lurid visage of her own sexuality rendered monstrous by cultural repression. The self-image which terrifies Jane in the red-room -- "tiny phantom, half fairy, half imp" -- has grown to hideous proportions. Jane's final confrontation with more than imaginative or "mental terrors," with the real manifestation of her inner conflict of self-will (eros) and social prescription, represents her fall from innocence. Thus, following the interruption of the marriage ceremony when Rochester reveals the bloated features of "virile" womanhood (p. 321) Jane stands gravely "at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of the demon" (p. 322).

The final "discovery" of Jane's quest is neither comprehended nor consciously recognized as the painful but essential encounter with the self. The nature of Bertha Antoin^etta Mason remains ambiguous and enigmatic. The recognition scene in Charlotte Bronte's novel of female development, then, is not the affirmation of the heroine's identity, but the realization of utter disillusionment: "I have awakened out of most glorious dreams and found them all void and vain" (p. 325). Just as Jane's forced acknowledgment of her sexual identity and her rage over the frustrating burden of her female body consistently yields, throughout her development, to terrifying self-hatred, so the final revelation of Bertha Rochester, of expressed female sexuality as abomination, begins Jane's self-effacement and death fantasy. In Charlotte Bronte's *Bildungsroman* structure the outward manifestation of the heroine's inner potentiality is Bertha Rochester. And Jane retreats from the inner journey of self-discovery and exiles herself to the hostile world outside. The vast untravelled region into which Jane ventures is no longer fantasized

as an expansive world of "sensations and excitements." Instead, the world of experience is recognized as a cruel wasteland for the wandering female. Led by external laws and principles, Jane enters the valley of death -- chill, dark, and void -- to seek her adult destiny:

Hopeless of the future, I wished but this -- that my Maker had that night thought good to require my soul of me while I slept: and that this weary frame, absolved by death from further conflict with fate, had now but to decay quietly, and mingle in peace with the soil of this wilderness.
(p. 351)

Significantly, then, Bronte herself retreats to religious allegory to conclude her narrative of female development: faith in a mechanical God, rather than faith in her own creative potential, delivers Jane to her true "home" at Marsh End. Quest-romance becomes a Christian allegory that, on the surface at least, reinforces rather than challenges the prevailing social structures of an oppressive Victorian ethos -- structures that systematically incarcerate the nature of an outcast female sensibility. Whereas the religious fervor of St. John Rivers provides a significant outlet for his "unlimited ambition" and implicitly erotic energy, Jane is prohibited from even this type of self-expression. Unlike St. John, Jane is not "of the material from which nature hews her heroes" (p. 419) and she must finally reject the fantasy of heroism with which St. John tempts her to follow him in his Christian mission. Interrupting St. John's enthusiasm for her own ambitious nature, Jane shouts desperately, "you try to stir up restlessness! To what end?" (p. 417) and accuses St. John of near wickedness. St. John's challenge is, as Jane's desperation implies, cruelly

inappropriate. As a woman, Jane may never, as he does, "labour for his race" (p. 477).

The conclusion of *Jane Eyre* fails to resolve the heroine's journey for self-authenticity: it is a denial rather than a resolution of conflict. The abrupt shift to religious quest seems curiously at odds with the irrelevance of Christian standards characteristically disclosed by the preceding Gothic motifs. But, more significantly, Jane achieves heroic independence only through the saving graces of various paternal figures: God, who abides with her through the desert of despair, St. John Rivers, who commands her to "rise, and pass before me into this house," and her long lost Uncle John, whose fortune allows Jane to claim, finally, "I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress" (p. 459). Moreover, though Jane's marriage to Rochester formally concludes both the romance structure and Jane's *rites de passage*, her union with Rochester at Ferndean Manor -- "buried, as you see, in a heavy wood" -- severely undermines the success of her quest. The apparent closure of Jane Eyre's initiation only underlines Bronte's compromised heroic pattern. The labours through which Jane discovers not inner reserves of strength but a capacity for enduring, silently, the severely limited dimensions of female growth and self-discovery, undermine Jane's heroism throughout the novel. But her final deliverance to the dark seclusion of Ferndean clearly sacrifices Jane's archetypally heroic impulse for social revision -- her earlier railing against the suffering of women "from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation" (p. 141) -- for the popular cant of domestic bliss. Jane's achieved selfhood is not manifested

through a redefined social status and full participation in the life of society, but may only be maintained within a personal space, in isolation from the social realm.

The conflict of reason and passion, social prescription and imaginative desire, ostensibly resolved when Jane chooses Rochester over St. John Rivers, is in fact merely evaded. In the forest of Ferndean, "feeling" is significantly exorcised of dynamic sexuality and it is "the powerlessness of the strong man" that touches Jane's heart to the quick and earns her maternal devotion. Jane becomes with Rochester the "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh" (p. 476). Thus, the ideal marriage of Jane and Rochester is not the reconciliation of diverse sensibilities, but absolute consummation: one body, one soul, and one sex.

In terms of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, which culminates with the hero's full realization of personal identity within a social context, the conclusion of Jane Eyre's quest -- an asexual union in the self-enclosed forest -- is hardly archetypal. Jane awakens from most glorious dreams to discover by daylight the ruins of Thornfield -- the lost potentiality for full self-possession, for the complete realization of her female identity. Irreconcilable modes of female experience originally discovered in the red-room are, at Thornfield, made into objects of conscious reflection and, paradoxically, consumed by fire. Thus, as in contemporary popular literary forms, the potentially subversive material revealed through the Gothic symbolism of Jane's quest, is recontained in the prevailing domestic romance structure.(26) It may be, as Karen E. Rowe suggests, that

Jane heroically turns from fairy tale models of reality to face a hostile world. (27) But apparently Charlotte Bronte cannot: Jane's aborted development expresses Bronte's compromise with conventional literary constructs derived from a patriarchal culture incapable of imagining a female self.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER 3

- (1) Wilson Harris, quoted from Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, "Enigma of Values: An Introduction," in *Enigma of Values: an Introduction*, ed. Wilson Harris et al. (Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1975), p. 16.
- (2) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 296.
- (3) Kathleen Tillotson, quoted from Miriam Allott, "The Brontes," in *The English Novel: Select Bibliographical Guides*, ed. A.E. Dyson (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 235.
- (4) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 337. See also, "The early reception of *Jane Eyre*: 1847-1848," in *Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre and Villette: A Casebook*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 43-74.
- (5) Richard Chase, "The Brontes, or, Myth Domesticated" (1947); rpt. *Forms of Modern Fiction: Essays Collected in Honor of Joseph Warren Beach*, ed. William Van O'Connor (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1948), p. 118.
- (6) Miles, p. 57.
- (7) David Lodge, "Fire and Eyre: Charlotte Bronte's War of Earthly Elements," in his *Language of Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 143.
- (8) Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, pp. 27-8.

- (9) Miles, p. 55.
- (10) Patricia M. Spacks, *The Adolescent Idea: Myths of Youth and the Adult Imagination* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981), pp. 198, 236.
- (11) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 297.
- (12) Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (1847; rpt. Penguin English Library, 1976), p. 54. All further references will be to this edition.
- (13) "Introduction," to *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, Elizabeth Langland, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 11.
- (14) Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 33.
- (15) Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites de Passage*, transl. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Paul, 1960).
- (16) Dianne F. Sadoff, *Monsters of Affection: Dickens, Eliot and Bronte on Fatherhood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 149.
- (17) Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 339-41.
- (18) Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), p. 107.
- (19) Moers, p. 107.
- (20) Elizabeth MacAndrew, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 13.
- (21) Julia Kristeva, "Oscillation Between Power and Denial," p. 166.
- (22) See, Marianne Hirsch, "Spiritual *Bildung*: The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm," in *The Voyage In*, ed. Abel, Hirsch, Langland,

pp. 23-48.

(23) Edwards, p. 27.

(24) See further, Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of Thornfield as "the house of Jane's life, its floors and walls the architecture of her experience," pp. 347-48.

(25) MacAndrew, p. 36.

(26) Janice Radway, "The Utopian Impulse in Popular Literature: Gothic Romances and 'Feminist' Protest," in *American Quarterly* (Summer 1981).

(27) Karen E. Rowe, "Fairy-born and Human Bred: Jane Eyre's Education in Romance," in *The Voyage In*, ed. Abel, Hirsch, and Langland, pp. 69-89.

CHAPTER FOUR

Wide Sargasso Sea: Awakening

Bourgeois aggressiveness and the needs of an industrial economy revolutionized society. But the demands for libidinal restraint and commercial calculation corrupt the possibility of male heroism by making it -- as the examples not just of Ahab, but of Twain's Huck Finn, and Conrad's Kurtz and Lord Jim attest -- profoundly and deliberately nihilistic. . . . When Psyche's tale enters the novel's history, she destabilizes both social and aesthetic structures. . . . Her narrative position is tentative, uncertain, because the questions she raises -- questions about the intimate and institutional relationships of human beings to each other, to family, society, and God -- cannot easily be answered. -- Lee Edwards(1)

I felt as if all my life and all myself were floating away from me like smoke and there was nothing to lay hold of -- nothing. . . . And I was there, like a ghost. And then I was frightened, and yet I knew that if I could get to the end of what I was feeling it would be the truth about myself and about the world and about everything that one puzzles and pains about all the time. -- Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*(2)

By revising Charlotte Bronte's classic text and creating a narrative for the mad woman in the attic^t -- the ghost that haunts a great tradition of English prose fiction -- Jean Rhys creates much more than a provocative inversion of archetypes. Written over a period of ten years, during which Rhys struggled against severe physical and emotional distress to complete what fascinated her more than anything else she had ever tried to write,(3) *Wide Sargasso Sea* becomes the final development of Rhys's oeuvre, the discovery of the

fictional voice for which she had searched throughout her career. Rhys's acknowledgement of a life-long imaginative sympathy for the incarcerated woman of *Jane Eyre* suggests that her fascination with reinstating Bronte's lunatic derived from her growing recognition that the revelation of the mystery of Bertha Mason might resolve complex personal and artistic issues that had compelled her whole career:

The mad wife in *Jane Eyre* has always interested me. I was convinced that Charlotte Bronte must have had something against the West Indies and I was angry about it. Otherwise, why did she take a West Indian for that horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature? I hadn't really formulated the idea of vindicating the mad woman in the novel but when I was rediscovered I was encouraged to do so.(4)

Rhys was, surely, as obsessed with apprehending the ghostly alter ego which appears throughout her own novels as she was with vindicating Bronte's mad woman. Her final novel explicitly subverts Bronte's paradigm of paternal authority in order to discover a female subject, imagination, and fiction: *Wide Sargasso Sea* emerges as the brilliant conclusion of Rhys's fictional quest.

In her last novel Rhys resolves the paradox of imagining the autonomous female self as subject within a symbolic paternal order by structuring her fiction as a *dialogue* of voices -- "I can only do it," she wrote of her extraordinary effort to find the appropriate narrative viewpoint, "with two voices"(5) (my italics). Dividing the narrative between Antoinette Cosway and Mr. Rochester, Rhys dramatizes the sexual dynamic that empowers all her fiction and finds the vehicle for expressing her own cultural ambiguity -- as

Showalter suggests of woman's duality, not both *inside* and *outside* of the dominant culture but inside two cultures (male and female) simultaneously.(6) Rochester's narrative, by far the most difficult for Rhys to write,(7) is crucial "to explain" Antoinette. The first person narration of Rochester (who remains unnamed throughout the novel) provides the dialectical "Other" consciousness necessary to the full constitution of a self. But Rochester's monologue is, significantly, enclosed and overwhelmed by the elegaic voice of Antoinette. *Wide Sargasso Sea* remains Antoinette's story -- the record of her heroic development towards an epiphanic identification of self and other.

The peculiar bisexual dynamic of Rhys's text, however, allows Rhys to emerge from the confines of a personal and specifically feminine inner-space -- the basis of her earlier autobiographical fiction -- in order to create a comprehensive fiction in which general human experience becomes encapsulated by a woman-centred mythology. The story of the first Mrs. Rochester not only recovers Bronte's repressed story of women's cultural experience and rebellion, but, by revealing this through a dual-voiced narrative and within a multi-cultural and racial setting, Rhys moves from the individual to the collective. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the implications of a woman's colonial status -- realistically dramatized in *Quartet* by Marya's relationship to the Heidlars -- becomes transposed into a more general exploration of the profoundly tragic consequences of absolute power politics. "In an exploitative society," as Jeremy Hawthorn notes, "all involved are, in different ways, denied their full humanity."(8) Thus Rhys's inversion in *Quartet* of Ford's

fiction of neo-classical clarity predicts her final appropriation in *Wide Sargasso Sea* of the order of Romanticism, the "destruction of the conventional, classical order and the corresponding assertion of a personally defined but universally defining cosmos." (9) *Wide Sargasso Sea* comprehends both the intensely personal descent of Antoinette into madness, and a collective crisis of cultural vision. "Alienated from an alienated society," as Hawthorn posits, Antoinette represents the lost child in a chaotic world of experience where, as in the case of Maxine Hong Kingston's "I" in *The Woman Warrior*, "social confusion is explicitly linked to the loss of a mythic structure." (10) Not surprisingly, Lee Edwards' description of Kingston's heroine -- the emblem of an emerging feminine mythos -- is strikingly appropriate to the heroic stature of Antoinette Cosway: "Outside the frameworks that contain society and give human life its meaning, she resembles a Jane Eyre who arrives at Thornfield not from the sanctified, if stultifying, Lowood, but from some much more distant country of the mind." (11) Antoinette's tragic dislocation, then, becomes both symptomatic of and symbolic antidote to an impoverished mythology.

Bringing both fire and light to Thornfield Hall, Antoinette explodes the cultural myth of female subserviance to a cosmic paternity that rigorously denies female autonomy and condemns both men and women to a sterile world. Hence Antoinette reveals her affinity with the heroic paradigm of Psyche -- in which a radical transformation of self and society necessarily destroys a mechanical liturgy in its rebellious quest for a living metaphysic. The goal of Psyche's quest is love, "an expression and alteration of the

possibilities of individual relationship,"(12) and though Antoinette does not succeed in altering her fate -- madness and death -- she does succeed, like Psyche, in liberating eros from the bondage of Rochester's schematized reality. Asserting her own passionate personality and her poetic faith in a sympathetic world of magic and beauty, Antoinette challenges the very basis of a culture that sees love as expressive primarily of sexuality alone and as contained only in relationships that reinforce social and economic hierarchies."(13)

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Rhys divides *Wide Sargasso Sea* into three parts, itself suggestive of the three-fold structure of quest romance: Part I, Antoinette's narration of her early life and coming of age, laments a lost paradise; Part II dramatizes the tragic peripeteia through Rochester's terrorized record of a magic and beauty that violates his sense and logic; and Part III, Antoinette's revelation of "madness and a dream and happiness in England,"(14) imagines a paradise regained. Despite Rhys's previous difficulty with ending her novels, her last novel *begins* with Antoinette's final triumphant leap and works backward from there. Seven years before completing *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys wrote, "I've got the end. Not the start."(15) Indeed, the rhythm of Rhys's novel is curiously retrospective: Antoinette's end is preordained by Bronte's nineteenth-century text, but her story remains to be told. The

interest of Antoinette's story, in contrast with Jane Eyre's, does not lie in discovering how it all concludes, but in the very process of the myth-making. The intensity of *Wide Sargasso Sea* derives from its prefigured conclusion, its peculiar "tone of necessity":

"Nothing -- neither duty nor respectability nor the observance of codes of behaviour so formidably constructed into moral imperative in *Jane Eyre* -- possesses quite the tone of necessity -- that runs deeper than appearance and logic -- with which Jean Rhys imbues Antoinette, and in so doing makes her madness essentially human, and Rochester's hard-hearted sanity a psychological debt to her inimitable passion that borders on precarious divinity."(16)

The end of Antoinette Cosway's journey is a waking of the subconscious into the potential fertility of darkness. Thus the primary illusion of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not the quest but the dream itself, where sensuous impressions and disordered experience create the internal process of Antoinette's developing sensibility. Rhys challenges the categorical dichotomies that characterize what David Lodge defines as the "dialogue" sustained throughout Jane Eyre's development "between passion and reason, feeling and judgement, impulse and conscience,"(17) by denying the legitimacy of such classification. *Wide Sargasso Sea* adopts instead a dream logic which characteristically "transposes rules of linguistic code and social morality as well."(18) Indeed, Rhys's attempt to embrace and transpose the myth of female monstrosity by traversing the literary codes of Bronte's text,(19) makes *Wide Sargasso Sea*, like Rhys's earlier fiction, vulnerable to a particular kind of misreading. Antoinette's story is again, like Marya's, mistaken for the pathetic

story of the victimized -- Antoinette's "brave failure," as one critic writes. But Wilson Harris suggests the considerable implications of this kind of misinterpretation: "*Wide Sargasso Sea* is written in nineteenth-century realist convention and as a consequence the subtle, ambiguous, poignant, disruptions of homogeneous cultural model may be misunderstood or misconceived as the logic of pathos, as a psychology of pathos, whereas their significance, as dialogue and untamable creation myth, is much more profound." (20)

Antoinette Cosway's development focuses not on the heroine's growing consciousness of the conflict between dichotomous systems of value, but on the tragic imposition of institutional prerogatives and social imperatives on subjective experience and creative will. Expressing a complex faith in imaginative truth, *Wide Sargasso Sea* significantly alters Bronte's "*structuralization of feud*" (21) to suggest the reconstructive power of the mind. Jean Rhys's novel of female development, then, is not the novel of "apprenticeship" but of "awakening," characterized by flashes of recognition rather than the continuous unfolding of action. (22) Incorporating the great Romantic theme, according to Frye, of the attaining of apocalyptic vision by a fallen but potentially regenerate mind, *Wide Sargasso Sea* appropriately assumes Romantic rather than Gothic literary motifs.

Like the "internalized quest Romance" of Wordsworth's "The Prelude" or Keats's "Endymion," Antoinette's development is directed inwards, towards an expanded consciousness that might perceive the

infinite possibilities of a fully human world. Part One of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, then, focuses on the interaction of subjective and objective realities, on the process by which external events become the internal language of Antoinette's consciousness. Through uniting the "unobtrusively distinguished and right" speech rhythms of the different racial groups,(23) with the elliptical dialogue and fragmented narrative voice of Antoinette, Rhys, like the Romantic poets, seeks to defy rather than imitate external reality by creating a uniformity of tone and mood, a poetic identification of the human and non-human worlds. The emphasis of Rhys's text is not on sense but on maintaining "a self-consistent idealized world without the intrusions of realism or irony":(24)

They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, "because she pretty like pretty self" Christophine said. (p. 15)

Rejecting the rational dialogue of Bronte's novel of apprenticeship, then, Rhys defines Antoinette's development in terms of disordered experience and sensuous impressions. A poetic illogic becomes the narrative means of imagining a female self, of dismantling a symbolic discourse that traditionally excludes women. The dense metaphoric texture of *Wide Sargasso Sea* transgresses the linear pattern of *Jane Eyre* (which inevitably corroborates a social reality), in order to intimate the possibility of a social idealism signified by a revised symbolic model. Not surprisingly, a specifically female poetic identity informs Rhys's radical narrative for Bronte's mad woman. But Rhys's entrance into a new symbolic order is signalled by her entrance into history. Rooted in the

historical past, Rhys's feminized version of quest romance alters the preoccupation of Romanticism with the autonomous ego and individuated perception: Antoinette's traumatized narrative incorporates the collective experience of a whole society in the process of dissolution. In his 1927 "Preface," Ford discusses Rhys's neglect of setting in her early fiction:

I tried -- for I am for ever meddling with the young! -- very hard to induce the author of the *Left Bank* to introduce some sort of topography of that region, bit by bit, into her sketches -- in the cunning way in which it would have been done by Flaubert or Maupassant, or by Mr. Conrad "getting in" the East in innumerable short stories from *Almayer* to the *Rescue*. . . . But would she do it? No! With cold deliberation, once her attention was called to the matter, she eliminated even such two or three words of descriptive matter as had crept into her work. Her business was with passion, hardship, emotions: the locality in which these things endured was immaterial.(25)

But in *Wide Sargasso Sea* a specific time and place -- Jamaica and Dominica during the 1830s -- is central to the mythic infrastructure of the novel. "The imaginative texture of the book perfectly matches the exploration of facets of Caribbean history," as Louis James notes, and "the personal theme becomes symbolic of a whole historical process."(26) Rhys reveals the social and racial relationships in the West Indies between the Creoles, Afro-Caribbeans, and *nouveaux riches* newcomers, with extraordinary accuracy,(27) emphasizing both the reality of the novel's "dream truth" and the indebtedness of Antoinette's narrative "to shadowy, almost nameless, myths within the inarticulate heterogeneity of the Caribbean."(28)

Wide Sargasso Sea demonstrates that the making of a new

mythology, the redefinition of the female subject, depends upon imagining the continuity of a female consciousness throughout history. Thus the strong cultural antagonism between the various racial groups in the novel immediately establishes the context for Antoinette's development: from the beginning, Antoinette's profound sense of loss and, paradoxically, her imaginative faith in a regenerative cycle, become integral functions of the dominant processes of her society:

Then one day, very early, I saw her horse lying down under the fragipani tree. I went up to him but he was not sick, he was dead and his eyes were black with flies. I ran away and did not speak of it for I thought if I told no one it might not be true. But later that day, Godfrey found him, he had been poisoned. "Now we are marooned," my mother said, "now what will become of us?"

Godfrey said, "I can't watch the horse night and day. I too old now. When the old time go, let it go. No use to grab at it. the Lord make no distinction between black and white, black and white the same for Him. Rest yourself in peace for the righteous are not forsaken."
(p. 16)

The Romantic theme of dispossession, of a lost original identity characterizes both the social setting of the novel -- Jamaica, following the Emancipation Act -- and Antoinette's experience of alienation and rejection:

I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches. Let sleeping dogs lie. One day a little girl followed me singing, "Go away white cockroach, go away, go away." I walked fast, but she walked faster. "white cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away."

When I was safely home I sat close to the old wall at the end of the garden. It was covered with green moss soft as velvet and I never wanted to move again. (p. 20)

Feeling "safe" belongs to the past (p. 15), and Antoinette's elegiac longing for an imaginative lost time expresses both her desire for reintegration and the prophecy of fulfillment: the potential for redemption lies in the very power of her imagination to perceive a lost paradise.

Antoinette's identity remains bound to a historical process. But her triumph derives from disrupting a traditionally male-centred historical mythologizing to posit the credibility of female subjectivity, to imagine her own story occupying a central place in the history of human experience. Significantly, then, as opposed to Bronte's motherless heroine's search for paternity, (29) much of Antoinette's development concerns her search for a lost maternal history, of discovering, in the recent terms of Adrienne Rich, the "lesbian continuum" (30) as a means of appropriating a female symbolic order, a feminized history. Rhys's original story of the daughter's ambivalent relationship to the terrifyingly powerful father figure (both Ford and Heidler), becomes, in the end, the daughter's dialogue with the mother. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette's relationship to various maternal figures -- her own mother, Christophine, Aunt Cora, Mother St. Justine, the sisters at Mount Calvary Convent -- structures her development and story.

The mirroring relationship between Antoinette and her mother, immediately established in the opening lines of the novel -- "she pretty like pretty self" -- expresses both the continuous, plural, "in-process" nature of female identity, and the profound conflict inherent in the female adolescent's double self-image. As Spacks

suggests, "in nineteenth century novels women express hostility toward mothers by eliminating them from the narrative; twentieth century fiction dramatizes the conflict." (31) The process of reclaiming the mother -- "an historical reaching-back to the lives women have lived before us, to find there the sense that our experience is rooted in a strength which has managed to survive the centuries" (32) -- is, as Rhys's fiction demonstrates, both liberating and tremendously painful. Sorrow, the foremost emotion in the mother/daughter myth of Demeter and Persephone, similarly becomes the overriding mood of Antoinette's story in which her own identity remains inextricably burdened with the horrifying fate of her mother. Indeed, Antoinette's recognition of the pathos of experience, her terror of change, specifically derives from her reflexive relationship with her mother, from her sympathetic perception of her mother's inconsolable anguish: "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" (pp. 15-16). Laughed at by the black natives and scorned by the white Creoles, Antoinette's mother remains tragically isolated from both communities and condemned to a prison-paradise in the lush Jamaican landscape. Significantly, it is Antoinette's mother who reveals the world to her daughter as fallen:

All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery -- why should *anybody* work? This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous. (p. 17)

The sympathetic relationship with her mother defines the daughter's tragic vision. Thus Antoinette must break through the

confines of her mother's mirrored image. Throughout the whole of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the mother's story parallels the heroine's, but must ultimately yield to Antoinette's own regenerative vision of a world-in-process, beyond the "old time" structures of oppression and exploitation, the bleak social reality that her mother cannot transcend. Indeed, Antoinette painfully recognizes her own development as a process of separating from her mother, of seeing her mother as other than herself:

My mother usually walked up and down the *glacis*, a paved roofed-in terrace which ran the length of the house and sloped upwards to a clump of bamboos. Standing by the bamboos she had a clear view to the sea, but anyone passing could stare at her. They stared, sometimes they laughed. Long after the sound was far away and faint she kept her eyes shut and her hands clenched. A frown came between her black eyebrows, deep -- it might have been cut with a knife. I hated this frown and once I touched her forehead trying to smooth it. But she pushed me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and for all that I was useless to her. . . .

It was too hot that afternoon. I could see the beads of perspiration on her upper lip and the dark circles under her eyes. I started to fan her, but she turned her head away. She might rest if I left her alone, she said.

Once I would have gone back quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa -- once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe.

But not any longer. Not any more. (pp. 17-19)

As Ronnie Scharfman explains, "*Wide Sargasso Sea* provides a striking version of an unsuccessful mirroring bond and its painful effects on the young heroine." (33) But this disrupted relationship, rather than leading to "the subject's inability to constitute itself as an autonomous identity, to belong to a place in any secure way, to be inserted into a larger community, even to have a name," (34) as

Scharfman claims further, in fact implies Antoinette's potential heroism, her absorption into the community from which her mother remains tragically exiled. Antoinette's alienation from her mother, who "grew thin and silent, and at last refused to leave the house at all" (p. 16), is crucial to her self-discovery, to the possibility of an imaginative "revision of the cultural canvas" which might simultaneously manifest the full integration of individual personality.(35) The self-mythologizing which Rhys's text effects, depends upon the heroine's perception of the reflexive bond with her mother and, finally, on her moving beyond this "cave of the mirror" to define herself in new ways. Antoinette moves sympathetically towards and fearfully away from her mother's sorrow: "after I knew that she talked aloud to herself I was a little afraid of her" (p. 17). Maternal rejection does indeed doom Antoinette to "a sense of fragmentation," as Scharfman indicates. But the dissolution of Antoinette's bond with her mother releases her from the narrow confines of the exploitative colonial culture from which her mother is descended. Antoinette's abandonment in the centre of a terrifying process of social violence and disintegration forces her to explore the vital dimensions of the native community and landscape -- the original "homeland" upon which she comes to depend for her very survival.

In developing a female discourse of plurality, Rhys outlines Antoinette's separation from her natural mother whose history threatens to condemn Antoinette to the same prison-paradise in which she dwells, a one-dimensional landscape in which black and white, rich and poor, "English" and "not English," become the categorical

terms of a perverse language and culture -- of which Antoinette's idiot brother, Pierre, is natural heir. Antoinette's separation from her mother -- formally marked by her mother's remarriage to Mr. Mason -- saves her from a paralyzing entanglement with the Terrible Mother, with Medusa's awesome power to abort heroic development. The severed mother/daughter bond emphasizes the Romantic theme in which maturity means the irreparable and final loss of the mother. But Rhys's female Romance complicates the traditional paradigm by incorporating a more vital maternal force, the living as opposed to the stone face of a monstrous femininity imbued with the power to disrupt a paternal cosmos. If Antoinette's natural mother represents the stony sterility of the White Goddess, the tragic product of oppressive patriarchal traditions, then Christophine functions as the positive force of the the Terrible Mother, the dark "Muse-as-Medusa" figure whose "frozen rage," as Elias-Button argues for mothers in contemporary women's fiction, really represents "the concomitant of the world of creative feeling."(36)

Through the figure of Christophine, the original "blue-black" slave of Coulibri Estate, Rhys's narrative symbolically incorporates the complementary story of a dynamic matriarchal force, a "strength that has managed to survive the centuries,"(37) which fuses with the heroine's story to assert the power of a female culture and identity. Isolated from her own mother's paralytic sorrow, Antoinette bonds with Christophine whose native songs speak not of a moonless and dreary wasteland but of the sad perplexity of momentary splendour, of the poignancy of a beauty that must die:

When evening came she sang to me if she was in the mood. I couldn't always understand her patois songs -- she also came from Martinique -- but she taught me the one that meant "The little ones grow old, the children leave us, will they come back?" and the one about the cedar tree flowers which only last for a day.

The music was gay but the words were sad and her voice often quavered and broke on the high note. "Adieu."
(pp. 17-18)

Christophine assumes the wisdom of prehistory and her maternal relationship with Antoinette reinforces Antoinette's faith in a regenerative process, in the efficacy of a specifically feminine imaginative will.

Unlike Antoinette's mother who rejects her daughter's plea for historical identity -- "Why do you pester and bother me about all these things that happened long ago?" (p. 18) -- Christophine grants Antoinette a cultural past and initiates her into a mysterious shaman's realm of pure possibility:

I knew her room so well -- the pictures of the Holy Family and the prayer for a happy death. . . . Yet one day when I was waiting there I was suddenly very much afraid. The door was open to the sunlight, someone was whistling near the stables, but I was afraid. I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was a dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly. Drop by drop the blood was falling into a red basin and I imagined I could hear it. No one had ever spoken to me about obeah -- but I knew what I would find if I dared to look. Then Christophine came in smiling and pleased to see me.
(pp. 26-7)

Christophine's association with obeah connects her to the dark shadow-space of female creativity. Her dynamic presence, moreover, effects Antoinette's own identification with a creative principle, her participation in a human-centred myth of Creation rather than

her victimization by the projected sky-god of her English ancestors. Christophine serves as Antoinette's primary link with the black community, her connection to a primitive human landscape. Significantly it is Christophine who saves Antoinette from paralyzing loneliness (p. 20) by introducing her to Tia, the black daughter of her only friend.

Antoinette's relationship with Tia establishes her irrevocable identification with "the native, the heart of darkness, the Other." (38) The friendship between Antoinette and Tia characterizes an idyllic innocence in a green world removed from the reality of intense racial enmity and social alienation:

Soon Tia was my friend and I met her nearly every morning at the turn of the road to the river.

Sometimes we left the bathing pool at midday, sometimes we stayed till late afternoon. Then Tia would light a fire (fires always lit for her, sharp stones did not hurt her bare feet, I never saw her cry). We boiled green bananas in an old calabash and after we had eaten she slept at once. I could not sleep, but I wasn't quite awake as I lay in the shade looking at the pool -- deep and dark green under the trees, brown-green if it had rained, but a bright sparkling green in the sun. The water was so clear that you could see the pebbles at the bottom of the shallow part. Blue and white and striped red. Very pretty. Late or early we parted at the turn of the road. My mother never asked me where I had been or what I had done. (p. 20)

Tia's betrayal, however, prophesies both the social and personal agony of the coming revolt of a repressed native sensibility. By stealing Antoinette's dress and forcing Antoinette to wear her own soiled clothing, Tia paradoxically exposes the black/white cultural dialectic that inevitably divides her from Antoinette; but Tia's actions also violently challenge the arbitrary boundaries of such a

conscripted social vision: "Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (p. 21), Tia tells Antoinette just prior to stealing her clothes. Tia's friendship and betrayal exposes not only the latent violence of the oppressed but also the potential synthesis of black and white, the dissolution of arbitrary social divisions which dehumanize both oppressor and victim. According to the Romantic ethos, the reintegration of self must derive from the contents of experience. Thus Antoinette's vulnerability to the multiple forces of her environment, as opposed to Jane Eyre's conscientious appropriation of a specific social code, preserves her potential for transcendence, for escape from her existential predicament. Unlike her mother, Antoinette *participates* in the conflicting forces of her heterogeneous community and her quest for identity becomes a search for the dynamic centre of flux, the dark and mysterious core that might synthesize the disparate parts of her dual-cultural inheritance and divided matrilineage.

The inevitable progress towards social catastrophe which Antoinette subconsciously apprehends, paradoxically manifests both the destructive and creative potentiality of racial interaction. Similarly, nature assumes the ambiguity characteristic of Romantic landscape imagery. The landscape of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not the wintry wasteland of Jane Eyre's journey, but an intensely vibrant and sensational power, at once beneficent and savage:

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. (p. 16)

Unlike the Gothic landscape of *Jane Eyre* -- the allegorical setting of Jane's pilgrimage for social accommodation -- nature in *Wide Sargasso Sea* eludes all moral categories and expresses instead the rhythm of organic process, the inevitability of death and the promise of regeneration. The natural setting, like the cultural canvas, is potentially prophetic and introduces a pervading Romantic metaphor: the West Indian landscape (natural and social) is the context within which Antoinette finds herself or, more appropriately, within which she *must* find herself:

Watching the red and yellow flowers in the sun thinking of nothing, it was as if a door opened and I was somewhere else, something else. Not myself any longer. (p. 24)

Dressed in Tia's rags -- which her mother later orders to be burned (p. 27) -- Antoinette is introduced to the English *nouveaux riches*. Thus, from the beginning, Antoinette's encounter with Mr. Mason, with the new representatives of old world systems of racial oppression and cultural tyranny, anticipates her participation in the inexorable movement towards disastrous cultural collision, her sacrificial role in the (temporary) resolution of intense social conflict. Appropriately, it is Christophine who prepares Antoinette for receiving the new neighbours, the only visitors to Coulibri in many years, and warns of the coming holocaust:

While Christophine scrubbed my face and tied my plaits with a fresh piece of string, she told me that those were the new people at Nelson's Rest. They call themselves Luttrell, but English or not English they were not like old Mr Luttrell. "Old Mr Luttrell spit in their face if he see how they look at you. Trouble walk into the house this day. Trouble walk in." (p. 22)

Christophine's perception of trouble derives from both intuitive and acquired wisdom. Having survived the slavery of the past, Christophine recognizes the sinister nature of old world justice, the inhumanity of imposing an arbitrary system of law and order on a fundamentally alien culture:

No more slavery! She had to laugh! "These new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrate. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up peoples's feet. New one's worse than old ones -- more cunning, that's all."
(pp. 22-23)

Antoinette's encounter in her own multifarious environment with the definitive cultural code of a foreign "Old Country," perpetuates her sense of menace and alienation, her feeling that nothing would be the same, that "it would change and go on changing" (p. 23). Tia's betrayal, a new dress, and her mother's social gaiety become the symptoms of a lost innocence.

Once again, the maternal wisdom of Christophine provides the shaping frame for Antoinette's heroic development towards an altered cultural strategy and symbolic reality. Her own mother's marriage to Mr. Mason, contrastingly, guarantees Antoinette's exposure to the hypocrisy of the English Imperialists -- who own the land but cannot possess it -- and her initiation into racial prejudice and a corrupted morality. Self-alienation becomes the legacy of Antoinette's mother who would imprison her daughter in an imposed and foreign "English girl" identity. Following her mother's marriage, Antoinette's face becomes "hating" and though Coulibri looks the same, it doesn't feel the same. The conversations of the

English perpetrate Antoinette's growing anxiety, her conscious recognition that complex social gestures mask malicious jealousy and real cruelty. But Antoinette's most profound fear derives from her growing alienation from Christophine, the maternal centre of her native sensibility:

It was their talk about Christophine that changed Coulibri not the repairs or the new furniture or the strange faces. Their talk about Christophine and obeah changed it.
(p. 26)

Like the ambiguity of the natural landscape, Christophine's obeah represents both the violent potential of cultural difference, and the mysterious and primitive power of creative synthesis. Christophine's black magic, unlike the supernatural Gothic machinery in Charlotte Bronte's fiction, symbolizes the efficacious potential of imaginative will, and metaphorically functions throughout the novel to suggest the abiding potential for an idealized world. Christophine's affiliation with the supernatural powers of death and rebirth, then, is both beguiling and terrifying. Thus despite Antoinette's new life with Mr. Mason -- "I was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking" (p. 30) -- her filial relationship with Christophine guarantees her innate vulnerability to the heterogeneous West Indian culture -- the cause of Antoinette's increasing anxiety and the latent promise of comprehensive vision.

Finally, then, the burning of Coulibri Estate signifies the dynamic convergence of both the internal conflict of Antoinette's racial inbreeding, and the external condition of intense cultural

enmity. Antoinette's new English identity and original native sensibility merge and dissolve in the traumatic conflagration of her birthplace by the rioting blacks. The cataclysmic fire enacts the violent but necessary exorcism of a demonic repression of violent feeling between the black and white communities. And the fire consumes the house which has begun to imprison Antoinette in an alien English milieu:

The house was burning, the yellow-red sky was like sunset and I knew that I would never see Coulibri again. Nothing would be left, the golden ferns and the silver ferns, the orchids, the ginger lilies and the roses, the rocking-chairs and the blue sofa, the jasmine the honeysuckle, and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. (pp. 37-8)

Both the intrinsic beauty of the garden and the material facade of Coulibri estate are sacrificed in the disintegration of Antoinette's internalized and increasingly monstrous dialectic of racial enmity. The fire fragments the "structuralized feud" beginning to alienate Antoinette from herself. Thus the burning of the Miller's Daughter symbolically destroys the inauthentic mask of Antoinette as her mother's English girl. The fire retrieves for Antoinette the dynamic world-as-process, a plural cultural context (black/white) as opposed to the colonial vision of sterile duality -- one and other.

Significantly, a specifically theological dialogue suggests the means of deliverance from the horror of cultural chaos and meaningless void. Mr. Mason's pious prayer for defence from the rioting blacks to a "mysterious God" -- the mechanical idol of a lifeless mythology -- only apparently effects deliverance from the chaos: "And God who is indeed mysterious, who had made no sign when

they burned Pierre as he slept -- not a clap of thunder, not a flash of lightening -- mysterious God heard Mr Mason at once and answered him. The yells stopped" (p. 36). In fact, however, the mob is silenced by the horrifying death of Antoinette's mother's parrot, Coco, a metonym, as Scharfman suggests, for Antoinette's mother herself.(39) The sacrificing of Coco symbolizes the efficacious presence of a divinity which collides black and white through its comprehensive metaphysic:

I opened my eyes, everybody was looking up and pointing at Coco on the *glacis* railings with his feathers alight. He made an effort to fly down but his clipped wings failed him and he fell screeching. He was all on fire.

I began to cry. "Don't look," said Aunt Cora. "Don't look." She stooped and put her arms round me and I hid my face, but I could feel that they were not so near. I heard someone say something about bad luck and remembered that it was very unlucky to kill a parrot, or to see a parrot die. They began to go then, quickly, silently, and those that were left drew aside and watched us as we trailed across the grass. They were not laughing any more. (p. 36)

Frye observes that this "sense of identity with a larger power of creative energy meets us everywhere in Romantic culture."(40) But, as Edwards suggests of contemporary women's writing, Rhys's text incorporates two radical authorial assumptions: "first, that the cosmic realm that borders on our own and promises redemption belongs to a female Creator; and second, that Her power enters our society through the agency of a mortal woman."(41) Thus Christophine and Aunt Cora -- the black and white mother surrogates for Antoinette and presiding elders of her self-affirmation -- emerge throughout the firing of Coulibri as the ^{re}representatives of a powerful female force that might transcend the existential horror through imposing a

religious context of abiding faith. In the midst of the disintegration of Antoinette's childhood home, Christophine stoically bears the burden of Pierre's charred and lifeless body, while Aunt Cora offers Antoinette unearthly strength:

Aunt Cora put her arms round me. She said, "Don't be afraid, you are quite safe. We are all quite safe." Just for a moment I shut my eyes and rested my head against her shoulder. She smelled of vanilla, I remember. (p. 33)

Similarly, it is Aunt Cora who steps forward to battle the coloured man with the machete and whose impassioned warning of eternal damnation miraculously prevents the blackman from massacring Antoinette's family:

Old white jumby, he called her. But she did not move an inch, she looked straight into his eyes and threatened him with eternal fire in a calm voice. . . . He cursed her again but he backed away. "Now get in," said Mr Mason. "You, Christophine, get in with the child." (p. 37)

Blind faith, the maternal legacy of both Aunt Cora and Christophine, structures Antoinette's developing female fabulation. An emerging feminized divinity creates the context of Antoinette's heroic rebirth.

The devastation of Coulibri irrevocably separates Antoinette from her place of origin, but Antoinette's development is towards the reconciliation of the fragmented dream. Rhys's novel does not assimilate the linear pattern of Bronte's quest but incorporates a cyclical rhythm -- a feminine rhythm of nature and necessity. Generated by a Romantic construct that conceives of a dark centre "where the inward and outward manifestations of a common motion and

spirit are unified, where the ego is identified as itself because it is also identified with something which is not itself,"(42)

Antoinette's narrative imagines a specifically Female metaphysic as structuring the central point of convergence. Antoinette's final encounter with Tia, then, at the very centre of the vanishing world is not a descent into madness but the revelation of a kind of primal sympathy:

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. I did not feel it either, only something wet, running down my face. I looked at her and I saw her face crumple up as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (p. 38)

Antoinette's mirror image is not a monstrous Double, the horrifying manifestation of self-division that generates Jane Eyre's Gothic nightmare of self-loathing and suicidal despair, but a complementary vision of self-affirmation. The external process of racial enmity and the internal process of Antoinette's developing sensibility fuse in a vital intimation of the continuity of self.

Antoinette awakens from unconsciousness in the house of her English Aunt Cora, and finds her past life irretrievably lost. But Tia's wound remains emblematic of Antoinette's voyage to the centre of conflict and discovery of her own identity as inseparable from the native culture of her West Indian homeland. Never again will Antoinette attempt to appropriate an inauthentic "English girl"

identity, a kind of death mask which perpetuates cultural oppression. Moreover, the severed snake-like plait of her own hair which Antoinette discovers in a drawer (p. 38), symbolizes both her encounter with a dark female centre of limitless power -- the realm of the snake-haired Medusa -- and her active assumption of her own creative potential as daughter of such an awesome Female Presence. Similar to the speaker's development in Ma^y Sarton's poem, "The Medusa as Muse," as Elias-Button outlines, Antoinette benefits from her encounter with the mythic Gorgon "because she has moved from the passive state of being looked at to the point where she can take the risks involved in a more active looking, a process in which perhaps she is asserting her own ability to perceive and experience the world. In addition, having confronted Medusa herself directly, she is able to understand that the powers she has feared are really her own and that, within the unconscious, darkness and light exist side by side, both necessary components of the creative imagination."(43)

Antoinette's residence at Mount Calvary Convent makes explicit the pervasive theme of Antoinette's growing participation in a supportive female community which partakes of a feminized divinity. The English convent becomes a "refuge" from racial confrontation, but it is not, like Lowood, a self-enclosed place of exile. Rather, the sisterhood of the convent provides a sympathetic cultural canvas against which Antoinette's narrative voice and symbolic autonomy are intensified. Unlike Jane Eyre's categorical apprenticeship in female survival, Antoinete awakens to the necessary plurality of conflicting powers, the co-existence of "sunshine and of death" (p. 47), and the ancient knowledge "that every creative act is

firmly rooted in the dark":(44)

Everything was brightness, or dark. The walls, the blazing colours of the flowers in the garden, the nuns' habits were bright, but their veils, the Crucifix hanging from their waists, the shadow of the trees, were black. That was how it was, light and dark, sun and shadow, Heaven and Hell . . . (p. 48)

Significantly, the colours of gold and green -- the heraldic colours of Eden before the Fall and the traditional colours of vanishing youth(45) -- dominate the imagery of this section of the novel, which immediately precedes Antoinette's marriage to Rochester. The recurring nightmare that concludes Part One prefigures Antoinette's encounter with Rochester -- "his face black with hatred" (p. 50) -- her forced obedience to another's vision of reality, and her ultimate incarceration in the "cardboard world" they call England (p. 148). But Antoinette does not flee from disaster, nor does she passively submit to victimization. Having confronted and incorporated the potentially petrifying forces of the dark mother, her own snake-haired identity, Antoinette is now prepared to battle the "stone wall" in which Rochester dwells (p. 50). Thus she accepts her fate -- "*this must happen*" -- recognizing that a dynamic metaphysical faith might provide her only means of transforming the tyrannical order of the existential world. Antoinette's brave entry into Rochester's world signifies her participation in the generation of a radical Female mythos. As in the contemporary poetic conjurings of the Muse-as-Medusa, Antoinette faces the monstrous horror of female cultural identity in order ^{to} find that "the legends are wrong. / it is those who do not look who turn to stone."(46)

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Part Two of *Wide Sargasso Sea* -- conceived of by Rhys as the "monologue" in between the dream framework of *Wide Sargasso Sea* -- expresses the central tragic drama, the crucial battle of the threefold structure of the quest subtext. Rochester's appropriation of the narrative signals the oppression of Antoinette's identity and her consequent "death struggle" to survive the imposed limitations of another's world-view. The marriage of Antoinette and Rochester is not inherently incompatible, but, as James suggests, the "sense of the tragedy is heightened by the possibility of the alternative." (47) The ambiguous nature of the exotic landscape itself provides the opportunity for Rochester's rebirth, the erosion of corrupted cultural values and the development of a sympathetic faculty that might break through the limited perspective of the "human abstract." Throughout Part Two, Rochester's interaction with the native community, with the natural scene, and with Antoinette, alternates between conscious rejection of what is alien and mysterious, and unconscious submission to the overwhelming power of vital process. "I have tried to show," Rhys wrote of the Rochester section of her novel, "this man being magicked by the place which is (or was) a lovely, lost and magic place, but, if you understand, a violent place. (Perhaps there is violence in all magic and all beauty -- but in there -- very strong)." (48) Sensuous impressions that fundamentally elude definition are repeatedly placed, throughout Rhys's narrative, in powerful juxtaposition with Rochester's own habitual categorizing of time and place, existential

facts and figures:

Standing on the veranda I breathed the sweetness of the air. Cloves I could smell and cinnamon, roses and orange blossom. And an intoxicating freshness as if all this had never been breathed before. . . . She led me into a large unpainted room. There was small shabby sofa, a mahogany table in the middle, some straight-backed chairs and an old oak chest with brass feet like lion's claws. (p. 61)

Like Marya in *Quartet*, Antoinette becomes associated with darkness, with shadows and moonlight. It is at night, then, that Rochester loses his perverse self-consciousness and becomes susceptible to Antoinette's world of visionary dreams. At night the river flowers open and Rochester partakes of Antoinette's intuitive understanding of the paradoxical nature of existence -- "Desire, Hatred, Life, Death came very close in the darkness" (p. 79). The release of Rochester's capacity for sympathetic identity, for a romantic apprehension of mutability, allows his passionate union with Antoinette. Their "love in the dark" is the recovery of Rochester's innocence, the emblem of his youth:

"Do you think that too," she said, "that I have slept too long in the moonlight?"

Her mouth was set in a fixed smile but her eyes were so withdrawn and lonely that I put my arms round her, rocked her like a child and sang to her. An old song I thought I had forgotten:

"Hail to the queen of the silent night,
Shine bright, shine bright Robin as you die."

She listened, then sang with me:

"Shine bright, shine bright Robin as you die."

There was no one in the house and only two candles in the room which had been so brilliantly lit. Her room was dim, with a shaded candle by the bed and another on the

dressing-table. There was a bottle of wine on the round table. It was very late when I poured out two glasses and told her to drink to our happiness, to our love and the day without end which would be tomorrow. I was young then. A short youth mine was. (p. 70)

Erotic fulfillment transforms Rochester's ambivalence towards the island and towards Antoinette, and his new found capacity for imaginative perception manifests the Romantic mythic emphasis on eros, or love rooted in the human sexual instinct, as the source of redemption:

It was often raining when I woke during the night, a light capricious shower, dancing playful rain, or hushed, muted, growing louder, more persistent, more powerful, an inexorable sound. But always music, a music I had never heard before. (p. 75)

Daylight, however, brings misunderstanding and conscripted vision, and Rochester's obsession with numbers, names, and the written word (he is continually composing imaginary letters to his father), separates him from the anthropomorphized and erotic landscape of Antoinette's island. Rochester's sensuous apprehension of profound beauty and oracular presence (sound imagery repeatedly underscores Rochester's waking consciousness), becomes subverted by his drive for concrete definition. As Rochester is only too aware, power in the external world of daylight, derives from the capacity to repress one's own sensibility in order to deny and oppress the humanity of others:

How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? A very small boy. Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary, I was told, and that view I have always accepted. If these mountains challenge me, or Baptiste's face, or Antoinette's eyes, they are mistaken, melodramatic, unreal . . . (p. 85)

Rochester's conscious horror of vulnerability and his manic manipulation of the "reality" of others, predicts the tragic rhythm of inevitable catastrophe, the fulfillment of the prophecy of Antoinette's permanent conscription to the world of dark Otherness.

Like the masculine hero's obsession with death, Rochester's quest for rationalized "truth," for external answers to unresolvable mystery, becomes an obsessive desire for possession of all that eludes classification and, therefore, control:

It was a beautiful place -- wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loneliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, "What I see is nothing -- I want what it *hides* -- that is not nothing." (p. 73)

His suspicion of what is strange, then, makes Rochester extremely vulnerable to Daniel's letter, which concretely documents Rochester's own fear of racial and cultural contamination. Rochester, as Rhys emphasizes in her *Letters*, believes Daniel's letter "because he wants to -- that's why." (49) Daniel's letter realizes Rochester's tragic consciousness of time, fate, and the mutability of beauty. But more than this, Daniel focuses Rochester's latent hostility and suspicion on Antoinette's inherently alien sexuality:

"But I hear too that the girl is beautiful like her mother was beautiful, and you bewitch with her. She is in your blood and your bones. By night and by day. But you, an honourable man, know well that for marriage more is needed than all this. Which does not last. Old Mason bewitch so with her mother and look what happen to him. Sir I pray I am in time to warn you what to do. (p. 81)

Daniel appeals to Rochester's racial pride, his fear of social

humiliation, and his loss of self-definition. And Rochester's subsequent fall into the sin of self-consciousness turns the paradisaical island into a "nightmare." Lost in the forest, which he now perceives as intensely hostile, Rochester looks outside himself to define "truth" -- "How can one discover truth I thought and that thought led me nowhere" (p. 86). Moreover, his inability to distinguish "lies" from reality, to create his own system of meaning and truth, becomes the tragic peripeteia, the reversal of Rochester's developing capacity for sympathetic participation that forbodes disaster for both Rochester and Antoinette.

Significantly, the question of "lies" centres on the question of the fate of Antoinette's mother. Destruction comes not from the abyss of the unconscious, but, as James suggests, "from the trauma of history." (50) Rochester's loathing of Antoinette derives from his fear of the past and of the future -- of what he can never know or possess. Daniel tells Rochester that he has been deceived, that Antoinette is not what she appears; and he claims historical evidence as proof:

They fool you well about that girl. She look you straight in the eye and talk sweet talk -- and it's lies she tell you. Lies. Her mother was so. They say she worse than her mother, and she hardly more than a child. (p. 103)

Midway through Part Two, Antoinette's voice briefly overwhelms Rochester's narrative (pp. 89-98). Counterpointing Rochester's nightmare pursuit of rationalized "truth," Antoinette's dream-like narrative imposes a context of mystical faith in the congruency of time, place, and subjective identity: "The sky was dark blue

through the green mango leaves, and I thought, 'This is my place and this is where I belong and this is where I wish to stay'" (p. 89). Surrounded by the ancient Mounes Mors (the Dead Ones) of Christophine's shamanic realm, Antoinette asks for magic to transform Rochester's hatred into love -- an ecstatic sexual love that might traverse the tragic boundaries of difference. Antoinette pleads with Christophine to bring Rochester to her bed because she believes in the power of love to dissolve Rochester's suspicion and jealousy: "I will be quiet, I will not cry. But Christophine, if he, my husband, could come to me one night. Once more. I would make him love me" (p. 93). Just as, near the conclusion of *Quartet*, Marya's brief holiday with Stephan reaffirms her relationship to a dynamic world of feeling, Antoinette's dialogue with Christophine emphasizes an emerging rather than retreating sense of self. Antoinette's final madness, then, becomes only the elucidation of her personality which is, like Marya's, incarcerated on the level of consciousness -- the story of Bronte's mad woman -- but liberated by the narrative in which Antoinette's voice grows increasingly intense.

Christophine advises Antoinette to "pack up and go," but Antoinette instinctively recognizes that her only hope remains in the centre of the conflict where the violent encounter with her mother's destiny might reverse the vicious historical cycle of female (and racial) oppression: "Going away to Martinique or England or anywhere else, that is the lie. . . . Running away from him, from this island, is the lie" (p. 94). As in her dream of Hell, Antoinette accepts her fate, maintaining a visionary faith in

her own ability to participate in and thereby effect the living process. It is not the denial but the recognition of conflict that might yield regeneration. As Hawthorn indicates, "the past demands its price: it cannot be denied but must be exposed, acknowledged, understood and paid for." (51) Antoinette's crucial scene, then, is a passionate plea for a "revision" of her mother's past. In the long dark veranda, "with the candles burning low and the watching, listening night outside," Antoinette tells Rochester "the truth, not lies," about her childhood, her mother, and the "terrible things that happen" (pp. 104-113). But when she has finished, Antoinette perceives Rochester's new invulnerability:

"I have said all I want to say. I have tried to make you understand. But nothing has changed." She laughed.
(p. 111)

Rochester maintains the word of history, just as he possesses the letter of the law -- the tools with which he suppresses his own humanity in order to suppress the humanity of others. (52)

But the "Word," as Wilson Harris suggests, is also fundamentally paradoxical: "the Word is a gesture of psyche, it is a means of exploration, creation, and renewal, and like light and truth, it can also be conscripted into a convergent tool." (53) Thus, although the words "madness," and "infamy" are used to effectively deny the humanity of those who do not conform to Rochester's will to possess, "pity" becomes the transitional term of Rochester's potential discovery and rebirth:

Words rush through my head (deeds too). Words. Pity is one of them. It gives me no rest.

Pity like a naked new-born babe striding the blast.
(p. 133)

Extraordinarily elegiac passages in which Antoinette becomes identified with the motion and spirit of the island, with dynamic patterns of thought and feeling in a final reconciliation of mind and matter, express the merging of Rochester's daylight world with Antoinette's dark night, a poetic dreaming as one:

I shall never understand why, suddenly, bewilderingly, I was certain that everything I had imagined to be truth was false. False. Only the magic and the dream are true -- all the rest's a lie. Let it go. Here is the secret. Here. (p. 138)

Rochester's ritual induction into Antoinette's supernatural landscape, then, makes his final resistance to her world all the more violent and irrevocable. Recognizing that he must give everything -- "All -- all -- all. Keep nothing back. . . ." (p. 141) -- Rochester ultimately denies both the validity of Antoinette's past and the present elusive reality of a magical beauty which she represents. Christophine's love potion which Antoinette faithfully administers becomes, in the face of Rochester's disbelief, a treacherous poison.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Moreover, Rochester's rejection of Antoinette's maternal history -- the feminine complement of the patriarchal system of power in which Rochester himself is both pawn and victim⁽⁵⁵⁾ -- yields "the sickening swing back to hate" (p. 139). Forsaking the dynamic world of dreams for the dead world of existential fact, Rochester loses everything and is condemned to a fallen world with no possibility for redemption:

I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it. (p. 141)

The identification of Antoinette with apocalyptic vision in the final passages of Rochester's narration suggests the epiphanic nature of Antoinette's concluding narrative. In "Part Three," Antoinette's voice assumes the oracular solemnity of mythopoesis. Antoinette's "madness" in the final scenes at Thornfield Hall does not represent the disintegration of personality, but the uncompromising spirit of Antoinette. *"I'll say one thing for her,"* Grace Poole is overheard referring to her charge at Thornfield Hall, *"she hasn't lost her spirit. She's still fierce"* (p. 146). Antoinette's visionary madness in fact functions, as Wilson Harris suggests all myth functions, to express "untamable force or unstructured mediation between partial systems of meaning." (56) By means of Antoinette's final intensely subjective and universally significant narrative, "Part III" resolves the multiple levels of experience expressed by the individual narrative perspectives of both Antoinette and Rochester in "Part I" and "Part II," respectively. Antoinette's madness becomes "no less than . . . a loss of soul to find soul," (57) a healing process, as R.D. Laing suggests, that destroys the limits of the ego and reconnects the psyche with transcendent experience. Representing the madness of "breakthrough" rather than "breakdown," Antoinette's world becomes permanently ordered by the limitless possibilities of image and

sense rather than space and time:

Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has meaning. (p. 151)

Antoinette's narrative, then, finally assumes a comprehensive symbolic order which asserts the powerful presense of a female subject and imagination. The prevailing red and white symbolism of "Part Three" expresses the latent religious and sexual contexts implied throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea* but, most particularly, the colour red symbolizes Antoinettes's mythic voyage, the emblem of her symbolic journey for comprehensive vision, and the means of her final heroic self-assertion. Antoinette's third dream, concludes the submerged quest structure. In this final dream the battlements of Thornfield Hall symbolically present the "point of epiphany," the point at which "the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment":(58)

When I was out on (on) the battlements it was cool and I could hardly hear them. I sat there quietly. I don't know how long I sat. Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotics and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw my doll's house and books and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est la? Qui est la?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man's voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And all the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought *Why did I scream?* I called "Tia" and jumped and

woke.

Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage. (pp. 155-6)

In the conclusion of Part II, Rochester's old world sense appears permanently deranged by his marriage to Antoinette who has awakened in him a new and passionate sensibility. Refusing the truth of Christophine's "dark voice coming from the darkness" (p. 129), the true story of Antoinette's matrilineage, and forsaking Antoinette's mad love for his own rationalized hatred, Rochester cannot, however, ultimately escape Antoinette's undeniable Presence. The persistent echo of her voice throughout the latter part of Rochester's narrative suggests Antoinette's successful enactment of the transformational powers of Psyche, a female heroic paradigm which focuses on the possibility of human development and change, on the possibility of a new cultural order based on reciprocity rather than rationalized oppression. Rochester's narrative, then, not only demonstrates the inadequacies of a culture that prohibits both racial and sexual dialogue, but also provides the context for Antoinette's heroic development. It is "Part II" that firmly establishes Antoinette's identity with the landscape, the natives, and a lost paradise. And it is in "Part II" that Antoinette imposes her own fertile imagination on Rochester's sterile reality. Incapable of identifying beauty with truth, Rochester represents a culture in which external social demarcations become the internal self-divisions of the individual. Rochester's rejection of Antoinette's sexuality, his resistance to a dialogue of difference

and heterogenous culture, then, condemns both he and Antoinette to a tragic reality. Antoinette discovers England to be a "cardboard world": "They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don't remember, but we lost it" (p. 148). Sacrificed to the world of madness and dreams, Antoinette embraces death as, paradoxically, her only means of triumphant self-affirmation. Contrastingly, Rochester becomes permanently exiled from the creative realm of the subconscious, from the magic and loveliness of his "sweet honeymoon." Rochester lives, but he lives as "nothing" (p. 142); he assumes the pathos of Bronte's curiously sexless and mutilated hero.

Jane Eyre's Gothic journey ends in daylight with the destruction of what is incomprehensible in the terms of a patriarchal cosmos -- the enigma of female experience. The end of Antoinette's journey, however, is not the waking into ruin, but the going forth with light towards an epiphanic fusing of past, present, and future. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the nightmare is pursued until it yields deliverance, until the horror and terror are transcended by a revised female heroic. And a new world is perceived in the process of becoming.

FOOTNOTES, CHAPTER 4

- (1) Edwards, pp. 20-21.
- (2) Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr. MacKenzie* (1930; rpt. Penguin Books, 1981), p. 41.
- (3) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 178.
- (4) Jean Rhys, from an interview with Marcelle Bernstein, "The Inscrutable Miss Jean Rhys," *London Observer* (1 June 1969); quoted from Elizabeth R. Baer, "The Sisterhood of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway," in *The Voyage In*, p. 132.
- (5) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 186.
- (6) Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," p. 202.
- (7) See, *Letters*, p. 234.
- (8) Jeremy Hawthorn, "Race, Relationship and Identity: William Faulkner and Jean Rhys," from his *Multiple Personality and the Disintegration of Literary Character: From Oliver Goldsmith to Sylvia Plath* (London: E. Arnold, 1983), p. 100.
- (9) Faulkner, p. 55.
- (10) Edwards, p. 241.
- (11) Edwards, pp. 241-2.
- (12) Edwards, p. 12.
- (13) Edwards, p. 14.
- (14) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 216.
- (15) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 163.
- (16) Wilson Harris, "Carnival of Psyche: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso*

- Sea," in *Kunapipi*, Vol. 2, ii (1980), p. 145.
- (17) Lodge, *Language of Fiction*, p. 116.
- (18) Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," p. 70.
- (19) Kristeva provides an interesting definition of the term "traverse," especially with regard to Rhys's peculiarly sexualized narrative: "the word 'traverse' implies that the subject experiences sexual difference, not as a fixed opposition ('man'/'woman'), but as a process of differentiation." "Oscillation Between Power and Denial," p. 165.
- (20) Harris, p. 146.
- (21) Harris, p. 149.
- (22) Abel et al., "Introduction," *The Voyage In*, p. 11.
- (23) See, Louis James, *Jean Rhys*, (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1978), pp. 66-7.
- (24) Northrop Frye, "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism," in his *The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society* (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 201.
- (25) Ford, "Preface," pp. 25-6.
- (26) James, pp. 66-7.
- (27) James, p. 66.
- (28) Harris, p. 145.
- (29) See Sadoff, p. 171.
- (30) In her essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Adrienne Rich suggests a means of radically transforming the concept, derived from patriarchal myths and perceptions, of relationships between women: "If we consider the

possibility that all women -- from the infant suckling her mother's breast, to the grown woman experiencing orgasmic sensations while suckling her own child, perhaps recalling her mother's milk-smell in her own: to two women like Virginia Woolf's Chloe and Olivia, who share a laboratory: to the woman dying at ninety touched and handled by women -- exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980), p. 651.

- (31) Patricia M. Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), p. 191.
- (32) Karen Elias-Button, "The Muse as Medusa," in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., Ltd., 1980), p. 201.
- (33) Ronnie Scharfman, "Mirroring and Mothering in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Telumee Miracle* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," in *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981). p. 99.
- (34) Scharfman, pp. 99-100.
- (35) Hanne Nielsen and Flemming Brahms, "Retrieval of a Monster: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*," in Wilson Harris et al., *Enigma of Values*, p. 141.
- (36) Elias-Button, p. 204.
- (37) Elias-Button, p. 202.
- (38) Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 124.
- (39) Scharfman, p. 105.
- (40) Northrop Frye, "The Drunken Boat," p. 209.

- (41) Edwards, p. 240.
- (42) Frye, "The Drunken Boat," p. 211.
- (43) Elias-Button, p. 204.
- (44) Elias-Button, p. 205.
- (45) Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; rpt. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Paperback Edition, 1973), p. 200.
- (46) Karen Lindsey, quoted from Elias-Button, p. 203.
- (47) James, p. 55.
- (48) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 269.
- (49) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 269).
- (50) James, p. 57.
- (51) Hawthorn, p. 77.
- (52) Hawthorn, p. 104.
- (53) Petersen and Rutherford, "Enigma of Values," p. 141.
- (54) In her *Letters* Rhys explains that "the 'love' drink on Obeah Night merely releases all the misery, jealousy and ferocity that has been piling up in Mr R for so long. He pretends to think he has been poisoned -- that's only to pile up (again) everything he can against her and so excuse his cruelty. He justifies it that way," p. 269.
- (55) In Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Rochester explains that his disastrous marriage to Bertha Mason is the result of his vulnerability to a patriarchal plotting. His brother and father, Rochester bitterly concludes, "thought only of the thirty thousand pounds and joined in the plot against me" (p. 333).
- (56) Harris, p. 149.

(57) Harris, p. 148.

(58) Frye, *Anatomy*, p. 202.

CONCLUSION

As to the human race, yes they are devils -- but poor devils most of them. . . . Still one is left with all sorts of problems. How to explain away music, painting, courage, self sacrifice of any sort, flowers, gardens, good acting or writing. Grace or any beauty at all?? -- Jean Rhys(1)

In the origins of her fiction Jean Rhys establishes an emotional order that resists closure and experiments instead with disturbances of aesthetic distance. Substituting for Ford's authoritarian narrative a fictional voice that is neither self-referential nor self-reverential -- "the writer," Rhys wrote, "doesn't matter at all -- he is only the instrument"(2) -- Rhys's autobiographical fiction signals her deviance from the fictional patterns of male artist-heroes and proposes a new heroic. Like the stories of other modern female heroines who "fear what will happen if they lose their nerve, as they see before them a future of endless conjunctions, endless dissolutions, endless interest in the process of their own growth and survival,"(3) Marya's narrative appears flexible and uncertain; it expresses moral insight without imposing a fixed conclusion, a defined moral hierarchy.

The fictional narration of Rhys's life becomes, as Edwards suggest^s generally of the fiction of modern women writers, "the artifact of heroism that informs the society surrounding it."(4)

Thus Marya's story emerges as a drama of female acculturation. Her "passivity" becomes symptomatic of the social paralysis experienced by women in a culture in which both the revelation and repression of sexuality invokes exploitation. "Not giving a damn" becomes a viable means of self-preservation, the proclaimed triumph of Marya's inner life over the external processes of her society. Impelled, after all, by an obsessive longing for "joy" -- which Rhys provocatively characterizes as "an unborn child jumping, leaping, kicking at her side" -- Marya conceives of life not as an endless battle but as potentially celebratory. In light of Marya's unrelenting faith in a reality other than that revealed by her particular society, in a grace and beauty which persists despite all the cruelty of the existential world, Dowell's misanthropic musings and Ford's carefully "distanced" fictional structures indeed appear fussy and inadequate.

In her final novel, Jean Rhys transforms disturbances of aesthetic distance into a deliberate fiction of "creative disruption." Convinced that Charlotte Bronte's Bertha is "impossible," Rhys sets out to substantiate Bronte's ghost of female rebellion and sexual awakening. Rhys suggests the revolutionary potential of a female heroine uncircumscribed by a patriarchal social and cosmic order, free to explore a feminine sensibility amidst the multiple cultural perspectives of a heterogeneous community. The turbulent mid-nineteenth-century West Indian landscape provides both the tenor of a culture divided by racial and sexual violence and the vehicle for suggesting an alternative mythos -- a Romantic image of the symbolic correspondence between language and object in an

essentially humanized nature.

Claiming that the greenness of Ferndean affirms that "Nature in the largest sense seems now to be on the side of Jane and Rochester," Gilbert and Gubar similarly suggest an archetypally Romantic conclusion to *Jane Eyre*: "not the Celestial City but a natural paradise, the country of Beulah 'upon the borders of heaven,' where 'the contract between bride and bridegroom [is] renewed,' has all along been, we now realize, the goal of Jane's pilgrimage." (5) But if this is the goal of *Jane Eyre*, then Jean Rhys's *humanizing* of Bertha Mason necessarily completes the quest. (6) As a "sane version of Bertha," Jane, contrary to Gilbert and Gubar's conclusion, is finally incapable of expressing the Blakean mythos of excess that might liberate her from libidinal, hence imaginative, restraint. Severe self-discipline becomes the goal of Jane's quest, and it is not the revolutionary impulse of "myth" but the containment of "fantasy" --an illusion of joy undermined by the reality of Jane's domestic entrapment -- that informs the conclusion of *Jane Eyre*. Jane abandons her early belief in "the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness," her ambitious desire for other worlds, in order to discover "reasons for tranquility" with which to control her restless imagination. Seeking to accommodate herself to the existing social reality, Jane develops in contrast to Romantic revolutionary paradigms. Her progress towards adulthood outlines a gruelling apprenticeship in limiting her desire and subduing her pride: "'What do I want? A new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances. I want this because it is of no use wanting anything better'" (*Jane*

Eyre, p. 118).

Rhys's Antoinette Cosway, however, breaks through the cultural barriers to female autonomy and heroic expression. Transforming the "passivity" of her earlier heroines to the participation of Antoinette in the world-as-process, Rhys reveals both her affinity with and revision of Romantic literary modes. Antoinette's final vision -- the Romantic union of objective and subjective realities -- in fact merges with a peculiarly feminized divinity to celebrate the incorporation of self in the organic cycle of regeneration. A collectivising of the self, as opposed to the Romantic posturing of the poet-hero solitary in his self-consciousness, characterizes Rhys's imagination of an explicitly feminist transcendence. Inextricably bound to the elaborate tapestry of Antoinette's third and final dream, Aunt Cora, Christophine, Antoinette's mother, and Tia, become the mutual creators of the sky vision in which Antoinette perceives the image of her life: "Then I turned around and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it" (p. 155). Leaping to Tia -- across the Sargasso Sea to the mythical landscape of a lost time and place -- Antoinette apprehends the native sensibility from which she has been tragically severed. Her heroism eludes the traditional hero's consummation of all that has formerly escaped him. Antoinette's quest ends instead with the merging of her personality with the dark Other: "I called 'Tia' and jumped and woke."

Marya's assumption of a female sexual identity which is both self-alienating and a kind of "self-sealing internalization" or

negative narcissism, precipitates Heidler's rape -- the actual manifestation of Marya's imagined terror. But Rhys's emphasis in *Wide Sargasso Sea* on positive female relationships revises her original preoccupation with female victimization within patriarchal society. Asserting the potential triumph of female culture and identity and thus proclaiming the heroism of the cultural outcast, *Wide Sargasso Sea* may be seen to exemplify Rich's "lesbian continuum." Taken as a strategic term, as Jacquelyn N. Zita proposes, Rich's notion "not only elucidates the ways in which women have always resisted male tyranny and compulsory heterosexuality, but also ways in which these episodic resistances can be solidified and crystallized into an autonomous culture of resistance." (7) The unrelenting passion of Marya, then, becomes solidified by Antoinette's experience of a powerful female culture and metaphysic. Moreover, by incorporating the mythic forces of the traditional dark "mother" as a potent image of female culture, Antoinette is able to transform the inner rebellion of Rhys's former heroines into a dynamic act of resistance. Imprisoned in Rochester's house -- symbolically, an alien body, or sexual self -- Antoinette realizes her mission, the necessary conclusion of a kind of spiritual pilgrimage: "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (pp. 155-6).

The process of Rhys's fiction identifies and, finally, explodes the characteristically feminine signification of desire, "a room of one's own" -- both Marya's inner-space and Antoinette's attic prison. In her last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys's fictional narration is liberated from the confines of personal space and

expresses a more liberated desire: the firing of Thornfield Hall. The power of Rhys's final image derives from the violent destruction of historical and cultural half-truths and the promise of deliverance to a new world where the dynamics of *difference* negotiates reconstruction, a dialogue of cultures.

FOOTNOTES, CONCLUSION

- (1) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 173.
- (2) Rhys, *Letters*, p. 270.
- (3) Edwards, p. 145.
- (4) Edwards, P. 148.
- (5) Gilbert and Gubar, *Mad Woman in the Attic*, p. 370.
- (6) Rhys recognized her own fiction as in some sense a completion of Bronte's:

"I have a very great and deep admiration for the Bronte sisters (Though Charlotte did preachify sometimes). (And all the rest.) And often boring perhaps. (Me too!)

How can I of all people, say she was wrong? Or that her Bertha is impossible? *Which she is.* Or get cheap publicity from her (often) splendid book?

She wrote: -- Charlotte did: '*This I know: the writer . . . owns something of which he is not always master . . . it will perhaps for years lie in subjection . . . then without warning of revolt there comes a time . . . when it sets to work. . . . You have little choice left but quiescent adoption (?) As for you, the nominal artist -- your share is to work passively -- under dictates you neither delivered nor could question -- that would not be delivered at your prayer, nor changed at your caprice. If the result be attractive the World will praise you, who little deserve praise. If it be repulsive the World will blame you, who as little deserve blame.*' So you see she knew. It is so. And it is so."

Rhys, *Letters*, p. 271.

- (7) Jacquelyn N. Zita, "Historical Amnesia and the Lesbian Continuum," *Signs*, 7, No. 1 (1981), p. 178.

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Title of Thesis

HEROIC REVISION: THE TRIUMPH OF JEAN RHYS'S DARK VOYAGE

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JANE E. HAIG

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