Identities Displaced and Misplaced

Aspects of Postcolonial Subjectivity in the Novels of Jean Rhys

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines various aspects of female subjectivity in the characters of Jean Rhys's five novels: *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). These aspects are informed by race, gender and class, unique to each of the novels, and all involving a degree of performance and/or mimicry.

Although the phrase, "Stages of Postcolonial Subjectivity" was considered, it was replaced with "Aspects", as a term that more accurately reflects subjectivity in these novels. The word "stages" denotes progress, suggesting that the subject is at some point unified or fixed, and progresses from one stage to the next. However, the term "aspects" suggests some of the central themes to the thesis, including mirroring, reflecting looking and gazing. For Rhys's characters, it conjures up their awareness of others viewing them, and the ways in which this awareness shapes their own subjectivities, which in turn are constantly undergoing change and flux, and are never at any point fixed or unified.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides a critical overview of Rhys's last and best-known novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, building on some of the key debates in subsequent chapters, including psychoanalytical readings, postcolonial readings, race, gender, representation and the ability of the text to "write back" to the centre of power. The second chapter explores the phenomenon of the postcolonial female gaze in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, that of the white Creole and of Christophine as a black woman. Using film theory as a theoretical framework, the discussion focuses on Antoinette's female gaze directed against her English husband, as well as Christophine's ability to exert her own "other" power that lies outside of language and Englishness. The third chapter charts the fragmented subjectivity of

Rhys's female characters, examining their ambivalence towards England and an assumed other culture, from which they have originated. Postcolonial and psychoanalytical theories are applied to the analysis, which explores the female characters' ability to challenge fixed categories of race and gender. The fourth chapter also challenges these fixed categories, exploring the performativity of the female protagonists in Rhys's early novels, in terms of clothes, hair and make-up. These seemingly superficial details convey a deeper sense of understanding about the societies in which these characters live, the spaces they inhabit and the male figures with which they interact, and on whom they depend. The fifth and final chapter examines Rhys's early female protagonists as metaphorical zombies, using sociological research into the Haitian zombie as a theoretical framework. Despite their zombification, however, these characters demonstrate their ability to engage in life through the use of memories and nostalgia.

My analyses of Rhys's female protagonists take into account the many, varied and often contradictory critical responses to her work and themes, which result from the complex and subtle evocations of the characters themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will analyse the phenomenon of postcolonial female subjectivity in the novels of Jean Rhys. The phrase "Stages of Postcolonial Subjectivity" was at first considered as part of the title of the thesis, but the word "Stages" was changed to "Aspects". As postcolonial subjectivity changes amongst the characters of Rhys's novels, an illusion is created whereby the subject moves or progresses from one level of subjectivity to another. This illusion lends itself to the notion that there are "stages" of postcolonial subjectivity, which also serve as platforms from which the characters perform their identities. However, if subjectivity is seen as something that is in a *continual* process of change, and in which there is no original moment, no point of arrival, and thus no fixed, unified subject, then there can be no sense of progress or development towards something unified. As Butler states in *Gender Trouble*, "totalizing" approaches to studying gender, which suggest "that there is a category of 'woman' that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, ad sexuality" are misleading.[1] Thus, the word "stage" is misleading in this context, and despite its reference to performativity, suggests a sense of progression. The word "aspects", by contrast, is far more accurate for the purpose of this research, as it suggests the notion of subjectivity *as seen* from various views, angles and perspectives. Postcolonial subjectivity in these novels, with its many facets, angles, aspects and perspectives, will be examined. This also suggests the notion of reflection, highlighting the ways in which Rhys's characters view themselves, their awareness of how others view them, and the performance of their identities that emerges as a result.

The research will draw upon a range of critical approaches to Rhys's novels,

[1] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, London: Routledge, 1990, 1999, pp 18, 20-1.

encompassing postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, film theory, Creole subjectivity, performativity and the zombie motif, and will use textual examples from the primary sources to illustrate these major concerns. The purpose of this wide-ranging theoretical framework is to address one of the most widely discussed and debated issues central to the criticism of Rhys, that of female identity, in light of the postcolonial white Creole. The analysis will focus primarily on the novels, although occasional biographical references to Rhys will be made.[2]

A wide variety of critical interpretations of Rhys's work, particularly since the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is evident.[3] Early critics interpret Rhys's novels on the basis of autobiography, finding links between Rhys's own life and the tragic episodes of alienated young women dependent upon men in England and Paris, of which she writes in her fiction. These portrayals depict the female protagonists as helpless, passive victims.[4] The first of these critics is Elgin Mellown, who describes all of the female protagonists from Rhys's five novels as together forming an "archetypal woman"[5] at different stages of her life, arguing that this "Rhys woman" corresponds to Rhys herself, at different stages of her life.[6] Early critics who read Rhys's female protagonists as versions of Rhys herself include: Louis James (1978), Thomas Staley (1979), Peter Wolfe (1980), and Helen Nebeker (1981).[7] The first book-length analysis of Rhys's texts was Louis James's

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[2] For texts that deal principally with Rhys's life and its relation to her writing, see her unfinished autobiography, *Smile Please*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1981, 1982, 1984, first published by André Deutsch Ltd., 1979; Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985; and Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990.

[3] See Jean D'Costa, "Jean Rhys 1890-1979", in *Fifty Caribbean Writers*, Dance, Daryl, ed., New York, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp 390-404, pp 391 and 395 for a discussion on the inability to fit Rhys's writing into one particular school, including West Indian, Modernist and women's fiction.

[4] Walter Allen, "Bertha the Doomed", *The New York Times Book Review*, 18 June, 1967, p 5; Carol Ann Howells, *Jean Rhys,* Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, 1991, p 108.

[5] Elgin Mellown, "Character and Themes in the Novels of Jean Rhys", in Pierrette M Frickey, *Critical Perspectives on Jean Rhys*, Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1990, pp 107, 152, 155.

[6] "They [the first four novels] have the same heroine – although she goes by different names" (A Alvarez, "The Best Living English Novelist", *New York Times Review of Books*, 17 March 1974, pp 6-7, p 7.

[7] Louis James, *Jean Rhys*, London: Longman, 1978; Helen Nebeker, *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage*, Eden Press Women's Publications, Montreal, Canada, 1981; Thomas Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study*, Austin:

critical work, *Jean Rhys*, which uses as its central focus the question of Rhys's West Indian heritage. Helen Nebeker's *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage*, examines Rhys's texts from a feminist and psychoanalytical perspective. Staley and Wolfe also study Rhys's texts as feminist writing. From this early framework emerge two main strategies for studying Rhys's novels: the feminist and/or psychoanalytical perspective and the West Indian perspective. The latter led to postcolonial studies of Rhys's work, with debates surrounding Rhys's place within the postcolonial canon, reassessing the term "postcolonial" in order to examine issues concerning race: although Rhys grew up in the West Indies, she was white.[8] Subsequent critics, including Paula Le Gallez, Elaine Savory, Veronica Marie Gregg, Judith Raiskin, Mary Lou Emery and Helen Carr, have argued against using autobiography in their analyses of Rhys's texts, indicating the strength of Jean Rhys's writing as distinct from her personal life, and focussing on critical analysis, rather than personal testimonial.[9]

Many critics continue to separate Rhys's texts between postcolonial and Modernist. Her first four novels, *Quartet* (published originally as *Postures* in 1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), are all set in Europe, often in London or Paris, which has led critics to classify these novels as "European". *Voyage in the Dark* is partly set in the West Indies in terms of Anna's memories of her childhood, which has led some critics to read this novel as a

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University of Texas Press, 1979; Peter Wolfe, *Jean Rhys*, Boston: Twayne, 1980.

[8] For debates on this issue, see Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 1974, pp 33-38, p 38 and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12.1, 1985, pp 896-912.

[9] Helen Carr, *Jean Rhys*, Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers Ltd., 1996; Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995; Paula Le Gallez, *The Rhys Woman*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990; Judith Raiskin, "Creole Writing and Strategies of Reading", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 22.4, October 1991, pp 51-67; Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women's Writing and Creole Subjectivity*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys: Cambridge Studies in African and Caribbean Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1998; Mary Lou Emery, "Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination: Tropes of Visuality in Writing by Rhys, Kincaid, and Cliff", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 16.2 (Autumn), 1997, pp 259-280; Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1990.

West Indian novel. Rhys's fifth and final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), written twenty-seven years after *Good Morning, Midnight*, is almost entirely set in the West Indies. Numerous articles and critical works have been written on this text as a postcolonial novel. The term "postcolonial" has been applied to both Rhys's early novels and to her final novel. However, as Carol Dell'Amico points out, many critical interpretations of the early novels have not allowed for more than a cursory reference to postcolonialism within a Modernist context.[10] Dell'Amico argues that Rhys's early novels significantly contribute to the postcolonial debate in a Modernist context.[11] As part of my analysis, I will apply postcolonial theory to a study of all of Rhys's novels, thereby contributing to this ongoing debate.

This thesis will not examine the novels discreetly as novels; rather, the five chapters will cover separate themes that encompass specific texts. The first chapter, "Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", provides a critical assessment of Rhys's most well-known and heavily examined novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The themes of this first chapter will filter into analyses of the remaining novels, over the course of the ensuing argument. This chapter addresses issues of essentialism and the notion of West Indian-ness, and examines postcolonial readings of this major text. Hybridity, nostalgia in postcolonial literature, and the white Creole subject as occupying an ambivalent space within the text, will all be discussed. Writing from the margins will also be examined, in terms of its ability to subvert existing power structures. Rhys's protagonists are often depicted as "marginal" characters by many of her critics; thus the issue of "writing back" and the ability to write from the margin as a place of active resistance, rather than one of passive victimhood, will

[10] Carol Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*, New York, London: Routledge, 2005, p 1.
[11] Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment*, p 1.

be discussed.[12] The notion of "identity" as a fixed state of being will be scrutinised, drawing on critics who interpret it as a "constructionist" phenomenon, including Joane Nagel, and applied to the notion of ambivalence and hybridity in Rhys's female protagonists.[13] Englishness and whiteness as changeable and largely constructed identities will also be highlighted, with reference to Rhys's novels, as well as to critics, including Robert Young, Ford Madox Ford, and bell hooks.[14] The degree to which the white colonial female subject is colonised will be discussed, with regard to current debates surrounding double colonisation and half colonisation, as well as an argument that draws attention to de-colonisation. Rhys's female subjects, although white, are colonised by virtue of their gender and, crucially, by virtue of their non-English status. Their status as former slave-owners' daughters, however, serves to de-colonise them in terms of power.[15] Various layers of coloniser and colonised will thus be analysed as categories that blur boundaries, rather than existing as discrete entities or states of being. Significant relationships in which the coloniser/colonised divide is blurred will be examined, including where it exists between Antoinette and "Rochester", between Antoinette and Tia and between Antoinette and Christophine.[16] As part of the blurring of categorical boundaries, Homi Bhabha's notion of the ambivalent colonial "I" will be examined with regard to these relationships. Racist depictions of Tia and Christophine will be highlighted in light of Gayatri Spivak's argument that the novel is written on behalf of the

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[12] Salman Rushdie, as quoted in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds; *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge, 1989 (inside front page). See also Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 68.

[13] Joane Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture", *Social Problems*, Vol. 41.1, February 1994, pp 152-76, pp 152-3.

[14] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge: London and New York, 1995; Ford Madox Ford, *England and the English*, edited with an introduction by Sara Haslam, London: Carcanet, 1907, 2003; Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, 1996; Emery, "The Politics of Form: Jean Rhys's Social Vision in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Twentieth Century Literature* Vol. 28.4, Winter 1982, pp 418-30.

[15] Carine M Mardorossian, "Double (De)colonization and the Feminist Criticism of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *College Literature* 26.2, 1999 Spring, West Chester University, pp 79-95, p 81.

[16] Although he is never identified by name in Rhys's novel, I will refer to Antoinette's husband as "Rochester" for ease of reference.

white Creole subject, rather than through the voice of the black other.[17] These portrayals will be examined as a critique of the social hierarchies that existed in post-Emancipation West Indies, giving voice to what Benita Parry calls the "white settler class"[18].

Chapter Two, "The Female Gaze in *Wide Sargasso Sea*", takes on board the first chapter's theme of "writing back". The term "female gaze" is often reserved for film theory and its links to psychoanalysis, particularly with regard to Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), which defines the phenomenon of the male gaze.[19] However, I will adapt it to apply to Rhys's novels and the ways in which her female characters – including Christophine and Amélie – disrupt the male-female power structure by asserting an oppositional gaze. I will therefore apply psychoanalysis in this discussion. Christophine as a character will be examined in light of the ongoing debate as to whether or not she retains power within a text that has, as Spivak states, been written from the perspective of the white Creole colonial.[20] As part of the analysis on the female gaze in this chapter, issues of beauty and otherness will be discussed in light of Rochester's attitude to his Creole wife. Feminist readings of Rhys's text highlight Rochester's "feminisation", which aims to disrupt a clear-cut male/female binary. As part of this disruption and fragmentation, Homi Bhabha's notion of an "ambivalent I" and the colonial gaze draw a parallel with that of the male and female gaze. The ambivalence that Rhys's female characters feel towards their supposed superiors will reveal the instability of fixed categories, as well as the complexity with which the postcolonial subject is viewed and views herself. Christophine's refusal to "look back" demonstrates a form of active resistance, and will be debated in light of Spivak's argument that Christophine's

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[17] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.
[18] Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, p 39.
[19] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", reprinted from *Screen*, 16:3 (Autumn 1975), pp 6-18, in Antony Easthope, *Contemporary Film Theory*, London: Longman Group, 1993, pp 111-124, p 117.
[20] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.

voice is undermined.

Chapter Three, "Of Mimicry, Mockery and Mirrors", develops the notion of fragmentation and displacement, focussing primarily on postcolonial mimicry and mirroring. This chapter examines all of Rhys's novels. Issues of displacement and ambivalence are further discussed to compare some of the different types of displacement experienced by Rhys's female protagonists. Alienation and exile, whether empowering or "exhilarating" (to use Judith Kegan Gardiner's term), will be shown to be key to Rhys's writings.[21] Lacan's mirror stage will be outlined and discussed in light of critics who have used his theory to analyse Rhys's female protagonists' lack of identity. In my analysis, the Narcissistic pool of water will be examined as offering a deeper understanding of Rhys's female characters, and the ways in which they view and identify themselves. Their relationship to the patriarchal mirror and to the feminine pool of water will be contrasted in order to explore their various self-perceptions. Julia Kristeva's theory of the *chora* will also be invoked in order to demonstrate the ability of Rhys's female protagonists to disrupt the narrative with "pulsional pressure", thereby undermining its existing power structure, and asserting their subjectivity.[22] The self/other polarity will be shown to be disrupted, as Rhys's female protagonists utilise mimicry. Mimicry as a tool for undermining the authority of the coloniser will be examined, with reference to Rhys's female characters.

Chapter Four, "Clothes, Hair and Make-up", comprises an analysis of Rhys's early novels and the phenomenon of performativity. Judith Butler's theory of performativity, as well as that of other contemporary performativity theorists, will be drawn upon as a

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[21] Judith Kegan Gardiner, "The Exhilaration of Exile: Rhys, Stead, and Lessing", in Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram, eds., *Women's Writing in Exile*, University of California Press, 1989, pp 134-150.

[22] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language,* trans. Margaret Walker, Columbia University Press, New York, Guildford, Surrey, 1984. Originally published as La révolution du langage poétique, Éditions du Seuil, 1974, p 25.

vehicle for examining the notion of belonging in Rhys's early novels. Nostalgia and longing will also be examined in light of the displacement experienced by Rhys's female protagonists. Issues of race and the ability of Rhys's characters to perform their ethnic identities will be discussed. This analysis will include Rhys's female protagonists as well as her male characters, both major and minor, in the early novels. The ability of the female characters to perform will be assessed in terms of their placement and displacement within a modern and patriarchal society. It will also, however, examine the ways in which these characters use performance to their own advantage, playing the game within the terms laid out for them, ironically self aware of the spectacle that they create. Issues of race and gender will be raised, including feminist debates about female performativity, to what degree it is liberating and to what degree victimising. Ageing, youth and memory will also be discussed within the context of performativity in these novels, in terms of the commodication of women based on youth and beauty. Rhys herself claimed not to be a "feminist" writer in interviews.[23] The subtleties and complexities with which her characters perform their identities, using hair, clothes and make-up as their tools, will be discussed.

Chapter Five, "Memory, Nostalgia and the Zombie", examines the use of the zombie motif in the early novels of Jean Rhys. It marks a final stage of female subjectivity for the postcolonial subject, addressing issues of ambivalence in terms of a disrupted sorcerer-zombie relationship. Sociological studies of zombie-hood in Haiti will be utilised as a theoretical framework.[24] Rhys's female protagonists will be shown to be victims of a type of zombie-hood, a death-in-life state, experiencing a "poisoning" marked

[23]Mary Cantwell, "A Conversation with Jean Rhys", *Mademoiselle* 79 (October 1974), (pp 170-1, 206, 208, 210, 213).

[24] Hans W Ackermann, and Jeanine Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi", p 466, in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Volume 104, Issue 414 (Autumn, 1991), pp 466-494; Roland Littlewood and Chavannes Douyon, "Clinical findings in three cases of zombification" in *Lancet*, 1997, 350, pp 1094-96.

by being ill-treated and outcast by their families and lovers, a death upon separation from the "home"-land, and a resurrection in the form of memories and nostalgia over the loss of such a home. The notion of "home" will be discussed in terms of its ambivalence for these characters, who, as children and youths, often lacked a secure sense of belonging in the West Indies (or elsewhere). The degree to which these characters have control over their lives will be investigated, with regard to abjection and trauma. Their ability to conjure up memories from their past will be shown to provide a temporary relief from current misery, bringing memories vividly to life and providing shelter from the hostilities they face in their current alienated lives. These memory sequences and daydreams will be examined in terms of how they connect the characters to their past, adding texture to their otherwise bland existence in the present tense. The contrast between a remembered West Indies, for example, and a dreary everyday life in London, signifies a sense of longing for the past and for "home", as well as ambivalence towards both Englishness and blackness. The characters' sense of nostalgia will be discussed in a postcolonial context, whereby feelings of longing are always underpinned by a sense of dislocation and an inability to feel completely at home, hinting towards a future sense of alienation in a foreign land such as England. The extent to which nostalgia is both empowering and debilitating will be discussed, highlighting the complexity of Rhys's female characters. Sasha's memories of her youth in Paris, for example, will be contrasted with Anna's memories of her childhood in the West Indies, in both cases revealing their ability to have desires of their own. The extent of the female characters' zombie-hood will be discussed, indicating a degree of control over their will, as well as different metaphorical deaths and rebirths. Death as a state of living, rather than a final stage, will be highlighted as a defining feature of these zombified characters. Their outward behaviour, however, will be contrasted with their inner thoughts, revealing desires that are sometimes spoken, and

memories from which they continue to draw a sense of themselves. This final stage of female subjectivity conveys the characters' "looking back" as well as "talking back", preventing an easy classification of victim. Rhys's female characters are torn between two extremes, hot and cold, light and darkness. But it is from the silences between these rigid categories that their inner minds speak, creating layers of subjectivity and desire.

1. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: A Critical Overview (1966-2006)

Jean Rhys's most acclaimed novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, has been critically received in a variety of ways since its publication in 1966. Her previous four novels are said by many to have been ahead of their time, explaining their relative lukewarm reception by contemporary critics and readers.[25] It was *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, that won Rhys wide regard late in life.[26] This chapter will provide an overview of some of the major critical interpretations of Rhys's last novel, based on sources dating from 1966 to 2006. In so doing, some of the ongoing debates will be highlighted and critically assessed.

Wide Sargasso Sea as a West Indian Novel

Rhys's final novel was read as distinct from her first four novels, an issue which has, as will be discussed, been debated and problematised by several literary theorists. Another key issue in the critical assessment of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is its ability to stand alone as a text in its own right. Even upon publication, the novel was viewed as more than simply a prequel, a rewriting of the story of the madwoman in the attic, Antoinette/Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's classic *Jane Eyre*. For example, Mary Kay Wilmers in a *Times Literary Supplement* review, "A Fairy Tale Neurotic", states:

> While respecting the facts as given in *Jane Eyre*, Miss Rhys tells a quite different story. *Jane Eyre* is the happy tale of an English Cinderella, *Wide Sargasso Sea* the tragedy of a West Indian heiress. Although the origins of her main characters are in Charlotte Brontë, Miss Rhys's work exists entirely in its own right.[27]

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[25] Helen Carr, Jean Rhys 1996, p 15; VS Naipaul, "Without a Dog's Chance", *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 18.9, 1972, pp, 29-31, p 29; Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 135.

[26] *Wide Sargasso Sea* won the Royal Society of Literature Award and the W. H. Smith Award in 1966, on which Rhys commented, "It has come too late". She was also made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1966 and a CBE in 1978 (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, originally published London: André Deutsch, 1966, Penguin, 1993, p 1, foreword).

[27] Mary Kay Wilmers, *Times Literary Supplement* Book Review of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 17th November, 1966, p 1039.

The *TLS* review draws attention to the three-part narrative structure, which allows Antoinette to speak on her own behalf, first as a child in Dominica and in the final section as a woman stripped of her identity and imprisoned in Rochester's Thornfield Hall. This narrative structure also gives the novel its "moral perspective", providing Rochester with his side of the story in the middle section, filling in the details of the historical and socio-economic background to Antoinette's childhood in the West Indies.[28] This background includes the recently freed and politically disenfranchised black Creole slaves, the crumbling estates of the white Creoles with their isolation from both black Creoles and the English.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "Creole" as "a person of mixed European and black descent", "a descendant of European settlers in the Caribbean or Central or South America", "a white descendant of French settlers in Louisiana", or "a mother tongue formed from the contact of a European language with a local language (especially African languages spoken by slaves in the West Indies)".[29] Further reading allows for another myriad of meanings, including Europeans of mixed French and Spanish descent who live in New Orleans, as well as people of mixed European, African, Amerindian and Asian descent living in British Guiana in the 1930s.[30] A definition of Creole appears in the notes of *Éloge de la Créolité*/*In Praise of Creoleness*:

> The word 'creole' seems to come from the Spanish word 'crillo', itself deriving from the Latin verb 'criare' which means 'to raise, to educate'. The Creole is the person who was born and raised in the Americas and who is not a native like American Indians. Very soon this term was applied to all the human races, all the animals and plants transported to America from 1492 on. There was, therefore, a mistake in French dictionaries which from the beginning of the nineteenth century reserved

[28] Wilmers, *TLS*, p 1039. Rochester's section is interrupted by Antoinette's narrative voice, when she approaches Christophine for an *obeah* potion.
[29] *Oxford English Dictionary*.
[30] Wilson Harris, "Creoleness: The Crossroads of a Civilization?" Kathleen M Balutansky, and Marie-Agnes Sourieau, eds., *Caribbean Creolization*, University of Florida Press, 1998, p 23.

the word 'Creole' for the white Creoles (or Béké) only.[31]

The issues of race and place and how they contribute to Antoinette's madness draw attention to the use of categories such as "black", "white" and "English". The term "black", for example, suggests that the colour of a person's skin will determine certain attributes essential to all of those who share that particular skin colour. Carine Mardorossian, in her essay, "Shutting up the Subaltern", refers to Christophine and other black characters in the novel as "black Creoles", a much more accurate and less racially stereotyped term than "black" or "the blacks", which are used in the majority of the other critical texts consulted.[32] Within the novel itself, black Creoles are referred to as "black", mulattos such as Amélie are referred to as "coloured" and white Creoles are given derogatory terms by black Creoles, such as "white cockroach" and "white nigger".[33]

Most critics have accepted that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a novel that stands on its own. Yet how can this be, one might ask, if it is merely a (p)retelling of a pre-existing narrative? One way in which critics make sense of this apparent paradox is to assess Rhys's novel on the basis of its difference or otherness. Critics have, in the past, tended to exoticise the novel, drawing attention to its Caribbean setting, themes of madness, inbreeding, the collapse of colonial white Creole society, the magic and mysticism of West Indian *obeah* and the near madness that Rochester experiences as a result of living in such an alien world.[34]

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[31] Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoisea, Raphael Confiant, eds., *Éloge de la Créolité/In Praise of Creoleness*, 1990, p 121.

[32] Mardorossian, "Shutting up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Callaloo*, 22.4, 1999, pp 1071-1090. I will, however, use the term "black" to refer to characters in other novels by Rhys, where the ethnic origin of a particular character is not definitely attributed to the West Indies, and therefore cannot be classified as "black Creole".

[33] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 17, 35, 83, 85. Despite its sometimes derogatory usage, the term "coloured" can be applied in a self-affirming way. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. states: "I don't mind any of the names myself. But I have to confess that I like 'colored' best, maybe because when I hear the word, I hear it in my mother's voice and in the sepia tones of my childhood. As artlessly and honestly as I can, I have tried to evoke a colored world of the fifties, a Negro world of the early sixties, and the advent of a black world of the later sixties, from the point of view of the boy I was" (Gates, *Colored People*, London: Viking Press, 1994, p xvi).

[34] Rochester's alienation from the islands of the West Indies is likened to Conrad's Marlow, in *Heart of Darkness*.

Such critics, including the writer of the *TLS* review cited above, may have perhaps intended to draw attention to the unique identity of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a novel, distinct from its predecessor by Brontë. However, they have instead perpetuated colonial-based myths of Otherness and exoticism, thereby serving to promote rigid binaries of Self/Other, colonizer/colonized, English/non-English and black/white. For example, Mary Lou Emery, in her article "Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination", discusses "the importance of visuality to literary strategies of decolonization."[35] She cites an example of a film adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's novel, *A Little Princess* (1905). The film adaptation (1995) exploits the eastern element of the narrative by perhaps defeating the intended purpose of the novel. Rather than allowing the India that the schoolgirl protagonist remembers from her early childhood to stand on its own, the film uses the visual to exoticise her colonial heritage: "Ironically the imagination that comes to her aid […] develops in an intensely exploitative and hierarchical colonialist system that appropriated "the Orient" as the site of Western fantasy".[36]

Likewise, although the aforementioned *Times Literary Supplement* review attempts to give *Wide Sargasso Sea* an identity distinct from its predecessor, *Jane Eyre*, it does so using terms that both exoticise the Other, and that perpetuate a Self/Other hierarchy based on colonial values. For example, it highlights the features that distinguish Rhys's novel from Brontë's, as if listing the ingredients of spiced rum or ginger cake:

> Antoinette Cosway […] and her hopeless, ruined family – once notorious slave-owners – [were] now despised by Negroes and Europeans alike. Her heritage was, to say the least, inauspicious: her father died a drunkard leaving half-caste children all over the island; her mother

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In both cases, the main character is a white Englishman, sent to a hot, tropical, exotic and therefore "Other" culture shrouded in mystery and intrigue. The female characters in Conrad's novel are also analysed with reference to 19th Century British imperialism: see Marilyn Demarest Button and Toni Reed, eds., *The Foreign Woman in British Literature: Exotics, Aliens, and Outsiders*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1999.

[35] Emery, "Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination: Tropes of Visuality in Writing by Rhys, Kincaid, and Cliff", *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 16.2 Autumn, 1997, p 260.

[36] Emery, "Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination", p 260.

eventually became insane; her brother was a congenital idiot.[37]

This passage is laden with dismissive cultural stereotypes based on a system governed by English imperialism. Note that the former slave-owners are not English, but white Creole, an apparently "other" culture. Therefore, an English publication such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, in highlighting the Creoles' decline from a once-glorious colonial past, is arguably promoting its own colonial supremacy. The review is thus informed by an English colonial heritage and the ideology on which it has thrived. Guy Wilentz, in "English is a Foreign Anguish", stresses that the English literary canon is constructed "not just as selections but as hierarchies."[38] He explains that ideology is a crucial factor in determining which texts should belong to the literary canon, and which should not. Nineteenth-century texts such as Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, therefore, can be said to be informed by the socio-economic climate of their time, that is, the fact that English imperialism was at its zenith. As Carol Ann Howells states:

> As soon as the speechless raging monster becomes a speaking woman with a history and a logic of her own, she begins to tell a story to which Brontë, with her unquestioning belief in the assumptions of imperialism, was blind.[39]

This "unquestioning belief" in the values of imperialism allowed Brontë to portray Antoinette as a madwoman whose madness was attributed solely to her white Creole heritage.[40] She is not given a voice, not permitted to speak for herself, either in dialogue or in any narrative form. Rather, she is spoken for, both by Rochester and by Jane herself. As Spivak points out, Bertha Mason in Brontë's text is: "a figure produced by the

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[37] Wilmers, *TLS*, p 1039.
[38] Guy Wilentz, "English as a Foreign Anguish", in Karen R Lawrence, ed., *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century "British" Literary Canons*, pp 261-278, p 261.
[39] Carol Ann Howells, *Jean Rhys*, 1991, p 108.
[40] In a letter to her editor, Diana Athill, Rhys writes, "(I think too that Charlotte had a 'thing' about the West Indies being rather sinister places – because in another of her books 'Villette' she drowns the hero[…] on the voyage to Guadeloupe, another very alien place – according to her.) Perhaps most people had this idea then, and perhaps in a way they were right. Even now white West Indians can be a bit trying[…]but not quite so awful surely. They have a side and a point of view" (Francis Wyndham, Diane Melly, eds., 1984, p 297. Letter dated Sunday 20th [February, 1966]).

axiomatics of imperialism. Through this white Jamaican Creole, Brontë renders the human/animal frontier as acceptably indeterminate".[41]

Jane's description of Rochester's first wife in Brontë's novel portrays Bertha as an animal, thereby blurring the frontier between human and beast:

> In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.[42]

Spivak points out that the passage allows a close link between the white Creole and the wild animal to exist, by virtue of the ideology that informed British imperialism. From at least the eighteenth century, many non-white or non-English races were considered inferior and "savage".[43] Moreover, as with the case of Bertha/Antoinette Mason, a white Creole, many "mixed races" were considered liable to die out, due to their supposed low fertility rates. The racial hybrid, therefore, was seen to pose a threat to each of the "original" races that constituted the "new", mixed race.[44]

Given that ideology plays an integral role in determining texts in the English literary canon, and that *Jane Eyre* is considered to belong firmly to that canon, it is worth examining the issue of the rewriting of Bertha Mason as Antoinette Mason in Rhys's novel.[45] She is no longer a madwoman by virtue of her Creole ancestry, her supposedly

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[41] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", 1985, p 899.

[42] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, originally published by Smith, Elder and Co., Cornhill, 1847; London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1987, pp 257-258.

[43] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 899. Young states that "in the eighteenth century […] the different varieties of human beings had been classed as part of the animal kingdom according to the hierarchical scale of the Great Chain of Being. Predictably the African was placed at the bottom of the human family, next to the ape, and there was some discussion as to whether the African should be categorised as belonging to the species of the ape or of the human" (*Colonial Desire*, pp 6-7).

[44] For a discussion on the complexities of the issue of hybridity, from the eighteenth century to the present day, see Young, *Colonial Desire*, pp 1-28.

[45] Rhys has "rewritten" other stories, *both* fictional and autobiographical, in at least two of her other novels. Judith Kegan Gardiner discusses *Quartet* as not simply a rewriting of Rhys's affair with Ford Madox Ford and the triangle formed by Ford, his then partner, Stella Bowen and Rhys, but as a rewriting of Ford's novel, *The Good Soldier* (Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Rhys Recalls Ford: *Quartet* and *The Good Soldier*", University of

mixed and therefore "impure" racial blood.[46] Rather, her madness develops as a result of the socio-economic climate in which she lived. Such a climate includes a post-Emancipation West Indies in which black Creole slaves no longer feel obliged to work for their white Creole masters.[47] The new-found freedom of the slaves leads to civil unrest and outbreaks of violence. For example, Antoinette's childhood home is burned down, foreshadowing her own act of destruction at the end of the novel, through which she burns down Thornfield Hall.[48] Rhys's novel is therefore an attempt to present another side to Antoinette's madness, that is, to explain it by contextualising her own past in the West Indies, amidst the unstable socio-economic climate. The novel, as Carol Ann Howells states, "writes back" to the canon of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.[49] This notion of writing back is instrumental in creating a distinct identity for the West Indian writer.

Similarly, bell hooks's term "talking back" is relevant here. She states: "In the world of the southern black community I grew up in "back talk" and "talking back" meant speaking as an equal to an authority figure. It meant daring to disagree and sometimes it just meant having an opinion".[50] Antoinette's status as a white Creole woman meant that once married, her wealth was no longer her own.[51] The extent to which she is a "victim" has been debated, but more recent critics tend to agree that her

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Illinois at Chicago, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 1.1, (Spring), 1982, pp. 67-81). Carol Dell'Amico draws an analogy between *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and Joseph Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* (Carol Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*, New York and London: Routledge, 2005, pp 71-95).

[46] Early in his narrative, Rochester considers his wife's ethnicity. He thinks, "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they [her eyes] are not English or European either" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 56).

[47] On the first page of the novel, Antoinette hears Mr Luttrell, "our neighbour and her (Antoinette's mother's] only friend", talking about the black Creoles: "'Of course they have their own misfortunes. Still waiting for this compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed. Some will wait for a long time'" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 15).

[48] The fire that destroys Coulibri is described in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, pp 33-38. After dreaming of setting fire to Thornfield Hall and jumping off its roof, Antoinette thinks, "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (p 155-6).

[49] Howells, *Jean Rhys*, p 107.

[50] bell hooks, "Talking Back", *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 8, 1986-87, p 123.

[51] "'[Y]ou must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him'"(*Sargasso Sea*, p 91).

act of suicide at the end of the novel is one of free will, in which she performs her final and fatal act of resistance against the English imperial system. If Brontë's novel is regarded as a colonial text that stereotypes racial others, supports British imperialism – in which slavery is implicated – and upholds the patriarchal system which allowed Rochester to benefit financially from his marriage to Bertha Mason, then Rhys's novel can be seen as a "writing back" or retort to such a system. As Howells points out, Antoinette's voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea* provides her own version of her marriage, completely opposite to that provided by Rochester in Brontë's text. She notes that in marrying against her will, being deprived of her own name, her wealth and her home, Antoinette "emerges as the victim of a patriarchal plot devised by fathers and sons which chimes with the plot of imperialism."[52]

The notion of a "plot of imperialism" draws attention to the distinctions between coloniser and colonised, and the complexities of both Englishness and otherness. As Robert Young states in *Colonial Desire*, the notions of Englishness and otherness are deeply integrated. Englishness is not as "pure" a category as it may at first appear. Categories such as "white Creole", "black" and "white" or "English" are all problematic, in that they are relational categories applied and informed by complex socio-economic factors. History in turn may be said to influence ideology.[53] Ford Madox Ford states that England is a place whose races are "so mixed that there is […] hardly a man who can point to seven generations of purely English blood, it is almost absurd to use the almost obsolescent word 'race'".[54]

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[52] Howells, *Jean Rhys*, p 108.

[53] Ford Madox Ford states that although England has been repeatedly conquered by foreign rulers, an Englishman's response would be: "'All these fellows *are* ourselves'" (Ford, *England and the English*, p 249, Ford's emphasis). Ford argues that the multi-racial composition of English society ultimately results in a strong identification with England and Englishness, so that all of England's inhabitants become "English", regardless of their race (Ford, pp 249-63).

[54] Ford, p 256.

Young indicates that contemporary representations of "Englishness of the past" tend toward fixity, "certainty, centredness, homogeneity, as something unproblematically identical with itself."[55] However, he goes on to argue that these notions should be called into question and "seriously…doubted", as Englishness is actually often represented as "other, as something which other people possess, often as an image of consummate masculinity."[56] Young states briefly that Rhys's novels tend to represent masculine characters as other, in terms of their relationship to the female protagonists.[57] That is, the novels are told from the point of view of the female protagonist, whether in the first or third person, and in so doing, they look up to the "consummate" male as distant other, something they wish to aspire to, or in some cases, reject.[58]

The *TLS* review, however, presupposes the fixity of the above categories in its analysis of Rhys's text. For example, it says of Antoinette: "She grew up in isolation on an overgrown estate exposed to the beguiling spell of the West Indian landscape and to the treacherous influence of the Negro servants".[59] This "treacherous" landscape is described by Rochester in Brontë's narrative, as well as in Rhys's. In both cases, Rochester likens the place to a kind of living Hell, in every way antithetical to his beloved England: "Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger".[60]

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[55] Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 1995, p 2.
[56] Young, *Colonial Desire*, p 2.
[57] *Colonial Desire*, p 2.
[58] This applies mainly to Rhys's early novels. *Wide Sargasso Sea* has a section told from Rochester's perspective, and *Mackenzie* occasionally focalizes the third-person narrative through George Horsfield's, as well as Mr Mackenzie's voice.
[59] Wilmers, *TLS*, p 1039.
[60] *Sargasso Sea*, p 59.

Kenneth Ramchand states that the alien and exotic landscape serves as a platform onto which Antoinette and Rochester's love is projected:

> [T]he fierce sexuality between the characters […] is, indeed, the means by which each of the broken characters can abandon defensive postures: 'If I have forgotten caution, she has forgotten silence and coldness' (p 91). It is, however, part of the unsentimentality with which the author explores the terrified consciousness and […] that the young man's extreme self-consciousness and his susceptibility to intrusions from outside love's retreat should frustrate his yearning to possess and be possessed.[61]

As Ramchand states, the landscape becomes hostile for Antoinette, just as it has for Rochester. It becomes "a hated place to correspond with her unhappiness and her hate for her husband".[62] This commonality allows the landscape to serve as a platform onto which Rochester and Antoinette's love is projected.[63] The difference, however, is that Antoinette once loved the place, and it is Rochester's act of adultery with Amélie that drives her to hate it:

> 'Do you know what you've done to me? It's not the girl, not the girl. But I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life I would still have this, and now you have spoilt it. It's just somewhere else where I have been unhappy […] and I hate it now like I hate you and before I die I will show you how much I hate you.'[64]

Similarly, Carol Ann Howells states that this alienation from place indicates Rochester's inability to connect with and understand his own hidden desire for otherness:

> [T]hrough the exotic landscape and the girl he marries he catches a glimpse of a territory of romance which lies beyond his grasp. It is the revelation of his desire for that otherness which shocks him into the realisation of his own lack and of the limits of imperialism as the standard of absolute value.[65]

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[61] Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background*, Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston, Jamaica, 2004, p 215.
[62] Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, p 215.
[63] p 215.
[64] *Sargasso Sea*, p 121.
[65] Howells, *Jean Rhys*, p 108.

Young states that Englishness is characterised by its own hybridity, by heterogeneity rather than homogeneity.[66] He explains that despite the impression of fixity that seems to characterise Englishness, an uncertainty over the status of Englishness prevails. It is the impression of fixity and certainty that hides a greater uncertainty over identity. This sense of "being estranged from itself, sick with desire for the other" is evident in Rochester's narrative.[67] Thus Rochester is as much a victim of the patriarchal, "imperialist project" as Antoinette.[68] For example, he is the unsuccessful younger brother, a disappointment to his father. His trip to the West Indies has been arranged by Mr Mason and by Rochester's father in order that Rochester may marry a white Creole heiress and make a success of himself by assuming ownership of her inheritance. Once this objective is achieved, Rochester will no longer be a disappointment to his father.[69] However, his narrative indicates remorse and alienation, both from the exotic landscape in which he finds himself and from the patriarchal values which he has, until marrying Antoinette, been unable to realise.

As Elgin Mellown states, Rochester's narrative takes place at the moment that things occur, in the immediate past tense, as opposed to a distant, reflective past tense, as is the case with Antoinette.[70] Thus the reader shares with Rochester his "revelations and growing horror".[71] The two voices, therefore, tell one story, not only from different perspectives, but indicating the "effect of horror which it produces, the contrast of the victim who knows her fate with that of the victim who must gradually learn his".[72] Mellown goes on to state that the awareness of being a victim is different in Rochester

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[66] Young, *Colonial Desire*, p 2.
[67] *Colonial Desire*, p 2.
[68] This is Spivak's term: "Three Women's Texts," p 896.
[69] Rochester thinks about the letter he will write to his father: "I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 59).
[70] Mellown, "Character and Themes" p 112.
[71] "Character and Themes", p 112.
[72] pp 112-13.

and in Antoinette. On the one hand, Antoinette knows she is a victim, and that "any act is futile", whereas Rochester continues to believe that he is a free agent, even when his situation worsens.[73] Mellown adds that in other Rhys novels, as well as *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the male protagonist believes himself to have free will, whereas the female feels a sense of the "inevitability of her destiny".[74]

Critics including Spivak, Carol Ann Howells and Kenneth Ramchand draw attention to this male victimisation as allowing for a sympathetic portrayal of Rochester. Rather than painting him as the evil imperialist, Rhys highlights the uncertainty of Englishness as a category by representing Rochester as both a victim and a perpetrator of some of the abuses of British imperialism.[75] Ramchand states that rather than contributing to an "easy moral judgement", the narrative allows the reader to "explore the depths of [Rochester's] longing and frustrations too."[76] Ramchand explains that over the course of his stay and his relationship with Antoinette, Rochester's connection with the West Indies goes through different stages, beginning with the fear of an alien, hostile environment.

Another key debate in Jean Rhys's fiction, and in particular, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, focuses on whether or not Jean Rhys can herself be called a West Indian writer. As my thesis does not deal extensively with autobiography and how it relates to Rhys's writing, I will highlight another aspect of this debate: is *Wide Sargasso Sea* a West Indian novel? Before beginning to examine this question, it is worth briefly outlining the publication history of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It was the last of Jean Rhys's five novels and was

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[73] Mellown, "Character and Themes", p 113.
[74] "Character and Themes", p 114. However, Horsfield in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* says to Julia: "Well, I think there's a good deal of tosh talked about free will myself" (*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, first published by Jonathan Cape, 1930, London: Penguin Classics, 2000, p 40). See also Henrik Mossin, "The Existentialist Dimension in the Novels of Jean Rhys", *Kunapipi* 3.1, 1981, pp 143-50; and my fifth chapter on the Zombie.
[75] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 902; Howells, *Jean Rhys*, p 108.
[76] Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, p 214.

published in 1966, although she wrote an autobiography, *Smile Please*, which was published posthumously and unfinished in 1979. Evidence from Jean Rhys's *Letters* also shows that she began writing a version of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as early as the 1940s.[77] In one of her letters to her friend Peggy Kirkaldy, Rhys writes: "Also I have a novel half finished. I should like to finish it […] partly because I think it might be the one book I've written that's much use".[78] The letters published and edited by Francis Wyndham and Diane Melly add a footnote: "This was an early version of *Wide Sargasso Sea*."[79]

Spivak notes that in giving voice to the supposed villain of the story, *Wide Sargasso Sea* allows Rochester's character to be portrayed with a degree of sympathy.[80] It prevents a polar opposition between Antoinette as the essentially good, innocent, pure Other, and Rochester as the evil imperialist. Moreover, it illustrates the complexities of the power relationships at play in the West Indies during the post-Emancipation period.[81] The final section is written from the first-person point of view of Antoinette as an adult, now incarcerated in England in Rochester's mansion, Thornfield Hall. The first the reader hears of Antoinette's voice in this final section is as follows:

> In this room I wake early and lie shivering for it is very cold. At last Grace Poole, the woman who looks after me, lights a fire with paper and sticks and lumps of coal.[82]

The section begins, however, with a brief passage written in the voice of the maid, Grace Poole, who has been put in Antoinette's charge. Helen Nebeker notes that giving

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[77] See Helen Carr, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004-5, p 4.
[78] Francis Wyndham, Diane Melly, eds., *The Letters of Jean Rhys*, New York: Viking Press, Inc., 1984, p 39. The letter is dated by the editors in square brackets as "[October 1945]".
[79] Wyndham, Melly, eds., *Letters*, note 1, p 40. See also *Letters* pp 44, 50, 56, 143.
[80] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.
[81] Howells, *Jean Rhys*; Carr, *Jean Rhys*; Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*; Emery, "Refiguring the Postcolonial Imagination: Tropes of Visuality in Writing by Rhys, Kincaid, and Cliff", 1997; Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*; Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, 1996; Erica L Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa: The Politics of Location in Works by Jean Rhys, Marguerite Duras, and Erminia Dell'Oro*, London: Associated University Press, 2003; Paula Le Gallez, *The Rhys Woman*, London: Macmillan, 1990; Margaret Paul Joseph, *Caliban in Exile: The Outsider in Caribbean Fiction*, New York, London: Greenwood Press, 1992.
[82] *Sargasso Sea*, p 146.

voice to Ms Poole makes a general statement about the lack of freedom of many women of the time, housebound to the duties of family, or literally duty bound to households they worked for as maids, governesses, etc.[83] Over the course of the narrative, the reader learns more about why Antoinette becomes mad, gaining an understanding of the complex social structure in which she lived. One event that marks the passing from feeling safe and secure in a world that exploits slaves and that is fixed in its hierarchy, is the poisoning of a horse belonging to Antoinette's mother:

> 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?'[84]

The word "marooned" has an ambiguous meaning in the above passage. One definition indicates being stranded, neglected, isolated and alienated. For example, Mr Luttrell, who speaks with dismay about the misfortunes of the black Creoles, himself comes to a dismal end, marking the sense of isolation that the white Creoles feel, as a result of their social position:

> How could she [Annette] know that Mr Luttrell would be the first who grew tired of waiting? One calm evening he shot his dog, swam out to sea and was gone for always. No agent came from England to look after his property – Nelson's Rest it was called – and strangers from Spanish Town rode up to gossip and discuss the tragedy.
>
> 'Live at Nelson's Rest? Not for love of money. An unlucky place.'
>
> Mr Luttrell's house was left empty, shutters banging in the wind. Soon the black people said it was haunted, they wouldn't go near it. And no one came near us.[85]

Notably, the name of the house, "Nelson's Rest", has obvious colonial associations with Lord Nelson. By naming Mr Luttrell's house "Nelson's Rest", the narrative may suggest not only a colonial association, but the notion that the power of the coloniser, in

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[83] Helen Nebeker, p 155.
[84] *Sargasso Sea*, p 16.
[85] p 15.

this context, is virtually dead. The word "rest" reveals funerary connotations, indicating that the former glory of the white Creole as coloniser is now being laid to rest. At one time, the narrative suggests, the white Creoles lived in relative luxury, but the symbols of their wealth, after Emancipation, have become empty and meaningless, like Mr Luttrell's house, with its "shutters banging in the wind." It is as if the house represents a decaying monument to the white Creoles as slave owners: their houses still stand, but empty and unmanned, cannot continue to function as comfortable "homes".

Kenneth Ramchand uses the term "terrified consciousness", to describe the white Creoles' "sensations of shock and disorientation as a massive and smouldering Black population is released into an awareness of its power."[86] The already existing isolation that results from the white Creoles' hybrid identity, in which they do not wholly belong either to the black Creoles or to the white English, is somewhat offset by their colonial power and social status. As H Adlai Murdoch points out in her article, "Rhys's Pieces: Unhomeliness as Arbiter of Caribbean Creolization", white Creoles such as Antoinette possess a "dual status" of "both and, implicitly, neither", in terms of their identity within the framework of post-Emancipation West Indies.[87] Thus *Wide Sargasso Sea* destabilises fixed notions of "colonised" and "coloniser".[88] As Margaret Paul Joseph states in her book, *Caliban in Exile*, Rhys herself did not share the privileges enjoyed by her slave-owning ancestors, while living in the West Indies. On the contrary, her life there was marked by alienation and a sense of being a minority figure, by virtue of being white.[89] A sense of hostility towards her heightened this alienation, in the knowledge that her

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[86] Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, p 204.
[87] H Adlai Murdoch, "Rhys's Pieces: Unhomeliness as Arbiter of Caribbean Creolization", *Callaloo*, Winter 2003, 26.1, 2003, p 256.
[88] Murdoch, "Rhys's Pieces", p 256.
[89] Joseph, *Caliban in Exile*, p 38.

ancestors were, in fact, slave owners.[90] After moving to England, her life there was characterised by dependence upon men. This analysis calls into question the use of "coloniser" to characterise Rhys's female protagonists, who, arguably, reflect many aspects of Rhys's own life.[91]

When the black Creole slaves begin to turn against their former masters, their estates deteriorate as they begin to lose power, and any isolation already experienced as a result of an indeterminate ethnicity, is further deepened. Thus Antoinette, her mother and her brother are "marooned". The second definition of the word refers to runaway slaves, who were also known as "maroons".[92] By identifying herself and her family as "marooned", Antoinette's mother acknowledges her decline in social status. Once the white Creoles' colonial control is destroyed, they are viewed with the same contempt by the English as by the black Creoles; and to the English, they are just as inferior as the black Creoles, for they share a lack of white Englishness. Judith Raiskin, in *Snow on the Cane Fields*, notes the use of this word in the novel as a "double-edged concept for the white Creole", which "resonates not only with the white experience of abandonment but also with the black history of the 'Maroons,' the slaves who escaped into the hills and attacked the plantations with revolutionary fervour".[93]

Moreover, Mary Lou Emery indicates that although the maroons and the planters' wives were technically free, their freedom came at the cost of enslaving others.[94] The freed status of the black Creoles allows them to rebel against the slave system which had, for generations, deprived them of freedom and the right to speak out against their colonial

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[90] Joseph, *Caliban in Exile*, p 38
[91] *Caliban in Exile*, p 38.
[92] "A member of a community of fugitive black slaves or (subsequently) of their descendants, esp. those who settled in the mountains and forests of Suriname and the West Indies" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
[93] Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, p 132.
[94] Emery, "The Politics of Form: Jean Rhys's Social Vision in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Twentieth Century Literature* Vol. 28.4, (Winter), 1982, pp 418-30, p 426.

masters. Christophine is one such former slave whose independence is shocking and unsettling for Rochester. Antoinette's shaky relations with Tia, a black Creole girl, return to haunt her when she is imprisoned in Thornfield Hall. Tia is portrayed as Antoinette's colonial other, her mirror image, and her double.[95] These are not contradictions; rather, critics have repeatedly drawn attention to the scene in which Antoinette and Tia encounter each other on the night that Antoinette's house is burned down by black Creoles: "We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass".[96]

Tia's character, especially in this scene, has been mainly interpreted as Antoinette's "other".[97] Tia represents Antoinette's mirror reflection, which complicates and problematises a straightforward analysis that attempts to polarise these two characters. For a mirror image is, in a literal sense, a reflection of something, and is used to gauge the realness of the image being reflected. It is, simultaneously, an opposite, and it is here that the relationship between Antoinette and Tia becomes complex. Spivak, for example, in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", states that Tia is Antoinette's "Other that could not be selfed".[98] Antoinette does not belong to the black Creoles, nor to the white English. England and Englishness are what culminate in Antoinette's destruction. She is married to an unloving Englishman, Rochester, who renames her Bertha, thus stealing her identity.[99] He locks her up in the attic of his

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[95] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 902.
[96] *Sargasso Sea*, p 38.
[97] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 902.
[98] "Three Women's Texts", p 902.
[99] On the eve of Antoinette's descent into madness, she and Rochester try, unsuccessfully, to reconcile their differences. "'Don't laugh like that, Bertha.' 'My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?' 'Because it is a name I'm particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha'" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 111). Shortly after Rochester betrays his wife, he calls her Bertha again: "'Bertha,' I said. 'Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name. I know, that's obeah too'" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 121). As Neshantha Harischandra states, the act of renaming Antoinette Bertha also indicates her association with her mother, for this was also her mother's name (Harischandra, "Mirror Images: Female Interrelationships in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* Vols. 27.1 and 28.2, 2001/2002, pp 146-160, p 155).

mansion in England, which he has bought with the wealth gained from his marriage to her. Antoinette stays in a convent during her adolescence, and does not feel completely welcome there, either, although she does feel safe and protected. It is her lack of Englishness that makes her feel left out. For example, when Antoinette returns home from playing with Tia, she hides from English visitors, whom she finds intimidating: "They were very beautiful I thought and they wore such beautiful clothes that I looked away down at the flagstones and when they laughed – the gentleman laughed the loudest – I ran into the house, into my bedroom".[100]

It is evident that Antoinette admires the English people in this scene, describing them and their clothes as "beautiful". But this beauty is something that she feels she does not possess, and must hide when confronted by it, given that she is not English, as they are. There are other instances in the novel where Antoinette feels the desire to be English, or to belong to the English. However, this desire is an ambivalent one, tempered by a realisation that being English is an impossible aim, along with the knowledge that she also desires to be black. For example, Antoinette feels grateful towards her stepfather for alleviating their impoverishment, but at the same time longs for the days before he had arrived: "In some ways it was better before he came though he'd rescued us from poverty and misery".[101]

Once Mr Mason has married Antoinette's mother, Antoinette becomes somewhat more English. For example, their diet consists now of English food, including "beef and mutton, pies and puddings".[102] Antoinette says of this change that she "was glad to be like an English girl but I missed the taste of Christophine's cooking".[103] It seems that she is unable to decide whether she wants to be black or English. As discussed previously,

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[100] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 21-22.
[101] p 29.
[102] p 30.
[103] p 30.

she is neither, which creates a desire to be one or the other. Later in the narrative, when Antoinette is a teenager and is staying at a convent school, she admires one of the sisters' hair, that of Hélène. She asks her how she does her hair, because she wants to look like her. However, she is ashamed when she realises that her non-Englishness, that is, the fact that she is not white in the English sense, prevents her from being able to look like Hélène.[104] In this instance, Antoinette wants to be English, or more white, ashamed of the possibility of any coloured or mixed blood, by virtue of her Creole heritage. However, as indicated, she also desires to be black, making her desires ambivalent and impossible to satisfy. Notably, Hélène sounds like a French name, suggesting that it is not Englishness that Antoinette desires, but a fixed, definite national and ethnic identity. As a white Creole, she is torn between her admiration of the English and her love of the black Creoles.

Immediately before their actual encounter at the burning of Coulibri, Antoinette sees Tia, the object of her desire:

> 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.[105]

In this scene, Antoinette wishes to cross the racial divide and to join the side of the black Creoles. For Antoinette, Tia represents "all that was left of my life as it had been". This is a life that Antoinette remembers in which the black Creoles had their place in society, as slaves and obedient servants. In such a secure existence, a clear binary between the white and the black races is made, in which Antoinette desires her black other, hoping that crossing the divide to this other side will make her feel whole. Antoinette's desire is a longing for the other, which is a longing for a past, although that

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[104] "'Yes, but Hélène, mine does not look like yours, whatever I do.' Her eyelashes flickered, she turned away, too polite to say the obvious thing" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 46).
[105] *Sargasso Sea*, p 38.

past did not exist in the way that Antoinette remembers it. In the above scene, Antoinette projects her desire onto Tia, her black other, and believes in the existence of a past, idyllic life. As John Su states in his article, "'Once I Would Have Gone Back'": "[H]istory in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is defined by images of communities never formed, empathy never felt, suffering never shared – in other words, history is defined *by what never occurred*".[106]

Similarly, at the end of the novel, Antoinette has her final dream, which compels her to jump off the roof at Thornfield Hall, to her death. In this dream, Antoinette sees a myriad of images representing her former life in the West Indies, signifiers that have helped to shape her identity and to give her a sense of place and, to a degree, belonging. These images build up to a climax which ends with Tia, whose taunting voice challenges and compels her to jump:

> 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 stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, 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 the books and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* […] 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? […] I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke.[107]

The images in the above passage connect Antoinette to the place of the West Indies, using different sensory perceptions, but mainly the sense of sight. There is repetition of the phrase "I saw", to refer to the various sights which create a sense of longing for

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[106] John Su, "'Once I Would Have Gone Back…But Not Any Longer': Nostalgia and Narrative Ethics in *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Critique*, Vol. 44.2, Winter 2003, pp 157-174, p 166 (Su's emphasis). This is in tune with the notion that postcolonial literature represents a nostalgia for what once was. See, for example, "My Algeriance, in Other Words: to depart not to arrive from Algeria", in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, London, New York: Routledge, 1998, pp 153-72. As Hélène Cixous states in "My Algeriance": "I did not lose Algeria, because I never had it, and I never was it. I suffered that it was lost for itself, separated from itself by colonialization". Cixous, "My Algeriance", p 168.

[107] *Sargasso Sea*, p 155.

Antoinette's past. The objects which she sees are fixed in time, represented to her as if they have never changed, and it is indeed her sight of them that makes her long for their return. The repetition of the phrase "I saw" suggests that Antoinette is creating the presence of these images, and the fact that these are seen in a dream makes this all the more likely. The sense of sight then moves to that of sound when Antoinette hears the parrot calling. This is followed by the image of the pool at Coulibri, and finally, of Tia, who is represented in both sight and sound: "Tia was there. She beckoned […] she laughed." Antoinette hears Tia taunt her: "You frightened?" In response, Antoinette calls out to her, and wakens. Notably, the images in Antoinette's memory are far from idealised. Although Su suggests that Antoinette conjures up an imagined past that "*never occurred*"[108], he also states that, if the function of nostalgia is the "reviving and maintaining [of] lost presences"[109], then *Wide Sargasso Sea* has the opposite effect, as it highlights to Antoinette "precisely what she has lost."[110] Moreover, the images themselves combine sketchy representations of Englishness with those of Antoinette's West Indian Creole heritage. Her Aunt Cora's patchwork, with "all colours" suggests that cultural signifiers lose their discrete identities in Antoinette's prelude to death, but blend as one. This blending reflects the interdependence of the white Creoles, the black Creoles and England, in terms of the benefits and exploitations of slavery. For without the slave trade, Rochester would not have been able to buy his mansion: he has benefited directly from its riches by inheriting his Creole wife's dowry.[111]

Notably, Rochester's narrative in the second section of the novel is interrupted by

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[108] Su, "'Once I Would Have Gone Back'", p 166.
[109] Edward S Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, p 376, as quoted in Su, "'Once I Would Have Gone Back'", p 173.
[110] Su, "'Once I Would Have Gone Back'", p 173.
[111] Edward Said discusses Jane Austen's complex but problematic representations of England's socio-economic relations with slavery in the West Indies in *Mansfield Park*: from *Culture and Imperialism*: "Consolidated Vision", in Dorothy J. Hale, ed., *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, Malden, Massachussetts: Blackwell, 2006, pp 691-715.

what appears to be Antoinette's voice. Crucially, it blurs the boundaries between these two individuals and their lack of understanding of each other. It does not do so in order to bridge a gap and create a sense of understanding; rather, it adds confusion to each individual's sense of identity.[112] For example, before arriving in the West Indies, Rochester may well have had a clear sense of his purpose: to marry a rich Creole woman, thereby securing his own fortune and no longer being a burden to his father and elder brother.[113] However, Rochester's narrative is written with the retrospective eye of someone who already knows the outcome of his situation, and is looking back, with a sense of defeat and guilt. Antoinette's first narrative, however, reveals a child who is lost in the overgrown garden at her home in Coulibri, not knowing where her place is in this post-Edenic world.[114]

Wally Look Lai, himself a West Indian writer, discusses the West Indian-ness of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in his article, "The Road to Thornfield Hall: An Analysis of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" (1968). He refers to Rhys's text as "one of the truly great novels to have ever emerged out of the West Indies."[115] Look Lai also points out that although much of the novel is set in the West Indies, Rhys wrote it, along with all of her other published work, in Britain and Europe.[116] Moreover, it may be argued that there is no real difference in the themes covered in Rhys's five novels, and that the only distinguishing feature of her last novel is that it is set in the West Indies. Look Lai argues against this view, stating that Rhys's first four novels were "European" novels, in that they were set in England and Europe.[117] Thus, according to Look Lai, they are

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[112] For a detailed analysis of the effects of Antoinette's voice in Rochester's narrative, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.
[113] *Sargasso Sea*, p 59.
[114] p 24.
[115] Wally Look Lai, "The Road to Thornfield Hall: An Analysis of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", in La Rose, J, ed., *New Beacon Reviews*, London, New Beacon Books, 1968, pp 38-52, p 38.
[116] Look Lai, "The Road to Thornfield Hall", p 38.
[117] Ramchand, "Wide Sargasso Sea", in Frickey, Critical Perspectives, p 195.

differentiated from Rhys's last novel, which marked a radical departure in its West Indian-ness.[118]

However, as Elaine Campbell states in "Reflections of Obeah", Rhys only became recognised as a West Indian writer towards the final years of her life, primarily by Kenneth Ramchand.[119] Campbell quotes Louis James:

> Even in her books written wholly about Europe, the sensibility is not wholly European. Her sensitivity to heat and to cold, to bright colour or the absence of colour, her sense of another life behind the mask of social conventions, were formed in the Antilles.[120]

One thus sees in Rhys's first four novels the presence of the West Indies, or at least the memory of a warmer climate that the female protagonist once inhabited and in which, to some degree, she felt a sense of home and belonging. In her article "Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Exterminating the White Cockroach" Nancy J. C. Fulton also discusses the West Indian presence and themes in Rhys's other texts.[121] She cites Wally Look Lai's comment about the relationship between Antoinette and Rochester as representing an "encounter between two whole worlds".[122] Look Lai states that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a West Indian novel, not merely because of its setting, but because it comprises a "poetic dramatisation of basic Caribbean concerns", including the conflict between "European and West Indian consciousness".[123]

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[118] Ramchand, "Wide Sargasso Sea", p 195.

[119] Elaine Campbell, "Reflections of Obeah in Jean Rhys' Fiction", (1982) in Frickey, ed., Critical Perspectives, pp 59-66, p 59. Campbell also makes reference to Phyllis Shand Allfrey (a white Creole West Indian writer, and friend of Rhys). Notably, Allfrey was from a similar background to Rhys, but published only one novel, in addition to four collections of poetry (some of which were reprinted from earlier editions); and devoted her life to grass-roots political activism in the West Indies. She returned to the West Indies, where she established the country's first political party. For more information on Allfrey's background, see the Introduction to her novel, The Orchid House, by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953, 1997, pp vii-xxvi.

[120] Campbell, "Reflections of Obeah", p 59; James, *Jean Rhys*, p 33.

[121] Fulton, Nancy J C, "Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea:* Exterminating the White Cockroach", *Revista/Review Interamericana*, 4, 1974, pp 340-9, Hato Rey, Puerto Rico, Inter American University Press.

[122] Fulton, "Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", p 341; Look Lai, "The Road to Thornfield Hall", p 39.

[123] Look Lai, "The Road to Thornfield Hall", p 39.

Ramchand argues against the view that because Rhys wrote all of her novels in Europe, they are all European novels. For example, he emphasises the authenticity of spoken languages in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one of the factors that makes it a West Indian novel.[124] The patois with which the black servant and family friend, Christophine speaks; the language spoken by the mulatto servant, Amélie; and the written language of the half-English, half-Creole stepbrother Daniel Cosway, accurately reflect the diversity of languages and dialects in the West Indies.[125] Significantly, as Ramchand points out, these various dialects reflect a "whole social spectrum" of the time and place in which they are set.[126]

Ramchand, although he agrees with Look Lai's view that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a West Indian novel, does not do so to the exclusion of its relevance to other cultures. Look Lai identifies the novel's predominant theme as an "encounter between two whole worlds", where those worlds are England and the West Indies.[127] However, Ramchand states that this encounter is not necessarily restricted to these two cultures. Rather, the theme of a major culture clash based on lack of understanding, exploitation, and abuse of power, applies more broadly to the relationship between coloniser and colonised, albeit that these categories are problematised within the context of the white Creole, Antoinette.[128] Ramchand's interpretation suggests that Rochester and Antoinette respectively represent England and the West Indies, but could just as easily represent England and India under imperial rule; or England (as well as other European imperial nations) and Africa. As previously noted, Antoinette loses all entitlement to her wealth, once married. Also significant is the motive behind Rochester's marriage to Antoinette:

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[124] Ramchand, "*Wide Sargasso Sea*", p 196.
[125] Ramchand, p 196.
[126] p 196.
[127] Look Lai, "The Road to Thornfield Hall", p 39.
[128] Ramchand, "*Wide Sargasso Sea*", p 198.

he does not marry her for love (although he later develops feelings for her that resemble love), but for her dowry.[129]

John Hearne, in "The Wide Sargasso Sea: A West Indian Reflection", identifies the novel using criteria that are equally applicable at a universal level. For example, he states that one of the typically West Indian themes in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the unfulfilled quest for love: "It is this unflinching examination of perennially reviving, perennially blighted hope that makes Jean Rhys's novel so important, and that places it so dead centre of what we can only term the West Indian perception".[130]

Identifying something as "the West Indian perception" is problematic in that it leads to an essentialist view of West Indian people by suggesting that all West Indians view things in essentially the same way. Hence there is "only" "the" West Indian perception, a generalisation and denigration of the one, unified and simplistic way in which West Indians are said to view the world. Likewise, the notion that both Europe and the West Indies have each their own collective consciousness is problematic in its tendency towards essentialism. Both John Hearne's and Wally Look Lai's statements, as outlined above, prevent the possibility of a multitude of perceptions that may, to some degree, be informed by cultural factors unique to people living in the West Indies and/or Europe at a certain period in history. The problem of essentialism thus poses an obstacle in addressing the question, "Is *Wide Sargasso Sea* a West Indian novel?"

The notion of "perennially reviving, perennially blighted hope" is echoed by Kenneth Ramchand as a potentially West Indian characteristic, although he is careful not to fall into the trap of essentialism. Ramchand argues that in an attempt to answer the

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[129] The "purchase" of Rochester by Antoinette is another potential area of study, in which the transaction can be analogised with the betrayal of Christ and the 30 pieces of silver for which he was betrayed by Judas: "Then one of the Twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said *unto them*, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver" (*The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Matthew 26: 14-15).

[130] John Hearne, "The Wide Sargasso Sea: A West Indian Reflection", *Cornhill Magazine* 1080 (Summer 1974), pp 323-333; reprinted in Frickey, *Critical Perspectives*, pp 186-193, p 192.

question: "Is *Wide Sargasso Sea* a West Indian novel?" one must consider what makes it West Indian. He gives a list of potential answers, including the West Indian landscape, the West Indian social world depicted, and the fact that it is written by someone born and raised in the West Indies.[131] He also refers to Francis Wyndham's comment about Rhys's "almost lurid! – passion for stating the case of the underdog".[132] As Chinua Achebe explains:

> This is one of the penalties of being an underdog: that you have to know about the overdog, you see. The overdog doesn't need to know about the underdog; therefore, he suffers severe limitations, and the underdog ends up being wiser because he knows about himself and knows about the overdog.[133]

As noted, Hearne states that the endlessly built up and dashed hopes that classify the underdog, are typical of the West Indian. However, Ramchand cautions against identifying the underdog as typically West Indian, as it leads to the essentialist view that people of a certain race are inherently and necessarily characterised in certain ways. It leads to: "the danger of prescription that exists whenever we attempt to base definitions upon social and political content".[134] This "danger of prescription", as Ramchand points out, can also apply when attempting to undermine *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s status as a West Indian novel. He cites the disagreement between Wally Look Lai and Edward Kamau Brathwaite, a West Indian poet. Brathwaite states that the novel cannot be considered a West Indian novel on the basis that the "White Creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf" from the rest of the social structure, to be able to "meaningfully identify or be identified with the spiritual world on this side of

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[131] Ramchand, "*Wide Sargasso Sea*", p 194.
[132] *Sargasso Sea*, 1966; 1967, Introduction by Francis Wyndham, p 5.
[133] Chinua Achebe, in conversation with Charles H. Rowell, in Isidore Okpewho (ed*.), Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart: A Casebook*, 2003, p 260. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 260.
[134] Ramchand, "*Wide Sargasso Sea*", p 199.

the Sargasso Sea".[135] Brathwaite's main problem with Look Lai's view that the novel is a West Indian novel, is that Tia and Antoinette would never be friends in real life, as the colour divide between the black Creoles and the white Creoles at the time was too wide to make such a friendship possible.[136] Ramchand criticises Brathwaite for adhering too closely to a factual and historical interpretation at the expense of a more poetic one.[137] By adhering too closely to an historical interpretation, Ramchand suggests, Brathwaite overlooks a poetic reading that attempts to steer clear of essentialist assumptions based on race.

Helen Carr, in her book *Jean Rhys* (1996), indicates the importance to Caribbean literature offered by the themes found in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She notes that recent critics, including Veronica Gregg and Elaine Savory, have stressed the importance of the Caribbean to Rhys's writing, something that had previously been relegated only to her "Caribbean novels", which were seen as distinct from her "Continental novels", the former encompassing *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.[138] Erica Johnson states in her book, *Home, Maison, Casa*, that the dislocation of the colonial migrant is a strong theme in Rhys's novels, particularly in *Good Morning, Midnight*, which was not often regarded as one of her "Caribbean" novels.[139] Likewise, Emery draws attention to the use of the Carnival in Rhys's fiction as a way of introducing Caribbean elements into her work, stressing the use of masquerade as an important example of how *Good Morning, Midnight* can be read as a Caribbean novel.[140] For example, Sasha's Jewish artist friend, Serge, entertains her by dancing with a self-made African mask held to his face: "He holds the

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[135] Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 1974, pp 33-38, p 38.
[136] Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens*, p 38.
[137] Ramchand, "*Wide Sargasso Sea*", p 198.
[138] Carr, *Jean Rhys*, p 15.
[139] Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa*, p 34.
[140] Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p 20.

mask over his face and dances. 'To make you laugh,' he says. He dances very well. His thin, nervous body looks strange, surmounted by the hideous mask".[141]

The above description is analogous to the Carnival dances of the West Indies, in which black dancers wear white masks in order to parody their former colonial masters, and in which to engage in a celebration that has subversive undertones.[142] Shortly after this description, Sasha imagines herself in a hot climate, an image which could be a flashback to her life before she lived in Europe or England:

> I am lying in a hammock looking up into the branches of a tree. The sound of the sea advances and retreats as if a door were being opened and shut. All day there has been a fierce wind blowing, but at sunset it drops. The hills look like clouds and the clouds like fantastic hills.[143]

The image of the door "being opened and shut" suggests that Sasha's memories of her life before Europe and before England are so distant, that they only appear in glimpses of flashbacks. It is as if a door to these memories is opened by things that happen to her in the present, but are shortly thereafter "shut". This shutting off of such memories is not evident in her flashbacks to her past in England and Europe, which return to her involuntarily, and often painfully. The ambivalence signifies the "alienating discourse of metropolitan Europe" experienced by the Creole subject[144]. This results in a search for a home that only exists in the mind. As Erica Johnson states:

> The characteristic inscription of home as an *absence* in her subjects' lives does not mean that her characters are "homeless," a term that suggests that home figures as an irreparable site of loss, and assumes that, as

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[141] *Good Morning, Midnight*, first published London: Constable, 1939, Penguin, 1969, p 77. For an analysis of the use of blackness in Modernist art and literature, see Michael North, "Modernism's African Mask: The Stein-Picasso Collaboration" in *Prehistories of the Future: the Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, Elazar Barkhan and Ronald Bush, eds,. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, pp 270-289. North states that Picasso found African art to be both "'*raisonnable*' (that is to say, formally ordered) and *magicaux* (uncanny, mysterious, occult)." He adds that Gertrude Stein found African art "'natural, direct and civilized', as if to defy the usual contrasts between the natural and the civilized". Further, North states that the Modernists were "attracted to African art because it seemed to promise direct access to nature, but also because it broke down the whole dichotomy between nature and culture" (p 283).

[142] For a further discussion on the West Indian Carnival, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[143] *Midnight*, p 77.

[144] Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa*, p 36.

> migrants, Rhys's characters leave home behind in the West Indies. Rather, the Creole characters in Rhys's fiction *dwell outside of specific cultural and historical constructions of home*, whether they live in the West Indies or in Europe.[145]

Judith Raiskin echoes this view, citing examples of Antoinette's perception of Englishness in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Raiskin's analysis points to the changeability of Englishness as a construct, which is often pieced together in a romantic fashion in Antoinette's mind, through music, advertising imagery and stories.[146] For example, Rochester thinks:

> She often questioned me about England and listened attentively to my answers, but I was certain that nothing I said made much difference. Her mind was already made up. Some romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song, a waltz, some note of music, and her ideas were fixed. About England and about Europe.[147]

Carr echoes the sentiment shared by John Hearne, Wally Look Lai, Kenneth Ramchand and Naipaul, that the Caribbean is a crucial element in all of Rhys's writing.[148] However, Carr also stresses the "ambiguous and marginal place" that Rhys occupies in relation to a Caribbean identity. Both Carr and Louis James cite Brathwaite, who states that Rhys "cannot, since neither black nor of slave origin, be considered Caribbean at all".[149] Emery also states: "Edward Brathwaite has asserted that the term 'West Indian' refers to "someone of African descent" who shares "a common history of slavery".[150] Brathwaite's definition of West Indian is problematic for different reasons. Firstly, it is

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[145] *Home, Maison, Casa*, p 36.
[146] Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, pp 144-146.
[147] *Sargasso Sea*, p 78.
[148] Carr, *Jean Rhys*, p 15.
[149] Brathwaite: *Contradictory Omens* (1974), quoted in Carr, *Jean* Rhys, 1966, p 16. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o states in his book *Writers in Politics*, colonial domination infiltrates itself upon a nation through cultural forms, including "education, religion, language, literature, songs and dances, every form of expressive practices" (*Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature & Society*, Oxford: James Currey, Nairobi: EAEP, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1981; 1997, p 8). However, he adds that many African writers have used the language of the coloniser in order to speak out against such domination: "Africans turned that which was meant to imprison them into a weapon of struggle. They took the languages of Europe to denounce colonialism" (*Writers in Politics*, p 22).
[150] Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p 19, quoting Brathwaite as quoted in Campbell, "From Dominica to Devonshire, A Memento of Jean Rhys", *Kunapipi* I, no. 2 (1979), pp 6-22.

restricted to those who have descended from slavery, i.e., black Creoles living in the West Indies who can trace their ancestral roots to the economic slavery that resulted from colonialism. Brathwaite, in effect, denies white Creoles their West Indian status. Arguably, Jean Rhys's position in the West Indies was not that of the underdog, in that she was not descended of slaves, nor was she black, where being black is assumed to be a category of inferiority within the social context of West Indian culture at the time. However, having grown up in Dominica, she would have had a certain insight into West Indian culture unique to those who have spent their childhoods there.[151] Undoubtedly, her experiences would have contrasted starkly to the struggles and oppression faced by black slaves and those who were descended from slavery. Nonetheless, this does not make her experience any less West Indian.

Moreover, Emery indicates that different types of slavery experienced by a writer or a character within the complex social context of the West Indies can allow for such an individual to share something of the victimisation experienced by black slaves.[152] For example, she cites Antoinette as someone who experiences "sexual and class enslavement as a white Creole woman", allowing her to identify with "multiplicitous West Indian histories of possession and dispossession."[153] In other words, Antoinette is dominated by her husband, who gains possession of her wealth, changes her name and removes her identity, all of which indicate a type of enslavement for Antoinette. This indicates what Emery identifies as the "interconnecting dynamics of sexual and colonial slavery" in the novel.[154] Rochester is, in some ways, akin to the master in a master-slave relationship.

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[151] Paravisini-Gebert notes in her Introduction to *The Orchid House*, states: "[R]acism permeated [Allfrey's] society [in the West Indies]. […] In church, for example, they couldn't have mixed, even if they had wanted to, as it was divided into two parts – one for the whites in front, one for the blacks at the back, and an open space between them. At the end of the service blacks and whites went out separate doors. As a result, whites, blacks and colored lived in a never-ending ritual of power plays" (p ix).

[152] *Jean Rhys at "World's End"* pp 19-20.

[153] Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"* pp 19-20.

[154] *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p 20.

Although this polarity can be seen to be problematic in terms of Antoinette's own ancestry of slave ownership, it highlights the complexity of a concept such as "slavery". As Emery indicates, "slavery" is not restricted to economic domination, as is found in the historical slavery that existed amongst black Creoles in the West Indies, for example. By Emery's definition, it would include any type of major domination that leads to victimisation and lack of freedom as well as a lack of identity.

In terms of Emery's definition of slavery, Antoinette can be seen to be a victim of it, as can Jean Rhys. Rhys herself, as Brathwaite points out, was not black, nor was she descended of slaves. However, having grown up in the West Indies as a white Creole, she would have experienced a negation of self through her inability to belong wholly to the islands, and consequently, the stripping away of her identity. She was neither black nor English, and often spoke of wanting to be black, because she identified with the black Creoles at her childhood home, and saw in them a sense of belonging that she felt she lacked. Ironically, towards the end of her life, she adopted Englishness in the form of outward appearance. Having arrived from the West Indies, Rhys's accent was strongly West Indian, which made her something of a misfit within middle-class English society.[155] She turned away from this identity, however, and began to speak with a "proper" English accent in later years.[156] If she is not a slave in the traditional sense, she has been victim to a master-slave relationship in terms of her enslavement to Englishness and her deep desire to belong.[157]

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[155] Savory points out that Rhys was acutely aware of the "moral double standards in middle-class English society, and although she was, in many respects, part of such a society, or tried to belong to it, she also exposed it through her writing, thereby challenging and questioning it" (Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 111).

[156] Rhys's lack of success as a chorus girl is also said to be a result of what Carole Angier calls her "'nasty nigger voice', that had let her down […] when she was a famous old lady people could hardly hear her she spoke so softly…She'd learned to hide" (Angier, *Jean Rhys; Life and Work*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990, p 50). See also Mary Cantwell, "A Conversation with Jean Rhys", *Mademoiselle* 79 (October 1974) pp 170-1, 206, 208, 210, 213.

[157] As Simone de Beauvoir points out, women's supposed inferiority in society, as with that of "the Negro", is a result of the way in which women and ethnic minorities have been treated, historically, rather than reflecting a

Brathwaite's narrow definition of "West Indian" echoes Rochester's inability to categorise Antoinette. Rochester comments that Antoinette is "not English or European either".[158] For Rochester, the inability to categorise leads to a sense of denial of an individual's legitimacy. For if Antoinette is neither English nor European, then what is she? Rochester's suggestion is that she belongs nowhere, which makes her a threat to the established order.[159] Rochester's feeling of unease surrounding Antoinette stems from his belief that all things must have their place within the established order. As discussed previously, being in the West Indies throws all of this into doubt for Rochester, although, as Robert Young points out, it should not be supposed that Englishness exists as a fixed, centred point. Likewise, Brathwaite does not allow Rhys the status of Caribbean, nor, by implication, that of West Indian. For in order to be privileged with this status, Brathwaite suggests, one must be either black or descended from slaves. This draws attention to the use of racial and ethnic categories and the way in which Brathwaite has assumed their fixity.

bell hooks, in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, examines the problem of essentialism as highlighted by postmodernist theory.[160] Postmodernism critiques essentialism on the grounds that identity is not fixed, but is ever-changing and

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state of affairs based on essentialist notions of race and gender. Although such inferiority does, in fact represent a particular state of affairs, it is crucial to acknowledge the verb "to be" in its more subtle form, "to have become" (Simone de Beauvoir, "Woman and the Other", from "Introduction", *The Second Sex* (1949), *trans.* and ed. H.M. Parshley, 1953, reprinted in Dennis Walder (ed.), *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, Oxford University Press, 1990), pp 305-10, p 310).

[158] *Sargasso Sea*, p 56.

[159] As Cixous states: "Some people react to expulsion with the need to belong. For me […] I never needed a terrestrial, localized country" ("My Algeriance", pp 167-8).

[160] For discussions on postmodernist theory, see: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, The University of Michigan Press, 1994, originally published in French by Éditions Galilée, 1981; Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, New York: Semiotext(e), 1988; Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism", *The Postmodern Turn*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987, pp 84-96; Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism? Translated by Régis Durand, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledg*e, *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 10, Manchester University Press, pp 71-82; Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project" (pp 98-109), "The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a turning point" (pp 50-61) in T Docherty, *Postmodernism: A Reader*, New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993; Christopher Norris, "Baudrillard and the politics of postmodernism" in *What's wrong with postmodernism*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, pp 182-191.

changeable; whereas an essentialist view of identity suggests that people have fixed identities based on their race, for example, or nationality, which can potentially lead to cultural and racial stereotypes. However, hooks states that this postmodernist critique of essentialism is problematic, in that it denies the existence of black people as a positive presence. It fails to recognise the history of black people, for if identity is fragmented, problematic and even non-existent, this may well deny the existence of political/historical struggles faced by oppressed groups, such as African Americans.[161] hooks criticises "[t]hird world nationals, elites and white critics" for their theories that tend to ignore black people, and are thus not sufficiently radical to pave the way for new ways of seeing, thinking and being.[162]

However, hooks goes on to find some merit in the postmodernist critique of essentialism, developing her theory of "postmodern blackness".[163] She argues that it can be empowering for black people as it allows for "multiple black identities", steering clear of black/white binaries that can be prone to elitism and white supremacy.[164] It also avoids racial stereotypes and generalisations, including binaries between the "primitive" and the "civilised".[165]

Another problem with Brathwaite's reasoning above is that it presupposes a fixed notion of ethnicity. As hooks points out, a critique of essentialism is both problematic and potentially empowering. As noted, it is potentially liberating, given that it can lead to "multiple black identities" and prevent an overarching category, such as "black", which can be limiting and restrictive. As Joan Nagel states in "Constructing Ethnicity", a constructionist view of ethnicity is one of a "dynamic, constantly-evolving property"

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[161] hooks, "Postmodern Blackness" in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, Boston, MA: Southend Press, 1990, pp 23-31, p 25.
[162] hooks, "Postmodern Blackness", p 25.
[163] p 29. For an outline of hooks's theory of postmodern blackness, see "Postmodern Blackness", pp 25-29.
[164] p 29.
[165] hooks, "Postmodern Blackness", p 28.

based on both "structure and agency", and is a "dialectic played out".[166] That is, ethnicity is not a fixed state of being, based, for example, on one's skin colour. As Peter McLaren states, "White culture is not monolithic, and its borders must be understood as malleable and porous". His argument, like Nagel's, utilises a constructionist view of ethnicity with regard to whiteness, explaining that whiteness itself is "always in a state of flux and fibrillation", and must be seen as "*cultural*, as *processual*, and not ontologically different from processes that are non-White".[167] Nagel argues that although history plays an integral role in shaping ethnicity, it is crucial to acknowledge contemporary phenomena, and the ways in which they may cause ethnic identities to change and evolve.[168] Therefore, ethnicity is not seen as something fixed, determined solely by past events in history. Rather, present and future events, which are constantly changing, influence ethnicity itself, allowing it to change and evolve also.

Nagel states that ethnicity can be constructed by choosing items of cultural content and reinventing one's past, as well as creating and influencing the present. One does not arrive with the objects of culture as already given; rather, one selects these according to personal preference.[169] Moreover, Chetan Bhatt argues in "Ethnic Absolutism and the Authoritarian Spirit", that the notion of "identity" is problematic, in that many identity theorists treat it as if it has "ontological status".[170] Rather, she states, identity should not be regarded as "epistemologically innocent", but as something that emerges through complex social, historical and cultural "processes, institutions, networks, associations".[171]

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[166] Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity", p 152.
[167] Peter McLaren, "Whiteness Is…The Struggle for Postcolonial Hybridity", in *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*, Joe L. Kincheloe, Shirley R. Steinberg, Nelson M. Rodriguez, Ronald E. Chennault, eds., London: Macmillan, 1998, pp 63-75, p 65 (McLaren's emphasis).
[168] Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity", p 153.
[169] "Constructing Ethnicity", p 162.
[170] Chetan Bhatt, "Ethnic Absolutism and the Authoritarian Spirit", in Vikki Bell, ed., *Performativity and Belonging*, London, California, New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd., (also published as *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 16.2, 1999, Nottingham Trent University) , pp 65-86, p 65.
[171] Bhatt, "Ethnic Absolutism", p 66.

Anne-Marie Fortier points out further difficulties in racial categorisation based on ethnicity. In her article, "Re-Membering Places and the Performance of Belonging", she states that notions of racial descent and cultural belonging can draw "essentialist and exclusionist borders".[172] Therefore, rather than pitying Antoinette for her lack of belonging, it is more worthwhile to regard the very notion of belonging based on race as problematic. As Fortier states, such borders thinly "concea[l] racist notions of cultural belonging as genetically endowed".[173] Rhys's writing, as Veronica Gregg points out, stresses the "permeability" of boundaries including social, ideological and literary, which "construct the fiction of the individual self."[174]

As previously stated, the criteria that Hearne provides for identifying *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a West Indian novel, can be more widely, if not universally applied. For example, Hearne gives no adequate explanation as to why the "unfulfilled quest for love" should be a uniquely West Indian attribute.[175] Contrary to his strongly expressed opinion that the novel is a West Indian novel, he cites Plato in a universalist way:

> [E]very soul born into this world was an entity divided, hungrily searching for the separated half with which it could join to become whole and happy again.[176]

Hearne does not explain how such a universal appeal would characterise *Wide Sargasso Sea* as uniquely West Indian. However, Ramchand manages to combine two seemingly contradictory elements – universality and cultural specificity. He does so by stating that although *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a West Indian novel, it also has universal themes. Antoinette and Rochester each represent the West Indies and England respectively, but as previously noted, they also represent the colonised and the coloniser

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[172] Anne-Marie Fortier, "Re-Membering Places and the Performance of Belonging(s)" in Bell, *Performativity and Belonging*, p 47.
[173] Fortier, "Re-Membering Places" p 45.
[174] Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 156.
[175] Hearne, "The Wide Sargasso Sea: A West Indian Reflection" in Frickey, *Critical Perspectives*, pp 192-3.
[176] Hearne, "The Wide Sargasso Sea", p 193.

in any imperial scenario. The two very different worlds they each represent draw attention to the problems, contradictions and social climate unique to the West Indies during the post-Emancipation period.[177] At the same time, these two characters reflect the broader issue of colonial rule. However, as previously indicated, a colonised/coloniser binary is too simplistic a model for the complex racial and social background of Antoinette, and indeed creates a polarity that is itself problematic.[178] As the daughter of a plantation owner, she can be identified as a coloniser. But once married to the Englishman Rochester, she loses her wealth and becomes something of a slave to him. Spivak states that Rhys takes risks by presenting the narrative from the point of view of the white Creole, Antoinette, and from the white colonial Englishman, Rochester.[179] Lee Erwin, however, in her article "'Like in a Looking-glass'", argues that the greater risk Rhys took was to allow an identification between Antoinette and the black Creole slaves, which is partly illustrated in Antoinette's dream about setting fire to the house at Thornfield Hall.[180]

In spite of the problematic nature of the so-called "West Indian perception", as outlined above, it is worth noting that various critics have pointed to a similar concept in terms of their critique of how Rhys's novel has been analysed. For example, both Mary Lou Emery and Kathy Mezei state that Rhys's work has been misinterpreted and misrepresented due to a lack of understanding, not of its difference, but of the ways in which it may measure itself. Emery states that misrepresentations of *Wide Sargasso Sea*

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[177] Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, p 204.

[178] As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o points out, "colonial imperialist domination creates theories about the colonizer and the colonized which are 'nothing but crude racist formulations'", "Literature & Society: The Politics of the Canon", p 9, (quoting Amilcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture", *Transition* No. 45, 1974, pp. 12-17, p 12).

[179] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.

[180] Lee Erwin, "'Like in a Looking-Glass': History and Narrative in *Wide Sargasso Sea*" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 22.2 (Winter 1989), pp. 143-158, p 143. For a discussion of the various ways in which these parallels are made, allowing Antoinette to relate to her black other, see Erwin, "'Like in a Looking-Glass'", pp 143-158.

by European critics, tend to be the result of applying a European modernist context to an interpretation of a West Indian novel:[181] "European aesthetic, moral and psychological standards […] have operated to misread and, at times, to devalue Rhys's writing, writing that, in fact, challenges those standards".[182]

This misunderstanding is based on essentialist notions of West Indianness, and echoes what Marilyn Reizbaum calls a "canonical double cross".[183] Reizbaum draws attention to the exclusion of white women writers from the "canon" of postcolonial writers, citing Spivak as reserving this category for women writers in a "third-world context".[184] Such writers are excluded from this sphere, Reizbaum states, by virtue of their status as British, and hence their supposed connection to empire. She argues, however, that Irish writers, including James Joyce, should be considered as non-canonical, as "minor", rather than major, by virtue of their Irishness.[185]

In terms of misreadings of Rhys's writing, it would be incorrect to interpret the apparent randomness and fragmented narrative as indicative of "madness" or schizophrenia on the part of Rhys's female characters. As Guy Wilentz states, Caribbean writing may confuse the "Western" reader, due to its "lack of linear narrative, the fragmented quality of narrative voice, and the apparent obscurity of language."[186] Mezei states that in applying a purely psychoanalytical model to a reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one might read Antoinette's madness as evidenced by the "fractured chronology" of the narrative and its "fragmentary coverage". This fragmentation arises through "associative memory", in which Antoinette associates current events with memories of the past,

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[181] Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p xii.
[182] *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p xii.
[183] Marilyn Reizbaum, "Canonical double cross: Scottish and Irish Women's Writing", in *Decolonizing Tradition*, pp 165-190.
[184] Reizbaum, "Canonical Double Cross", pp 165-6.
[185] "Canonical Double Cross", pp 168-9.
[186] Wilentz, "English as a Foreign Anguish", p 262. Elizabeth Abel essays a psychoanalytical interpretation of Rhys's novels using R. D. Laing's theories in "Women and Schizophrenia: The Fiction of Jean Rhys", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 20.2 (Spring) 1979, pp 155-177.

leading to a kind of solipsism.[187] However, Mezei goes on to argue against such an interpretation, stating that Antoinette's narrative is not an "autobiographical or memory monologue".[188] Rather, it is a deliberate narration in which she is "held together by the act of narrating". Mezei thus argues against the notion that Antoinette is "mad", or completely so, for Antoinette is able to recall events with an understanding of their chronology, remembering dates and sequences of time: "To measure time is a measure of how closely one is in touch with reality."[189] Thus, according to Mezei, Antoinette attempts to "work within the boundaries of conventional narrative temporality such as sequence, linear chronology, [and] plausible duration".[190] Guy Wilentz attributes Rhys's disruption of narrative chronology to West Indian writing. He states that West Indian writers deliberately disrupt linear time in their narratives, as well as conventions of language, in order to "reflect the concerns of their non-Western, ethnically diverse and colonized cultures".[191]

As noted previously, it is debatable as to how a novel that is historically determined (by the previously existing *Jane Eyre*) can achieve its own identity. In terms of its narrative style and its "writing back" to the values of imperialism, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been shown to be successful. One debatable aspect of this, however, lies in the final sequence, in which Antoinette "must" kill herself, as Spivak points out:

> [S]he must play out her role, act out the transformation of her "self" into that fictive Other; set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction.[192]

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[187] Kathy Mezei, "'And it Kept its Secret': Narration, Memory, and Madness in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 28.4, (Summer), 1987, p 201.
[188] Mezei, "'And it Kept its Secret'", p 201.
[189] "'And it Kept its Secret'", p 201. Kristeva, however, argues that time itself is a patriarchal construct, dependent as it is upon language (the symbolic order), and that *jouissance* is what allows for a "marginal speech" that lies "outside time" (Kristeva, "Outside Time", in *About Chinese Women*, London: Marion Boyars, p 35.) For Kristeva's theory on time, see "Outside Time", pp 34-38.
[190] Mezei, "'And it Kept its Secret'", p 201.
[191] Wilentz, "English as a Foreign Anguish", p 266.
[192] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 902.

However, Emery indicates that the narrative uses "dream space" rather than linear time, to subvert the conventions of the European novel, thereby creating a unique identity for the text.[193] As Carol Ann Howells states, although Rhys's narrative works within spaces determined by Brontë's novel, "it manages to elude the ultimate imperialism of definitive interpretation."[194] Events in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are narrated in a non-linear fashion, allowing the plot to progress through a series of dreams. The most significant is Antoinette's final dream, in which she sets fire to Thornfield Hall and jumps from its battlements.[195] As Emery states, "The novel ends […] with the dream foreshadowing its 'real' conclusion".[196] As Savory states, place plays a crucial role in Rhys's texts, especially because her protagonists are denied a "firm and clear national connection".[197] As Judith Raiskin points out, the use of dreams in *Wide Sargasso Sea* reflects the dream-like way in which Antoinette imagines England:

> 'Is it true,' she said, 'that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.'
> 'Well,' I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.'
> 'But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?'
> 'And how can millions of people, their houses and their streets be unreal?'
> 'More easily,' she said, 'much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.'[198]

Raiskin explains that because the British Creole held a connection to an imagined motherland, any sense of England was bound to be based on myth, thereby lacking in a real connection to the place.[199] This is reflected in Antoinette's feelings about England, a

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[193] Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p 37.
[194] Howells, *Jean Rhys*, p 105.
[195] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 154-55.
[196] Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p 37.
[197] Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 135.
[198] *Sargasso Sea*, p 67.
[199] Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, p 149. For a further discussion of the violence of Antoinette's dreams as echoing the violence of England's colonialism, see Raiskin, "This Cold Thief Place" in *Snow on the Cane Fields*, pp 144-173.

place she has grown up hearing about and aspiring towards, in terms of its values and aspects of its culture, but also a place to which she has never been. However, it is the use of the imagination within the text that allows for a disruption of the canon, as previously discussed. Rhys's use of dream space allows her narrative to disrupt the canonical imperialist text of her predecessor, in an attempt to transcend boundaries and definitions imposed by nationality and race.[200] Moreover, as Raiskin points out, Rochester's connection to the West Indies is similarly constructed out of dream-like images, based on a culturally created myth, "the English literary creation of the abundant but menacing New World."[201]

Hybridity and Exile

The complexity of Antoinette's racial and social position leads to postcolonial readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea* that focus on hybridity, both as a positive and as a negative attribute of Rhys's text. "Postcolonial" is a term difficult to define, as it encompasses a variety of views, some of which can be in conflict with one another. This section will examine postcolonial readings that incorporate hybridity and exile, examining various layers of otherness and inversions of the self/other polarity within Rhys's text.

Hybridity

A key definition of hybridity is "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation".[202] It is a term that must be examined in light of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as it is a characteristic of postcolonial texts and a defining feature of

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[200] Howells states that Ford criticised Rhys for not providing enough detail of place in her short story collection, *The Left Bank;* whereas Howells argues that Rhys's sense of place was indeed strong. Her characters' sense of disorientation comes from pared down writing that gives only essential details, concerning place (Howells, *Jean Rhys*, p 32).

[201] Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, p 148.

[202] Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge, 2003. p. 118

Antoinette's character. The term "hybrid" or "hybridity" is often applied to someone who does not fit into one category or another, where the two categories in question are opposite and antithetical. It is a term used both positively and negatively. To begin with, the negative use of hybridity results from the perceived problematic nature and negative connotations attributed to a lack of classification. Antoinette's white Creole heritage makes her perceived, by both the English and the black Creoles of the West Indies, as a bizarre freak of nature who has European and British blood running through her veins, yet belongs to neither of these white cultures.[203] As a result, the English call her and other white Creoles "white nigger", while the black Creoles use the term "white cockroach".[204] As previously indicated, the English reject and look down upon her because of her lack of Englishness. The black Creoles feel contempt for their former white masters. Antoinette is black, culturally speaking, having lived amongst black Creoles and grown up in the West Indies, a place so exotic and other to England. Yet she does not *belong* to the black Creoles, by virtue of her role as master to these former slaves.

In order to understand the problematic nature of the classification of hybrid, it is useful to look briefly at the restrictive binaries of Self and Other. Postcolonial theory has highlighted the misrepresentation of the East by the West in literary texts, where the Eurocentric view taken inevitably portrays the East as opposite and inferior to the West. Where the West is male, rational, righteous, civilised, literate, the East is represented as female, emotional, sinful, savage and illiterate or primitive. These concerns have filled volumes over the past two-to-three decades, particularly since Edward Said's groundbreaking book, *Orientalism*.[205] However, more recent studies in postcolonial

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[203] I have addressed issues of borders, boundaries and cultural belonging in Jean Rhys's fiction in my paper, "Re-membering the Line between Semiotic and Symbolic: Jean Rhys and Rhizomic Possibility", presented at the Goldsmiths Boundaries Conference, 5th January 2005.

[204] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 17, 35, 83, 85.

[205] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, page 21.

theory have pointed to a major flaw in this particular discourse: postcolonialism may inadvertently serve to re-inscribe colonialism. Although postcolonialism highlights shortcomings of texts that misrepresent the East as Other, it also serves to reinforce the idea that the East is Other. As Edna Aizenberg says, Postcolonialism shoves everyone into a "globalized mash of displaced and discontented subaltern identities", leaving everyone who is not "Self" as "unhappily diasporic" or "in-between."[206] The discourse does not access the true voice of the Other, for it merely serves to represent the Other through literary texts written (largely) in English.[207]

Spivak acknowledges the hybridity of the white Creole, and discusses the difficulties of representing an "Other"; however, she criticises Rhys's text for following a "European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native."[208] Thus Spivak criticises *Wide Sargasso Sea* for failing to provide the unmediated voice of the so-called Other. Spivak argues that no matter how sympathetic postcolonial theory may be towards the plight of the Other, it fails to present a truly Other view, because "the project of imperialism has already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self."[209]

However, the very classification of Self and Other does not reflect the intrinsic nature of these two polarities. For example, Self is only Self by virtue of a complex web of social, cultural, economic and political dominance that the Self (e.g., the West) possesses over the Other (e.g., the East). It is not a question of essence, but a "subject position" that determines such a positing of binaries[210]. There is no such thing, therefore,

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[206] Aizenberg, "'She Walked Away Without Looking Back': Christophine and the Enigma of History in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *CLIO*, Vol. 28.3, 1999, p 261-372, Saint Louis University, Missouri", pp 261-277, pp 461-2.
[207] Aizenberg, "She Walked Away" pp 461-2.
[208] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.
[209] "Three Women's Texts", p 904.
[210] Abdul R Jan Mohammed, and David Lloyd, eds., "Toward a Theory of Minority Discourse: What is to be Done?" in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*; New York: Oxford UP, 1990, pp 1-16, p 9.

as an absolute Other or an absolute Self, for these terms do not reflect the intrinsic nature of that which they identify. Spivak argues that Antoinette does not represent the voice of the Other[211]; however, such a voice is impossible to obtain, given the purely relational way in which Self and Other are posited.

For example, Antoinette's displacement is highlighted by foregrounding it with her cultural, social and economic displacement and disenfranchisement. There is nothing intrinsically "other" about Antoinette, by virtue of her being a white Creole. Rather, it is the historical context within which the white Creole woman lies in relation to the blacks and the English in the West Indies, which determines her position as an other. As Monica Beatriz deMello Patterson states, whiteness as a category is based on an "aspect of positionality [which] allows one to view relational constructs from the side of the Other".[212] Thus, Antoinette's otherness is relational. Antoinette's hybrid status as white Creole creates a further level of hybridity, preventing the classification of "the Other" and replacing it with "an other". Spivak argues this point in an attempt to denigrate Antoinette's otherness as merely an other, adhering to the view that "the Other" actually exists. As shown, "the Other" exists only in so far as it has been created by the notion of "the Self".

As Frantz Fanon states, the East, (or the colonies), becomes a threat to the West when it begins to take on characteristics of the West, such as speaking and writing in English.[213] Such actions are seen as "mimicking the actions of the West from a distance", making the East out to be a "dark reflection" of its Western counterpart.[214] Such a

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[211] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.
[212] Monica Beatriz deMello Patterson, "America's Racial Unconscious: The Invisibility of Whiteness", in *White Reign*, pp 103-121, p 119.
[213] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Introduction by Bhabha, H; New York: Grove, 1986, originally published in French under the title *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1952, p 21.
[214] Homi Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative", in *The Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994, 1997: pp 40-65, p 44.

mimetic correspondence between East and West creates an identity crisis for the West, in which it begins to re-evaluate the degree to which its values and beliefs systems are intrinsically "Western", given that they are being adopted and adapted by its antithesis, the East. With the hybrid, however, the identity crisis is further deepened, for the hybrid incorporates both Western and Eastern properties and belief systems. Antoinette, for example, resorts to the use of *obeah* in order to win back her husband's love and affection, but she also attends a convent and speaks English fluently, thereby taking on the identity of the colonial. She generalises the black Creoles racially, often talking down to them or speaking of them in a denigrating fashion.[215]

Exile: Doubled and Halved

As Frantz Fanon states in *The Wretched of the Earth*, decolonisation is a violent act that involves a fundamental change in the existing social structure:

> [D]ecolonisation is always a violent phenomenon….Its unusual importance is that it constitutes, from the very first day, the minimum demands of the colonised. To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded. The need for this change exists in its crude state, impetuous and compelling, in the consciousness and in the lives of the men and women who are colonised. *But the possibility of this change is equally experienced in the form of a terrifying future in the consciousness of another species of men and women: the colonisers*.[216]

The "consciousness" of the colonisers is evident in Antoinette's and Rochester's individual voices. However, Antoinette and Rochester do not belong to the shared "species of men and women: the colonisers", given Antoinette's position as a white Creole. Judith Kegan Gardiner, in her article, "The Exhilaration of Exile: Rhys, Stead,

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[215] For example, Antoinette thinks: "I never looked at any strange Negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 20). Antoinette's ambivalence towards the black Creoles is discussed further in Chapter 3.

[216] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p 29, quoted in Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its* Background, p 204 (Ramchand's emphasis).

and Lessing", states that Rhys, like her female protagonists, is doubly alienated and exiled[217]. This phenomenon is a result of the individual's parents not living at "home", for example, while in the West Indies.[218] It is also a result of the child moving, in later life, to England, represented as the colonial centre to which she does not belong and in which she does not feel at home.[219] Such characters are doubly alienated because they feel a strong sense of not belonging, both in the place of their birth and childhood, and in the place to which they move as adults. As Gardiner states, "neither place is home; each is alternatively desirable and oppressive."[220]

As with other critics, Fulton points to the complex hierarchical structure at play in the West Indies of the novel, as a background to the causes of Antoinette's madness.[221] She also examines the narrowly focussed view of Antoinette's world as a child, in which she feels increasingly alienated from other people.[222] Gardiner's classification of exile as a two-pronged phenomenon is exemplified in Antoinette's character. Gardiner identifies two aspects of exile: exhilaration and alienation. Exhilaration comes from a release from the confines of the colonial home, a rejection of one's colonial upbringing and values; whereas alienation comes from empowerment, leading to loneliness, nostalgia and "defamiliarization".[223]

However, other critics have argued against the notion that the white colonial, including the white Creole, is doubly alienated. In her article, "A Half-Colonization: The Problem of the White Colonial Woman Writer", Robin Visel argues against the 1986

[217] Gardiner, "The Exhilaration of Exile", p 134.
[218] "The Exhilaration of Exile" p 134.
[219] p 134.
[220] p 134.
[221] Fulton, "Exterminating the White Cockroach", p 341.
[222] "Exterminating the White Cockroach", p 342.
[223] Gardiner, "The Exhilaration of Exile", p 149.

book, *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*[224]. Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford claim in *A Double Colonization* that the white colonial woman is "doubly colonised".[225] That is, she occupies the subject position of the coloniser by virtue of her colonial position, and is also "colonised" by virtue of her lack of economic power and her subordination to the male patriarchal system. However, Visel argues that Petersen and Rutherford do not make enough of a distinction between "the daughters of the colonisers and the colonised", for example, between the Australians, Canadians, South Africans and Creoles on the one hand; and the Aboriginal, Native Indians, Black Africans and West Indians on the other.[226] Visel states that the "darker native or slave-descended" women are truly doubled:

> While the native woman is truly doubly-oppressed or doubly-colonised,
> by male dominance as well as by white economic and social dominance,
> the white settler woman can best be described as half-colonised.
> Although she too is oppressed by white men and patriarchal structures,
> she shares in the power and guilt of the colonists.[227]

Thus Antoinette as a white Creole is only "half-colonised". Although she is colonised in her subordinate position to her husband, who owns all of her wealth, the counterpoint to this lack of power is her implicit involvement in colonial exploitation of black Creoles, by virtue of being a former slave-owner's daughter. This ambiguous position is reflected in the way in which Antoinette behaves towards the other characters in the narrative, including Christophine and Tia. For example, the child Antoinette is Tia's friend, and spends time eating and swimming with her.[228] However, when she feels threatened by and resentful towards Tia, Antoinette resorts to racism based on a colonially

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[224] Robin Visel, "A Half-Colonization: The Problem of the White Colonial Woman Writer", in *Kunapipi*, NSW, Australia, Vol. 10.3, 1988, pp 39-45.
[225] Visel, "A Half-Colonization", p 39. James Joyce claimed to be "doubly colonized". As Joyce says of the two masters he serves, British and Roman: "I do not see what good it does to fulminate against the English tyranny while the Roman tyranny occupies the palace of the soul" (James Joyce, cited in Richard Ellmann and Ellsworth Mason, (eds), *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, new York: Viking Press, 1959, p 173).
[226] Visel, "A Half-Colonization", p 39.
[227] Visel, "Half-Colonization", p 39.
[228] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 20-21, 38.

determined social hierarchy, by calling her a "cheating nigger."[229] As Visel points out, Antoinette does not belong to the "ranks" of the white English, nor does she belong to the black Creoles of the West Indies.[230] However, Visel, like Spivak, diminishes the otherness that results from Antoinette's hybridity, and, like Spivak, maintains that the colonial heritage places the white Creole above the black Other, in terms of power.

Carine Mardorossian continues the debate on double colonisation in her article, "Double (De)colonization and the Feminist Criticism of *Wide Sargasso Sea*".[231] She echoes Visel's view that although Antoinette is colonised in relation to her husband, she also shares, to a certain degree, the privileges of the plantation owners.[232] Mardorossian draws attention to the dangers in seeing Antoinette and Rochester as two opposites in a polarised relationship between colonised and coloniser, stressing the complex colonial hierarchies at play in the West Indies of the novel:

> While a particular set of oppressions is responsible for a person's subordination, another grounds her privilege over other groups; systems of oppressions intertwine with each other systematically […] Indeed, the novel is not only about the repression of a white Creole woman or of the white Creole in general, but also about the black enfranchised slaves and their "double colonization" (in Spivak's terms).[233]

In this sense, the black characters are doubly colonised, whereas the white Creole is colonised and then "de"-colonised. Therefore, Antoinette's status as white Creole diminishes her colonised status. On the other hand, when the black Creole slaves are freed, they too become somewhat decolonised, although not in the same way as the white Creoles. Within the narrative, they are still seen through the eyes of the white Creole Antoinette, or of the white Englishman, Rochester. For example, Rochester's possible

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[229] p 21.
[230] Visel, "Half Colonization", p 43.
[231] Mardorossian, "Double (De)colonization", p 79.
[232] This is only "to a certain degree", because of the deteriorating status of the white Creoles, as discussed previously.
[233] Mardorossian, "Double (De)colonization", p 81.

abolitionist views are only justified when he sees the ex-slaves working industriously, thereby upholding the Victorian work ethic in "working for more than their own consumption", and contributing to the plantation economy.[234] Spivak argues that because the novel is written from the point of view of these two white characters, there is no voice of the "Other", as the Other does not speak for himself or herself. The reader is not given the perspective of the Other, as no black characters tell the reader, in their own words and unmediated by a white narrator, their side or sides of the story.[235]

Writing from the Margin(s)

Carine Mardorossian's point that "oppressions intertwine" draws attention to an ongoing debate in Rhys studies: do Rhys's texts serve to expose and critique racism, or do they promote a racist view from the perspective of the white Creole?[236] As Savory states, the issue of race is "driven by the history of white racism", and therefore "can be the most difficult area for a white writer to try to unravel."[237] In addition to Spivak, other critics, including Veronica Gregg and Molly Hite state that Rhys's representation of race is unacceptable. Gregg notes that all of the non-white characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are prone to racial stereotyping. She draws attention to the "Creole's desire to reclaim hegemony over the literary representation of the West Indies and 'black people', adding:

> The racialist usurpation of the voices, acts, and identities of "black people", so central to Rhys's writing as a whole, is the psychological cement in the architecture of this novel: Tia as cheating, hostile nigger and container for the self; Amélie as the lusty mulatto wench who hates the Creole; Daniel as the hateful mulatto and mirror image for the husband; Christophine as nurse, black mammy, and obeah woman who privileges the white child's needs over her own and, at times, infantalizes

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[234] "Double (De)colonization", p 82.

[235] However, Daniel Cosway, the half black, half Creole and allegedly half brother of Antoinette, is given a "voice" through his letters to Rochester (*Sargasso Sea*, pp 79-82; p 118), although the letters are embedded within Rochester's narrative, within the section of the novel narrated from Rochester's point of view.

[236] Mardorossian, "Double (De)colonization", p 82.

[237] Savory, *Jean Rhys*, 134.

> the Creole woman; the deletion of any autonomous "life" for the black and mulatto characters.[238]

Carole Angier reads Tia as "the strength and gaiety (and also the treachery) of the primitive"; and Daniel Cosway "as the half-breed, neither black nor white but yellow", "the wolf-like other".[239] However, Gregg adds that the novel "raises more questions than it answers", as a result of: "[the] unorthodox presentation of an anatomy of the 'life' of the Creole woman in terms of the history of the West Indian and the deconstruction of its own assumptions".[240] Savory also argues against critics who dismiss Rhys's writing on the grounds of racism and racist stereotyping. She states that "[a]t least Rhys found an honesty which opens dialogue", adding that Rhys was ahead of her time in writing about race.[241] Savory attributes Rhys's failings as a writer, her limitation of vision at times, which manifests itself in racist stereotyping, to what any writer is guilty of, when trying to write "across the borders of [her] own identity and social location".[242]

As previously noted, Spivak in "Three Women's Texts" indicates that the narrative expresses the interests of the white Creole character, and not those of black characters. Spivak bases this assumption on Christophine's exit from the novel:

> [W]ell before the conclusion, she is driven out of the story, with neither narrative nor characterological explanation or justice. "'Read and write I don't know. Other things I know.' She walked away without looking back". (*WSS,* p 133)[243]

Spivak states that Christophine "cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition".[244] This inability to contain Christophine, a black, financially independent woman, is a result of imperialism's

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[238] Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, pp 114-115.
[239] Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, p 566.
[240] Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 115.
[241] Savory, *Jean Rhys*, pp 134-5
[242] Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 135.
[243] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", 1985, p 905.
[244] "Three Women's Texts", p 904.

domination over the written English language. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o states, canonical texts in English literature have been, historically, chosen as such in the course content of colonised nations, in order to provide an appealing representation of European culture, what he calls "[m]ind control through culture", as "a necessary condition for economic and political mastery."[245] This phenomenon turns "what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self", in Spivak's terms.[246] However, several critics have since disagreed with aspects of Spivak's argument.

For example, Joya Uraizee's article, "'She Walked Away Without Looking Back'" was published 14 years after Spivak's "Three Women's Texts". Like Spivak, Uraizee states that Christophine's character cannot be contained within the confines of a text written in the English language, one that may or may not promote white imperialism.[247] However, she suggests that Christophine's act of walking away "without looking back" is an act of defiance and one of subversion, if not resistance.[248] She then problematises the term "defiance" for its potential tendency towards essentialism: it can promote the idea of an "us" against "them" scenario, in which entire races of people are lumped together and categorised as if they speak with one voice, and see with one pair of eyes.[249] Uraizee then addresses this difficulty by distinguishing between "subversion" and "resistance". She defines subversion as working towards destabilising an existing structure from within, and resistance as "creating a new identity […] that is not dependent on an existing or imperial

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[245] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Literature & Society: The Politics of the Canon", in *Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature & Society*, Oxford: James Currey, Nairobi: EAEP, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1981, 1997, pp 8-9.
[246] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.
[247] Joya Uraizee, "'She Walked Away Without Looking Back': Christophine and the Enigma of History in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *CLIO*, Vol. 28.3, 1999, pp 261-277, p 264.
[248] Uraizee, "'She Walked Away'", p 265. bell hooks, by contrast, uses "looking back" as a means of subversion and resistance (whereas Christophine's refusal to look back serves the same purpose). See hooks' article, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination" in *Cultural Studies*, Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, eds., London: Routledge, 1991.
[249] Uraizee, "'She Walked Away'", pp 262-263.

notion of identity/epistemology".[250] Like Spivak, Uraizee acknowledges that because *Wide Sargasso Sea* "writes back" to an existing imperialist text, it is bound to repeat Antoinette's fate, and cannot create an "alternative history".[251] However, Uraizee stresses that Rhys's text destabilises and subverts *Jane Eyre*, partly by giving voice not only to Antoinette, but to black freed slaves such as Christophine. Benita Parry also argues against Spivak's view, stating:

> [Spivak] gives no speaking part to the colonized, effectively writing out the evidence of native agency recorded in India's 200-year-old struggle against British conquest and the Raj – discourses to which she scathingly refers as hegemonic nativist or reverse ethnocentric narrativization".[252]

Parry goes on to state that the "post-colonial woman intellectual" is given the task of "developing a strategy rather than a theory of reading that might be a critique of imperialism[253] Parry also critiques Spivak on the basis that Spivak does not take into account Anotoinette's unique white settler position, which Parry states, is "distinct from the texts of imperialism".[254] H. Adlai Murdoch's analysis of the nature of Antoinette's alienation also supports Parry's critique of Spivak. Murdoch states that Antoinette's duality and alienation results from her inability to be West Indian or English, a "subjective ambiguity" that contributes to her cultural and ethnic displacement, giving her the "dual status of both and […] neither".[255] Thus according to Parry, to criticise Rhys's text on the basis that it does not allow for the "voice-consciousness" of the black, "native" woman, to use Spivak's terms, is to miss the point that the novel speaks for the white settler class. This class is, as other critics have noted, distinct to the English status privileged by characters such as Rochester.

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[250] "'She Walked Away'", p 263.
[251] p 264.
[252] Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, London, New York: Routledge, 2004, p 37.
[253] Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, p 37; Spivak, 1986, p 230: "Imperialism and Sexual Difference", *Oxford Literary Review*, 8:1-2.
[254] Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, p 39.
[255] Murdoch, "Rhys's Pieces", p 256.

Parry states that Spivak's analysis of the scene in which Antoinette and Tia confront each other, during the burning of Coulibri, serves to "invoke the other that could not be selfed".[256] She states that Spivak sees Christophine's voice as "marking the limits of the text's discourse", and not as "disrupting it".[257] Christophine "subverts the Creole address" that "tries to construct her as a domestic other": she speaks out against Rochester, raises her children without the aid of a husband, and scorns patriarchal authority.[258] Parry continues her critique of Spivak's interpretation of Christophine's voicelessness, stating: "Spivak's deliberate deafness to the native voice…" is at odds with her "acute hearing of the unsaid modes of Western feminist criticism".[259]

Joseph Walker in his article "When Texts Collide: The Re-Visionist Power of the Margin" reassesses the largely negative connotations of the word "margin" in contemporary literary theory.[260] He cites bell hooks's article, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", which opens new ways of seeing marginality as a

> "[p]osition and place of resistance…for oppressed, exploited, colonised people." Seen in this way, the margin is not a place one wishes "to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather…a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist."[261]

hooks goes on to say that the margin "offers the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds".[262] Whether Christophine's walking away "without looking back" is an act of subversion or of resistance is debatable, given Joya Uraizee's distinction between the two terms. For Christophine to be acting in resistance against the patriarchal and colonial world, she

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[256] Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, p 39; Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 902.
[257] *Postcolonial Studies*, p 40.
[258] p 40.
[259] p 40.
[260] Joseph Walker, "When Texts Collide: The Re-Visionist Power of the Margin", *Colby Quarterly*, 1999, Vol. 35.1, (March), pp 35-48, p 34.
[261] Walker, "When Texts Collide", p 35; hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", in *Yearning*, pp 145-153, p 150. For discussions of bell hooks's theory of marginality, see my first chapter.
[262] hooks, "Choosing the Margin" p 150.

would have to create a new world that is not dependent upon the former. However, as Uraizee notes of Spivak's analysis, the representation of Christophine and characters like her is always "subject to the cathexis of the elite…it is never fully recoverable…it is effaced even as it is disclosed".[263] That is, the world of the "Other" cannot be truly portrayed, as it is represented through the English language. This linguistic framework is informed by what Spivak calls the "project of imperialism".[264] Therefore, Christophine's walking away, Uraizee concludes, is at best an act of subversion. However, Uraizee claims this as an empowering act for Christophine, given that although she is silenced, her voice influences Antoinette's actions.[265]

Moreover, hooks states that one can work within language in order to resist:

> We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle […]. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle.[266]

It may be argued that in refusing to take part in the colonial and patriarchal order, by walking away from and out of the text that, as Spivak points out, is shaped by Eurocentric ideology, Christophine does perform an act of resistance. For her silence is a refusal to be "subject to the cathexis of the elite". If language silences even as it represents such freed black slaves as Christophine, then to abort from such language may well be an act of resistance.

Similarly, Joyce's character, Stephen Dedalus in the autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, asserts his identity in terms of "silence, exile and cunning":

> I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in

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[263] Uraizee, "She Walked Away", p 265; Spivak, "Subaltern Studies", p 9.
[264] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.
[265] Uraizee, "She Walked Away", p 264. An analysis of Christophine's voice and its echoing in Rochester's head is discussed in my Chapter 3.
[266] hooks, "Choosing the Margin" p 146.

> some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile and cunning.[267]

This notion of postcolonial silence is echoed by bell hooks, who states in "Choosing the Margin" that the otherness of blackness is not only constructed, but poses a threat to both black and white people:

> Our very presence is a disruption. We are often as much an 'Other', a threat to black people from privileged class backgrounds […] as we are to uninformed white folks. Everywhere we go there is pressure to silence our voices, to co-opt and undermine them. Mostly, of course, we are not there. We never 'arrive' or 'can't stay'.[268]

Moreover, David Theo Goldberg defines "silence" as a mis-identification between otherness and nature:

> Nature is that about which […] "man" is driven to silence as much as it is the metaphor for silence itself. Those conceived racially as nothing more than the products of nature accordingly inspire awe, in the way in which nature can. Nature in this formulation stands in stark contrast to, the dark or underside of, humanity. Thus nature is not just that about which man is driven to silence but about which there cannot be anything to say. It is beyond knowledge because beyond speech.[269]

William D. Melaney, in his article "Semiotic Mythologies: Jean Rhys and the Postcolonial Novel", identifies Christophine as the "mediator" between the coloniser and the colonised.[270] He states that Antoinette cannot play this role; she cannot stand against her husband in his colonial interests, given that she herself has a colonial identity.[271] Christophine, however, does fulfil this role, as she attends to Antoinette as nurse and servant, and her "racial situation" as a freed slave gives her insights into Rochester's "reenactment of historical closure".[272] Melaney also stresses the importance of

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[267] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1916, 1966, p 251.
[268] hooks, "Choosing the Margin", p 148.
[269] David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Rule" in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson, eds., Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, p 97.
[270] William D. Melaney, "Semiotic Mythologies: Jean Rhys and the Postcolonial Novel", in Spinks, C W and Deely, John, eds., *Semiotics*, Peter Lang, New York, 1996, pp 31-40, p 37.
[271] Melaney, "Semiotic Mythologies", p 37.
[272] "Semiotic Mythologies", p 37.

Christophine in terms of her dual status, as one who rests both inside and yet somehow outside of the text, highlighting issues of race and gender, intertwining, rather than opposing these issues.[273]

Spivak states that *Wide Sargasso Sea* speaks for the "European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native."[274] Parry, as shown, states that the novel does allow a voice for both the white Creole and the black other. Carine Mardorossian, however, takes her view somewhere in between that of Spivak and Parry: she disagrees with Spivak that there is no voice of the other in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but also does not agree with Parry that the novel does indeed provide this voice (through Christophine). Victoria Burrows, in *Whiteness and Trauma*, takes yet another view in the debate over Christophine's voice and representation of the other. She states:

> While there can be no doubt that Christophine's spirited interaction with Rochester is an outright discursive rebellion against the imperialist, I do not agree that this represents a counter-discourse […] Christophine's daring verbal assault is always probing and protecting *on the behalf of her white mistress* and is always the reported speech, the 'she said', of Rochester's re-statement.[275]

That is, Christophine's defence of Antoinette is indeed strong-willed, but she always acts and speaks out of loyalty to her white Creole mistress. Burrows explains that Antoinette and Annette have been "traumatised by history, their personal identities fragmented by their collective and individual pain and loss".[276] Within this historical and personal context, Christophine represents "the other side of the story", with a strong and powerful voice.[277] However, that voice does not allow for "her interpellated subjectivity

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[273] pp 37-8.
[274] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.
[275] Victoria Burrows, *Whiteness and Trauma: The Mother-Daughter Knot in the Fiction of Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York; Palgrave Macmillan, p 61 (Burrows's emphasis).
[276] Burrows, *Whiteness and Trauma*, p 64.
[277] *Whiteness and Trauma*, p 64.

or for the constitution of self as imbricated in the traumatising legacies of slavery."[278] That is, Christophine's voice is always mediated through the voices of Antoinette and Rochester, who share the privilege of a first-person narrative. Christophine does not, by contrast, have an inner voice that allows for the subjectivity of her character as represented within the text.

The debate concerning the representation of Christophine suggests the inability of a novel written from the point of view of a white character to fully represent the interests of a black character and, more specifically, to allow for an inner subjectivity of such a black character. Assuming that such representation can never take place is not to disregard the ability of Rhys's novel to provide a voice that represents an othered voice, albeit not a black othered voice. As previously stated, Parry identifies Rhys's text as representing the white settler position, which is "distinct from the texts of imperialism".[279] It may be concluded that the distinctiveness of such a voice is neither English nor black, which allows for the subjectivity of an othered voice, but not that of the black other, Christophine.

[278] p 64.
[279] Parry, *Postcolonial Studies*, p 39.

2. The Female Gaze in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Postcolonial readings of literary texts often address the issue of identity in terms of a fragmentation of power. Theorists including Homi Bhabha address the fragmented nature of both colonised and coloniser, of East and West, male and female. The result of such fragmentation is the breaking down of these binaries, which challenges the notion of a fixed identity, thereby serving to subvert power. It is a "writing back to the centre".[280] Yet that centre itself is shown to be unstable, given its dependence upon the margins for its own existence, thereby calling into question the discreteness of "self" and "other" as categories and as fixed identities.

The aim of this chapter is to contribute to this debate. By analysing the female gaze in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a number of points are being addressed. Firstly, the novel is a re-writing of the canonical text, *Jane Eyre*, making subversion and a critique of authority one of the narrative's major concerns. There is a complexity of power structures at play within the text and its various narrative strands, informed by race and gender, which are multi-faceted and fragmented. The act of gazing will be considered in the context of a female gaze, as a defiant act that challenges power in Rhys's text, for both gender and race. Such a gaze allows for a breaking away from the relentlessly oppressive objectification of the female subject.

Although the term "gaze" also exists in postcolonial theory, there is a wealth of information on the male gaze in cinema. The phenomenon of gazing in literature strikes relevant parallels with gazing in film theory, as well as with postcolonial theory. Although there are differences between the act of watching a film and that of reading a literary text, the two activities have similarities. Highlighting these similarities is more

[280] Rushdie, as quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, eds., (inside front page).

useful than pointing out the obvious differences, for the purpose of this analysis.[281] Therefore, it is worthwhile examining the gaze as an objectifying force in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, by drawing upon feminist film theory as it has developed since Laura Mulvey's article, "Visual Pleasure". Bhabha's theory of the displaced colonial "I" or "eye" will also be utilised, as well as bell hooks' theory of the "oppositional gaze" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*.[282]

The purpose of this analysis is to reveal the displaced subject as one who does possess a gaze, and to examine the presence of the female gaze in its ability to subvert patriarchal power structures in the diegesis of Rhys' narrative. The gaze will be shown to be a major determinant in what Bhabha calls the "shifting [of] forces and fixities".[283] The various levels of these shifts reveal complex interrelationships amongst the characters of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a complexity that displaces the authoritative self. Multifaceted power structures are thus revealed within Rhys' narrative. The question of whether power lies within the female sphere will be raised with reference to Julia Kristeva, and applied to hooks' notion of the "oppositional gaze".[284]

His Gaze, Her Desire: Feminising the Male Subject

In "Visual Pleasure", Mulvey makes a distinction between "woman as image" and "man

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[281] For the sake of simplicity, the comparison will be between a novel and a conventional (mainstream) film. Both can be regarded as "texts", in that each is a self-contained piece of fiction. A narrative comprises the formation of each text, as do characters that engage in the story or plot. Each contains a diegesis, or world unto itself, in which the reader or the spectator becomes involved. Thus both require a "willing suspension of disbelief" in order for the reader or spectator to engage in the story and be suitably moved. Both literary text and filmic text exist as having "already happened", in that they come to life through being watched or read. Both, therefore, involve a deliberate, active determination on the part of reader and spectator, such that neither film nor text could exist without the spectator or reader.

[282] Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817", in *"Race", Writing and Difference*, 1986, p 167; hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, pp 115-131.

[283] Bhabha, "Signs", p 173.

[284] hooks, *Black Looks*, pp 115-131.

as bearer of the look".[285] Psychoanalysis in film theory makes desire a male preoccupation, insofar as the male spectator desires the female subject in the objectification of the latter in film. According to Mulvey, in the scopic arena, the female is the fetishised, desired and looked-at object of the male.[286] She possesses the quality of "to-be-looked-at-ness", whereas the male possesses the ability to look, taking pleasure in looking at the female.[287]

The above is relevant to John Berger's comment on the representation of women:

> From early childhood on she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent elements of her identity as a woman…Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.[288]

This notion of looking emphasises the constructed nature of identity, the way in which it is created by one's own perception of oneself – which tends to be merely a reflected image of the way in which one is seen by others. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for example, when Antoinette is locked up in Thornfield Hall, she remembers watching herself brushing her hair: "There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself".[289]

This act of watching suggests that Antoinette is acting out a role that her society has given her.[290] When her society rejects her and she is deprived of a role, she feels lost and

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[285] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure", p 117.
[286] "Visual Pleasure", p 116.
[287] p 116. E Ann Kaplan, in *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, draws a parallel between Freud's study of the differences between male and female looking (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1962), to conclude that the cinematic arena itself, including the process of filming, is gendered, rather than sexually neutral, and based on male sexual fantasy (Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, Methuen, London, 1988).
[288] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1972, pp 46-47.
[289] *Sargasso Sea*, p 147.
[290] This scene is analysed further in Chapter 3 of this thesis, with regard to mirroring and identity.

without purpose, thereby losing a clear sense of who she is. Without the assurance of social acceptance, Antoinette sees herself as an outsider but still tries to reach that former self that was once accepted and, though confused and fragmented, still had at least an idea of some sense of purpose.

According to Mulvey's theory, in order to deal with the threat of castration found in Freud's analysis, the female subject becomes a fetishised subject, her beauty exaggerated and idolised.[291] She is objectified through the male gaze for the visual pleasure of the male spectator. Thus, according to Mary Ann Doane, the woman is negated on several levels. In terms of her desire, she lacks the ability to have a desire of her own, given that she is merely a passive spectator. Anything resembling a desire is actually only the desire to desire.[292] She wishes she could have her own desire, but cannot.

Luce Irigaray, however, disputes Freud's theory here. As Toril Moi states in *Sexual/Textual Politics*:

> His [Freud's] theory amounts to casting the little girl as fundamentally the *same* as the little boy: she is, as Irigaray caustically puts it, not a little girl but a little man. […] The thinking man not only projects his desire for a reproduction of himself (for his own reflection) on to the woman; he is, according to Irigaray, incapable of *thinking* outside this specular structure.[293]

The tendency to attribute lack to the feminine raises the issue of whether or not psychoanalysis is a useful tool for analysing female objectification in film and literary texts. Ann Kaplan argues that psychoanalysis is something that should be worked within, in order to move on and overcome such power distinctions. The theory of the castration complex, for example, has itself undergone changes and permutations that allow for a

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[291] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure", p 117.
[292] Mary Ann Doane, "Subjectivity and Desire: An(other) Way of Looking", in Antony Easthope, ed., *Contemporary Film Theory*, London: Longman Group, 1993, pp 162-178, reprinted from *The Desire to Desire* (Indiana University Press, 1987), pp 1-13.
[293] Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Terrence Hawkes, ed., London and New York: Routledge, 1985, 1999, p 133.

more subtle analysis that attempts to avoid the predictable, repetitive binaries of man as presence and woman as absence.[294] However, such permutations have remained within the framework of the basic binary of male/female in terms of power and lack of power. Thus textual examples will be examined from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which demonstrate the existence of a uniquely female gaze. This point will also be applied in analysing hooks' "oppositional gaze", insofar as its subversive nature can be seen to be less effective than that of resistance.

Mary Ann Doane responds to Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure" with "Subjectivity and Desire: An(other) Way of Looking".[295] Doane argues that man is not the exclusive bearer of "the look", but woman also possesses one – that of the passive female spectator. Doane argues that Mulvey fails to recognise the importance of the female spectator.[296] Thus Doane gives voice to the female viewer, but only as a passive spectator. Doane does not allow women to gaze, but she does allow them to look. As Kaplan points out, gazing is an active phenomenon, whereas looking is passive.[297] Looking does not involve an exertion of power over an individual, over the other, that is, the looked-at. Thus in Doane's sense of the word, the woman looks passively from outside the margins of history and of economic power. She is taken in by what she sees, leading to an over-identification between the female spectator and the film. The female's passivity leads to her own identity being subsumed by the filmic world, so that she loses herself within it, thereby losing touch with reality. Thus Doane gives women the chance to look, but not the power to gaze.

Subsequent theorists, however, including Kaja Silverman, Steven Cohan and Ina

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[294] Doane, "Subjectivity and Desire", pp 1-13. See also Kaplan, *Looking for the Other*; Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, 1988; Norman K Denzin, *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze*, 1995; Sam B. Girgus, "Representative Men: Unfreezing the Male Gaze", 1994.
[295] Doane, "Subjectivity and Desire", pp 1-13.
[296] "Subjectivity and Desire", p 163.
[297] Kaplan, *Looking for the Other*, pp xvi-xvii.

Rae Hark, argue that film theory has erroneously attributed certain qualities to the feminine and certain to the masculine. In *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (1993), Cohan and Hark argue that qualities such as lack, castration and wounding actually serve to empower masculinity. The male gaze gains social, sexual and "spectatorial" power from such qualities.[298] It is a case of one depending on the other for its existence. In this case, the masculine cannot exist without these so-called feminine qualities, necessitating a revaluation of what constitutes both "masculine" and "feminine". Kaja Silverman makes similar claims in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1988). Silverman states that classic cinema is a cultural institution which attributes lack, specularity and containment to woman, while identifying man with potency, vision and exteriority.[299] However, Silverman argues, the qualities attributed to the feminine are actually necessary for all subjectivity, both male and female. Given this new approach, one can reverse the male/female polarity to achieve a "'feminization' of the male subject".[300]

A brief explication of how this role reversal comes about can be useful before applying these theoretical developments to the characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.[301] Silverman explains that femininity in psychoanalysis and film theory is associated with three things: castration, subordination to the gaze of the cultural Other and "discursive interiority", that is, being inserted into a pre-existing symbolic order.[302] However, these associations actually apply to all subjectivity, whether male or female. This is because

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[298] Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, eds., *Screening the Male*, 1993, p 2.
[299] Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, eds., *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, p 149.
[300] Silverman, de Lauretis, *Screening the Male*, p 149.
[301] *Wide Sargasso Sea* was adapted twice for film, firstly by John Duigan in 1993 and again in 2006 with a made-for-TV production directed by Brendan Maher. Both versions attempt to portray Antoinette's madness sympathetically, but neither is free from what Mulvey would classify as products of the male gaze in mainstream cinema; nor are they free of racial stereotyping. The degree to which the latter is a result of Rhys's own racial stereotyping is debatable, taking into account the complexity of representation in the novel.
[302] Silverman, de Lauretis, *Screening the Male*, p 149.

identity can only emerge through separation from the mother, moving from the real to a sphere of pre-existing meaning (the symbolic order). In addition, identity depends upon "the gaze of the Other"; that is, identity of the self cannot exist without the other gazing at the self. Film theory enforces the reversal of this, whereby the male is the sole possessor of the gaze, the latter being used to identify and objectify the female. However, using Silverman's formulation, qualities traditionally attributed to the feminine can belong to all subjectivity, allowing for a feminisation of the male subject.[303]

Feminisation is evident in the relationship between Rochester and Antoinette. For Rochester, power is an elusive phenomenon. He starts off as powerful, by virtue of being a white Englishman, but economically lacks power and must marry Antoinette, a Creole heiress, in order to secure his fortune. Here Rochester's objectification of Antoinette is not clearly defined by binaries of "self" and "other" or "gazer" and "gazed at". Firstly, the self/other polarity is ambivalent, in that Rochester's Englishness does not save him from having to marry Antoinette for financial security.[304] Thus, Rochester is economically dependent upon Antoinette, and in this respect it is Antoinette who possesses power over Rochester. Although, in the case of gazing, Rochester tends to look at Antoinette in order to objectify her, this gazing is again not a clear case of a "self" gazing at an "other". This complication echoes de Lauretis's critique in *Technologies of Gender* (1987), in which she states that film theory makes an **"**unacknowledged assumption of sexual difference: that the human subject, Man, is the male"[305]. In order to understand the conflation of these seemingly distinct categories, an examination of the

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[303] For a discussion of the filmic nature of *Good Morning, Midnight*, see Jan Curtis, "The Room and the Black Background: A Re-Interpretation of Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*", *World Literature Written in English*, 25:2, 1985, pp 264-270. Curtis states that Sasha, as the female protagonist, gives the reader a "close-up of human nature" (Rhys, *GMM*, p 75), in which Sasha's "film mind" "explores and exposes the interior framework of society through the consciousness of woman" (Curtis, p 264).

[304] *Sargasso Sea*, p 59.

[305] de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*, London: The MacMillan Press Limited, 1987, p 130.

role that power plays in the gaze can be useful.

As gazing is a way of asserting power over an individual, bound up in this is the gazer's awareness of the potential loss of such power, by the mere presence of the other. In Rochester's case, when he gazes at Antoinette, his need to objectify her comes from the "anxiety" Ann Kaplan writes about, over the potential loss of power.[306] However, a distinction can be made between this type of anxiety and that of the anxiety that Rochester feels. The former results from the perceived presence of the gazed at, whereas the latter is based on Rochester's knowledge of his economic dependence.

For example, Rochester's narrative reflects his own feelings of inadequacy as a man, and a sense of shame over his motives behind the marriage to Antoinette. Recalling the wedding day, he thinks about the way in which Antoinette's relatives at the reception looked at him: "I thought I saw the same expression on all their faces. Curiosity? Pity? Ridicule? But why should they pity me [?] I who have done so well for myself?[307] In this passage, the gaze is used against Rochester, the white Englishman, thereby subverting the balance of power that would customarily be held by someone in Rochester's position. The non-English status of the white Creole relatives would posit them as inferior to Rochester in terms of the balance of power: although they are colonisers, their non-Englishness makes them more akin to the colonised, in relation to Rochester's English status. As Stephen Slemon states in "Monuments of Empire", the colonial gaze[308] constructs the other in order to reaffirm the identity of the self, through the "objectifying gaze of knowledge."[309] Yet the white Creole identity in the above scene also allows the wedding guests to possess the hybridity of both colonised and coloniser, which makes

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[306] Kaplan, *Women and Film*, p 29.
[307] *Sargasso Sea*, p 65.
[308] I will read "male gaze" and "colonial gaze" as interchangeable in this context.
[309] Stephen Slemon, "Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing", *Kunapipi*, Vol. 9.3, 1987, pp 1-16, p 5.

their gaze both ambivalent and oppositional. It is an ambivalent gaze because their dual identity comprises both ends of the colonised/coloniser polarity, and it is oppositional because it subverts the gazer/gazed at relationship. Their ambivalence allows for a gaze that is split at its source, preventing it from belonging exclusively to either coloniser or colonised, and allowing its status to be inhabited by both.

Like Homi Bhabha's theory of the ambivalent colonial subject, the power shift between Rochester and the white Creoles blurs the distinction between self and other. The white Creoles gaze at Rochester – a white Englishman – making him feel uncomfortable over being scrutinised in unfamiliar surroundings, by unfamiliar people who all look the same to him. By making their gaze similar in this way, Rochester objectifies the white Creoles; yet they redress the power imbalance by gazing and objectifying Rochester to such a degree that he begins to question his motives about marrying Antoinette. In Rochester's eyes, the wedding guests all share the same expression, a perception that emerges from his need to objectify them, which is based on his guilt over the financial merger that is his marriage to Antoinette. Hence Rochester wonders, in an ironic, self-reflexive way, why the wedding guests would pity him, given that he has "done so well" for himself. Rochester's loss of integrity is characterised by the guilt he feels over his reasons for marrying Antoinette. Both the guilt and the loss are mutually dependent, and are evident both in the above scene, as well as in his attempts to write to his father about the financial arrangements made in Rochester's favour. The writing of the letter takes place in Rochester's mind before he actually puts pen to paper.[310] He thinks:

> Her pleading expression annoys me. I have not bought her, she has bought me, or so she thinks. I looked down at the coarse mane of the horse…Dear Father. The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me

[310] *Sargasso Sea*, p 59, pp 63-64.

> without question or condition. No provision made for her (that must be seen to) […] I will never be a disgrace to you or to my dear brother the son you love. No begging letters, no mean requests.[311]

In the above scene, Rochester thinks about the letter before actually writing it. This "mental writing" is his way of alleviating his guilt and of justifying his actions, using his father as an outlet. When Rochester does write the letter out, he is not sure as to whether the correspondence will be received, and places it in a drawer.[312] This action indicates that he does not actually want to send the letter to his father, and like the initial mental writing, he uses the process as a way of alleviating his guilt and justifying his actions. Thus Rochester "tells" his father that he will never be a burden or a source of embarrassment to him again. In this sense, Rochester's relationship with Antoinette reflects and refracts his shame over his inability to be self-sufficient. Once the couple are married, the economic scenario is reversed, giving Rochester complete ownership of Antoinette's wealth. Because of this sudden shift in financial status, Rochester's gazing at Antoinette indicates his need to reinforce his financial power over her.

By giving Antoinette a "pleading expression", Rochester demonstrates his need to make Antoinette seem dependent upon him. Although Rochester is the one who turns to Antoinette for financial security through marriage, his anxiety over the loss of this newfound power creates the tendency to justify his actions, which are riddled with guilt, as shown. Thus the "pleading expression" may be an innocent desire of Antoinette for Rochester to like and enjoy the place of the West Indies, from which he feels alienated. To her it is a place of beauty and abundance in nature, but to Rochester, it is overwhelming and alien. For example, while horseback riding with Antoinette, he responds to this new environment that he sees as hostile: "Everything is too much, I felt as

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[311] *Sargasso Sea*, p 59.
[312] p 64.

I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger".[313]

As indicated previously, Rochester's sense of hostility towards and alienation from the West Indies reflects his unacknowledged desire for otherness, in the form of Antoinette, which thereby creates a lack.[314] Antoinette's ambivalence about the place is also tempered by her understanding of it, and a greater sense of belonging – as well as longing for – her home. When Antoinette explains things to him that he does not understand, it is clear that she possesses more power than Rochester with regard to feeling "at home", thereby making Rochester dependent upon Antoinette for his survival in an environment that he perceives as hostile. Yet Rochester makes Antoinette's expression one of dependence, in an attempt to feel superior to her, and therefore justified in marrying her for her money. Thus he both acknowledges and denies her importance to his own well being, a contradiction evident in Bhabha's theory of the colonial gaze. Bhabha's theory outlines the contradictory nature of the colonial subject: such a subject is ambivalent in that it objectifies the colonised, but also depends on the latter in order to exist as colonised.[315] The same model can be applied to the self/other polarity, in which the self depends upon the other in order to exist as "self".[316]

Race Relations

According to Bhabha, identity is not inherent but part of a relational process. During his gaze of the postcolonial subject, the coloniser does two contradictory things: he projects

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[313] *Sargasso Sea*, p 59.
[314] Howells, *Jean Rhys*, p 108.
[315] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the postcolonial prerogative", in *The Location of Culture*, 1997, 1993, p 51.
[316] For a discussion of Rhys's Modernists texts and their inversion of primitivism in Modernist art, see Leah Rosenberg, "Caribbean Models for Modernism in the Work of Claude McKay and Jean Rhys", *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 11.2, 2004, The Hopkins University Press, pp 219-238. Works of art, such as the Serge's painting, allow the "power dynamics of modernism" to be "reconfigured", so that "modernist aesthetics can be used to counteract the alienating affects of high modernism on marginalized figures such as white creole women" (p 233).

an image of difference while simultaneously denying any real difference between himself and the colonised. He achieves the former by looking at the "native" in such a way as to convey his own sense of differentiation from the native, i.e., "I am the Self and you are the Other." Yet he fulfils his role in the latter by allowing himself to identify the native as somehow related to him, his "dark reflection", on whom he depends for his own identity.[317] Thus the coloniser in his gaze makes "present something that is absent".[318] He creates an identity for the other, one upon which the coloniser depends for his own sense of identity. This creates what Bhabha calls a division between projected image and reality.[319] Rochester projects his own ethnic ideal onto Antoinette, an ideal to which she does not conform. He thinks, "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either".[320] The word "they" refers to Antoinette's eyes.

Beauty Lies in the Eyes of Ambivalence

In the novel's opening passage, Antoinette recalls Christophine's attempt at explaining the hostility between the racial groups: "The Jamaican ladies never approved of my mother 'because she pretty like pretty self'".[321] The Jamaican ladies dislike Annette because of her beauty, which suggests hostility based on jealousy or disapproval. If beauty is seen not as an objectively existing quality, but something that may take on different forms, allowing for different types of beauty to exist, then Annette and Antoinette share the same type of beauty: "pretty like pretty self". This shared beauty is based not only on their common genetic make-up, but on their specific racial identity. Their beauty is the beauty of the white Creole, not the beauty of the English, nor the beauty of the black Jamaican ladies. The white Creoles in the novel are despised by the

[317] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity", p 44.
[318] "Interrogating Identity", p 51.
[319] p 51.
[320] *Sargasso Sea*, p 56.
[321] p 15.

Jamaican ladies, and looked down upon and/or misunderstood by the English, the latter being evident in Rochester's inability to accept his wife's beauty, as well as Mr Mason's inability to understand significant aspects of West Indian culture.

Thus a certain type of beauty can lead to jealousy and hostility. As the white Creoles may, in their lineage, possess black blood, but no longer appear physically black and may lack any such features, this may partly explain the hostility that the Jamaican ladies have towards the white Creoles, whose white beauty allows them a degree of power. It is the potentially shared racial heritage between the white Creoles and the black Creoles, combined with the vast disparity in power between the two groups, which would have caused the Jamaican ladies to stare at Antoinette and her mother, and to call them "white nigger" and "white cockroach", despising Annette's ability to marry into white wealth, as a result of her own whiteness, which is not completely white, but contains the possibility of blackness, as noted.[322] Any blackness that the white Creoles may have in their genealogy is masked by their white appearance, which has benefited them financially and socially as plantation owners.[323]

Rochester cannot accept the way in which Antoinette sees the world, thus her eyes become suspect. Rochester projects his ideals and negates Antoinette's way of seeing. He tries to deprive her of her gaze, debasing it as inferior and strange, something "alien". To Rochester, Antoinette is defined by what she lacks, qualities that belong to his realm of white Englishness. Ethnically, Antoinette's status is white Creole. Her mother is a "Martinique girl"[324] and her father makes up the "pure English" component. Antoinette's mixed race, with its implications of dual status as coloniser and colonised, poses a threat

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[322] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 17, 35, 83, 85.

[323] Significantly, the white Creoles who watch the black Carnival dancers through the jalousies in *Voyage in the Dark*, betray their jealousy (a word-play with jalousies) of the Other, a spectacle which both repulses and fascinates them. See Chapter 3 of this thesis for a discussion of this scene.

[324] *Sargasso Sea,* p 15.

to Rochester's rigid framework of categorisation. Rochester performs two contradictory things when gazing at Antoinette: he attempts to objectify and (in Ann Kaplan's terms) deny her importance; yet in so doing, he also attempts to create an identity for Antoinette. By creating an identity for Antoinette, Rochester makes "present something that is absent".[325] Rochester defines Antoinette in terms of what she lacks – Englishness and a purely European identity. Because she possesses neither of these, he cannot fully accept her, but fears her as alien and suspect.

Given that Rochester feels threatened by Antoinette's hybridity, he cannot fully accept her beauty. However, he tries to convince himself that she is beautiful, in an attempt to love her and thereby justify his motives for marrying her. His ambivalence is revealed in his dual perception of her: she is both alien and beautiful. Rochester usually associates Antoinette's strangeness with that of the West Indies, but there are times when he also accepts both her beauty and that of the place, although it is never a complete acceptance. He expresses this hesitancy in the letter that he thinks about writing to his father: "The girl is thought to be beautiful, she is beautiful. And yet…".[326] Rochester's doubt indicates his unwillingness to accept that beauty can exist in the other, unless it is also threatening. The few occasions when he does admit to finding Antoinette beautiful are contextualised by seductive, enchanting elements such as the intoxicating smell of the night flowers and the witchcraft of Christophine's *obeah* spell. For example, one evening the couple dine in the dining-room by candlelight and Rochester notes: "The flames burned straight. She was sitting on the sofa and I wondered why I had never realized how beautiful she was".[327]

In this scene, large moths fly into the flames and die, the sound of the night flowers

[325] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity", p 51.
[326] *Sargasso Sea*, p 59.
[327] p 67.

opening is deafening and their smell intoxicating. Fireflies are illuminated in their hundreds outside the veranda, and the night is so dark it drowns out the candlelight. But outside, the starlight is bright enough to cast shadows.[328] Rochester's attraction to Antoinette is thus based on the seduction of difference, the intoxication of what Antoinette has to offer in her exotic otherness. Rochester's construction of Antoinette's beauty is therefore western and "male-created", as Leigh states in her article, "Mirror, Mirror: The Development of Female Identity in Jean Rhys's Fiction".[329]

Beauty is important in Antoinette's society, as Leigh indicates.[330] However, contrary to Leigh's point that it provides a "secure life", the consequences of marriage for Annette and for Antoinette greatly differ. While Annette's beauty benefits her financially and rescues her family from being "marooned", Antoinette's beauty becomes her curse, stripping her of her wealth the moment she marries Rochester. Annette marries an Englishman, Mr Mason, and this is not well received, neither by the black Creoles nor the English. Antoinette remembers English people gossiping about her mother:

> 'A fantastic marriage and he will regret it. Why should a very wealthy man who could take his pick of all the girls in the West Indies, and many in England too […] marry a widow without a penny to her name and Coulibri a wreck of a place? […]'
> '[…] but Annette is such a pretty woman. And what a dancer […]'[331]

Beauty rescues Annette and her family from financial ruin, bringing them back to their former wealth and status. The couple go to Trinidad for their honeymoon and repairs are made to the house, which was, until then deteriorating.[332] Without a male

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[328] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 67-69. Note that "verandah" is spelled without an "h" in Rhys's text.
[329] Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror: The Development of Female Identity in Jean Rhys's Fiction", *World Literature Written in English*, Vol. 25.2, 1985, p 273. See also Veronica Marie Gregg, "Jean Rhys and Modernism: A Different Voice": the sexualised black other was a representation of Modernist art and literature. Rhys's writing inverted Eurocentric constructions of black female sexuality (as being oversexed, out of control, lascivious, etc). For example, Serge in *GMM* says: "'Seriously, all the time I was in London, I felt as if I were being suffocated, as if a large derrière was sitting on me'" (p 81).
[330] Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror", p 273.
[331] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 24 and 25. (See also Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror", p 273.)
[332] *Sargasso Sea*, p 25.

presence in the family, Annette and her children are left marooned, no better off than their former slaves. It is the male presence, in the form of Mr Mason that validates Annette, so that she can smile, laugh and enjoy her life again. Antoinette recalls spying on her mother and Mr Mason dancing together the night they returned from their honeymoon. Annette appears young and is happy again, in love and financially secure once more.[333] However, after about a year, she grows anxious about feeling unwelcome and urges her husband to allow them all to leave: "'They talk about us without stopping. They invent stories about you, and lies about me. They try to find out what we eat every day'".[334]

Annette refers to the black Creoles in a derogatory way, as "they", to suggest that all of the black Creoles think with the same, collective black mind. She expresses her fear of them by repeatedly asking Mr Mason if they can move away from Coulibri. Antoinette's inward reply is an acknowledgement of not being welcomed by the black Creoles, generally, and in fact, of being "hated". But she does not wish to move from the place: "I knew that we were hated – but to go away…for once I agreed with my stepfather. That was not possible".[335] This passage indicates Antoinette's feeling of ambivalence towards the place where she was born, but in which she often feels like an outsider. The place – more so than its people, perhaps – is home to her. She feels attached to the landscape, the trees and the flowers, the smells and the colours of the islands.[336] These are evoked in dream imagery and memories throughout the narrative. When she begins her narrative of her childhood in Coulibri, she recalls the parts of it that were wild, uninhabited and unmarked by human society:

> I went to parts of Coulibri that I had not seen, where there was no road, no path, no track. And if the razor grass cut my legs and arms I would

[333] p 25.
[334] p 27.
[335] p 27.
[336] For an analysis of colour coding in *Voyage in the Dark*, see Savory, "Writing Colour, Writing Caribbean: *Voyage in the Dark* and the Politics of Colour", in *Jean Rhys*, (Chapter 4), pp 85-108.

> think 'It's better than people.' Black ants or red ones, tall nests swarming with white ants, rain that soaked me to the skin – once I saw a snake. All better than people.
>
> Better. Better, better than people.[337]

Even in this wild place, Antoinette is reminded of the hierarchies of human society that exist in the islands. She identifies ants by their colour, but unlike the people who inhabit her world, they are somehow all the same, whether black, red or white. This sameness and anonymity makes them "better than people", a phrase she repeats like a chant. The repetition is an attempt to forget about the hierarchies that make her feel so ambivalent.[338] On the one hand, she is the coloniser, daughter of a plantation owner and lives on an estate. However, she is simultaneously a slave to the system and lives in near poverty for five years, before Mr Mason marries her mother.[339] There are therefore many instances in the novel where Antoinette feels a strong connection to the place in which she lives, but this is always felt with an absence of people.

The final line in the above passage is a stark reminder that racial differences loom heavy on the horizon, no matter how far Antoinette wanders from society: "the sky can have a very black look."[340] The line indicates the views of racial superiority in which Antoinette is entrenched, from birth. While living within this social hierarchy, she is aware that regardless of any feelings of affection she may have towards individuals such as Tia and Christophine, the black Creoles will always be seen by the white Creoles as racially inferior. Therefore, the use of the word "black" in the above line indicates not only the notions of evil, menace, and hostility that the word used in such a context has; it also suggests the looks directed towards Antoinette and her mother by the black Creoles.

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[337] *Sargasso Sea*, p 24.

[338] For a Lacanian interpretation of repetition in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, see David Cowart, *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.

[339] Mr Mason says to his wife: "'Annette, be reasonable. You were the widow of a slave-owner, the daughter of a slave-owner, and you had been living here alone, with two children, for nearly five years when we met. Things were at their worst then. But you were never molested, never harmed'" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 27).

[340] *Sargasso Sea*, p 24.

While swimming in a pool with Tia, Antoinette loses a bet to her friend and finds that her dress has been stolen. She arrives home wearing Tia's shabby dress instead of her own "starched, ironed, [and] cleaned" one.[341] Antoinette is wearing the clothes of the black other, indicating her desire (however hidden and subconscious) to be black.[342] Although Antoinette does not wish to wear Tia's dress, she seeks her approval in trying to do a somersault for her, but fails.[343] This failure marks Antoinette's inability to fully bridge the racial divide, and her inability to belong to the black Creoles. While Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark* admits to herself that she wishes to be black, Antoinette's desire has not been consciously acknowledged, although it is evident in her behaviour.[344] At the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette dreams that she is about to jump to her death from the roof of Thornfield Hall, when she sees a vision of Tia, as if beckoning to her from the pool at Coulibri. This is Antoinette's acknowledgement of her hitherto repressed desire to be black.

Returning home in Tia's shabby dress, Antoinette tries to avoid the English visitors outside her home, but cannot get inside without being detected. She first notices their beauty, particularly their clothes, and remembering her shabby dress becomes ashamed: "They were very beautiful I thought and they wore such beautiful clothes that I looked away down at the flagstones and when they laughed – the gentleman laughed the loudest – I ran into the house, into my bedroom".[345] This passage marks Antoinette's desire to be English. She is in awe of their beauty: "They were very beautiful", which is differentiated from their clothes: "and they wore such beautiful clothes". Their beautiful

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[341] *Sargasso Sea*, p 21.
[342] Neshantha Harischandra interprets the dress changing scene as also representing Tia's "hidden desire to be Antoinette", whereby, "on a symbolic level, wearing one another's clothes is a mark of sisterhood" (Harischandra, "Mirror Images", p 156).
[343] *Sargasso Sea*, p 21.
[344] *Voyage*, p 27.
[345] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 21-2.

clothes remind her that she is wearing a shabby dress, and indicates the importance of beauty in relation to race and status in Antoinette's society.[346] The loss of Antoinette's beautiful, white, starched dress indicates the transience of her position as coloniser, hinting at the vulnerable status of the white Creole, post-Emancipation. She desires the security of the English, their assurance and confidence as they laugh at her, but her position as coloniser is vulnerable. When she is scorned by her mother, Christophine reminds her that Antoinette only has two dresses, "wash and wear".[347]

When Antoinette's mother marries Mr Mason, their lives change so that she has new clothes again. Wearing Tia's dress, however, indicates Antoinette's hybridity. Both of her positions as coloniser and colonised are constantly changing and are constantly under threat. It is as if they can be changed as easily as garments. Antoinette therefore desires two different types of otherness: Englishness and being black. She embodies and imitates both, in varying degrees, throughout the narrative. As a child, she is still being made aware of racial differences, and tries to imitate these differences. But as an adult, she has already incorporated aspects of both Englishness and the black Creoles into her behaviour and outlook.

The Objectifying Gaze

bell hooks points to the objectification of black women in her chapter, "Selling Hot Pussy" in Black Looks (1992). She cites the historical eroticisation of the exotic, black female body. Although Antoinette is not black, she is not white either. Her Creole status makes her appear white, but, as previously noted, she may have black lineage somewhere

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[346] Beautiful clothes, their absence and their presence, their transience and their loss, is a prominent theme in all of Rhys's novels. For further discussion of clothes in Rhys's novels, see: Carol R Hagley, "Ageing in the Fiction of Jean Rhys", 1988, pp 115-125; Cynthia Port, "'Money, for the night is coming': Jean Rhys and Gendered Economies of Ageing", pp 204-217; Ma Dolores Martinez Reventós, "The Functions of Clothes in Jean Rhys' Fiction" [sic], pp 397-400; and Rishona Zimring, "The make-up of Jean Rhys's Fiction", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (Brown University Providence, RI), Vol. 33.2, Spring 2000, pp 212-234.

[347] *Sargasso Sea*, p 22.

in her distant past.[348] Thus Rochester objectifies Antoinette by othering her beauty. Rochester fears this strange beauty, a fear that reveals itself in his description, "Long, sad, dark alien eyes".[349] By giving Antoinette "alien" eyes, Rochester objectifies Antoinette through his gaze. By making the eyes "alien" and "dark", Rochester forces his gaze upon Antoinette and denies her the ability to gaze at him. This comes as a result of Rochester's anxiety over loss of power, and his urge to reinforce his own sense of power and superiority over Antoinette. The fact that the eyes are being gazed at, rather than any other part of the body, indicates Rochester's awareness of Antoinette's ability to gaze at him. Because he cannot understand the way in which she sees things (completely different to his own way of seeing), Rochester must objectify not only Antoinette herself, but her eyes, thereby trying to steal her ability to gaze. Rochester's use of the term "dark" indicates lack of light, lack of illumination and knowledge, while "alien" reinforces this lack. Rochester is unable to understand and appreciate his wife's difference, as well as that of the black Creoles. For example, he disapproves of Antoinette's affection for Christophine:

> 'Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?' I'd say.
> 'Why not?'
> '*I* wouldn't hug and kiss them,' I'd say, 'I couldn't.'
> At this she'd laugh for a long time and never tell me why she laughed.[350]

Here Rochester's swift movement from "Christophine" to "them" demonstrates his objectification of both Christophine and of the black Creoles. When Antoinette questions his questioning, he categorises Christophine with all black Creoles on the islands, removing her individual identity as an individual and transforming her into "them". The stress on the word "*I*" reveals Rochester's need to assert his own individuality, to give

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[348] Bernabé, Chamoisea, Confiant, eds., *Éloge de la Créolité*/*In Praise of Creoleness*, p 121.
[349] *Sargasso Sea*, p 56.
[350] p 76 (Rhys's emphasis).

himself authority and to validate his own opinions. The line beginning "*I* wouldn't hug and kiss them" contains the word "I" three times. This repetition reveals Rochester's anxiety over losing his sense of authority, casting doubt over its legitimacy and drawing attention to its fallibility. This reflects Homi Bhabha's notion of repetition in the authority of the English text and of the colonial "I". In "Signs Taken for Wonders", Bhabha indicates the "lifeless repetition of chapter and verse" that occurs when translating the Bible from English to Hindi.[351] This translation enforces the coloniser's religion over that of the colonised, imbuing the former with authority in an attempt to hide its ambivalence. Rochester's repetition reveals a hidden insecurity over his own lack. The black Creoles are alien and threatening to Rochester's sense of security; thus he reinforces his sense of difference by pitting "I" against "them" in antagonistic anxiety. The repetition of "I" also reveals the "feminisation" of Rochester's identity, previously mentioned.

She Looks Back at the "Eye of Power"

In his article, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic", Hal Foster explains that Lacan allows for a two-way gaze between subject and object, at least in the first instance. He states that to begin with, the gaze is not embodied in the subject, but pre-exists the subject, because it exists "in the world".[352] Although a male gaze does exist as a form of capitalist consumption, Foster argues that the gaze itself is not already completely bound to the subject, but initially embodies both subject and object.[353] This reading allows the object to return the gaze to the subject, so that the subject also becomes that which is gazed at.

When Antoinette hits Amélie for insulting her in front of her husband, Amélie replies with words and corresponding action: "I hit you back, white cockroach, I hit you

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[351] Bhabha, "Signs", p 167.
[352] Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic", *October*, Vol. 78, (Autumn), 1996, pp 106-124, p 106.
[353] p 106.

back."[354] Amélie demonstrates her power to return the gaze back to Antoinette. This gaze is not a literal one defined by looking, but demonstrates retaliation and the ability to subvert power. However, as shown, the power imbalance throughout the narrative is not clearly defined, in terms of gender or in terms of race. It shifts between and amongst the black Creoles, the white English and the white Creoles. Antoinette's gaze against the black Creoles is not always a gaze of power or of self against other. In fact, power is often already reversed, as is the case in the scene with Rochester and the staring, objectifying wedding guests. It is the wedding guests who gaze at Rochester, the latter finding himself the victim of such objectification. In addition, black Creoles stare at Antoinette and her mother early in the novel, making them feel like outsiders, and thereby subverting the power imbalance between colonised and coloniser. This points to Bhabha's "looking back", which indicates that the colonial eye (or "I") of power becomes displaced, allowing for the colonised to return this gaze, thereby subverting power.[355]

When Rochester attempts to objectify Christophine, he is met by an oppositional gaze that forces him to look away: "She was blacker than most and her clothes […] were subdued in colour. She looked at me steadily, not with approval, I thought. We stared at each other for quite a minute. I looked away first and she smiled to herself".[356] In this scene, the gaze is a two-way activity, between both Rochester and Christophine. The power imbalance does not clearly demarcate the two; it does not posit a gaze from Rochester to Christophine, against which Christophine then retaliates. Rather, the oppositional gaze allows for displacement and fluidity or shifting of power between the two subjects. As Bhabha states:

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[354] *Sargasso Sea*, p 83.
[355] Although Bhabha does not use the term "looking back" in his essay "Signs", I am using it for ease of reference and brevity, to refer to "strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power" (p 173).
[356] *Sargasso Sea*, p 61.

> Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination […] It […]unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that *turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power*.[357]

Christophine's gaze is a looking back at the "eye of power", a questioning of the imperial status of the white Englishman and the latter's power over the black Creoles. This gaze allows the colonised to question, challenge and subvert power that is enforced through the existing social system. Hence Rochester the coloniser, rather than being the gazer in this power relationship, is gazed at by the "colonised". This gaze is a "strategic" one in that in the narrative it is not initially clear as to who is gazing at whom. Christophine, the black woman and former slave, may expect Rochester, the white Englishman to stare at her in an attempt at objectification of the other. She is thus prepared for his gaze and returns it before he can cast it, allowing for what Bhabha calls a "certain problem of the object of the gaze".[358] Notably, Christophine's gaze demonstrates a subversion of the male/female polarity, in the form of a black female gaze.

The above examples have shown different ways in which feminisation occurs for Rochester in the narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Given this feminisation, and the notion that demarcations between "masculine" and "feminine" are problematic, female desire can also be seen in a new light. Antoinette speaks her desire on a number of occasions. Two of these will be highlighted for their significance to the female gaze. The first is when Antoinette attempts to objectify Rochester by "framing" him in the mirror, shortly after their marriage. Two wreaths of frangipani are on the bed, and Rochester wears one, making a face in the mirror. This sneer signifies his disapproval of the way in which the garland makes him appear. But he wears it because Antoinette desires him to do so.

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[357] Bhabha, "Signs", p 173 (my emphasis).
[358] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity", p 47.

Antoinette says to her husband,

> 'You look like a king, an emperor.'
> 'God forbid,' I said and took the wreath off. It fell on the floor and as I went towards the window I stepped on it. The room was full of the scent of crushed flowers. I saw her reflection in the glass fanning herself.[359]

Rochester briefly assents to Antoinette's desire for him to wear the garland. This action signifies Antoinette's objectification of Rochester, as she identifies him by calling him a king and an emperor. Antoinette exerts her female gaze against Rochester, making him into a hero, seeing him in the reflected mirror, framing his identity so that he appears heroic, as she desires him to appear. This is a role with which Rochester does not feel comfortable, and he rejects it by removing the garland and crushing the flowers.

Another way in which Antoinette speaks her desire is when she convinces Christophine to cast the *obeah* spell on Rochester, in the hope that he will love Antoinette again.[360] Having been neglected sexually and emotionally, Antoinette turns to Christophine for help. By turning to black witchcraft, a form of power that does not belong to the realm of colonial or patriarchal authority, Antoinette demonstrates her willingness to subvert the power of the latter, and thereby to express her own desire. This desire is her own because she seeks its realisation through a system other than that of white patriarchal law. Christophine at first refuses Antoinette's pleading request, warning her that *obeah* would have grave consequences for a white person: "'All that foolishness and folly. Too besides, that is not for *béké*. Bad, bad trouble come when *béké* meddle with that'".[361]

However, Antoinette convinces Christophine to comply with her request, by gazing at her. This action reveals a female gaze that is used in order to achieve a female desire. The desire is Antoinette's own desire to be loved by her husband, a desire that exists in

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[359] *Sargasso Sea*, p 62.
[360] pp 93-97.
[361] p 93.

and of itself. It is not merely, in Mary Ann Doane's sense, a "desire to desire". It is, rather, a desire to *create* a male desire. Thus Antoinette subverts the male/female power structure suggested by psychoanalysis, by possessing her own desire, acting upon that desire, and using it to create a male desire. In addition, Antoinette's request is made from one woman to another, further disrupting the male/female binary. The interplay between Antoinette, Christophine and Rochester forms a three-pronged structure with the female designators outnumbering the male. The very nature of Antoinette's desire is to create a male desire which currently does not exist. (Rochester does not, at this moment in the narrative, desire his wife.) This subverts the rigid enforcement of male desire that objectifies the female and makes her own desire impossible. The lack of Rochester's desire is significant here. Rather than Rochester being threatened by Antoinette's lack, he is threatened by her lack of lack, that is, her actual ability to love him. In other words, it is Rochester who lacks the ability to love Antoinette, whereas Antoinette possesses the ability to love Rochester.

The above analysis may indicate a role reversal between Antoinette and Rochester, which posits the "male" identity to Antoinette and the "female" to Rochester. However, the complexity of Antoinette's desire, which is also feminised by Christophine and the *obeah* spell, makes this conclusion too simplistic. As Ann Kaplan points out in *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (1983), representations of female characters in mainstream film can tend to reverse the roles of "male" and "female" at the expense of certain feminine qualities, such as "kindness, humaneness, motherliness".[362] However, in the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's desire does not compromise her femininity. She maintains her feminine qualities and draws from the feminine and that which lies outside of the white patriarchal structure.

[362] Kaplan, *Women and Film*, p 29.

Antoinette's Gaze against Christophine

Antoinette's gaze against Christophine, although it demonstrates a female desire, is also problematic in terms of race. As will be shown, this highlights hooks' notion that film theory is also guilty of denying black female subjectivity. In her desperation, Antoinette objectifies Christophine, referring to her inwardly in derogatory terms:

> I stared at her, thinking, 'but how can she know the best thing for me to do, this ignorant, obstinate old negro woman, who is not certain if there is such a place as England?' She knocked out her pipe and stared back at me, her eyes had no expression at all.[363]

The use of the word "negro" to categorise Christophine reveals Antoinette's objectification of the latter. As Frantz Fanon points out in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the classification of "negro" is derogatory in that it generalises all people of African descent, without recognising the ethnic and national differences that exist within the continent.[364] Fanon states: "Colonialism […] has never ceased to maintain that the Negro is a savage; and for the colonist, the Negro was neither an Angolan nor a Nigerian, for he simply spoke of 'the Negro'". [365] Fanon uses this term throughout *Black Skin, White Masks* in order to draw attention to its derogatory nature when used by white people against black people. The classification emerges as a result of the western colonialist project that posits the coloniser as protecting mother to the colonised, the latter a savage and unable to control its "evil instincts".[366] The term also eliminates a pre-colonial cultural history of Africa:

> For colonialism, this vast continent was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals – in short, the Negro's

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[363] *Sargasso Sea*, p 93.
[364] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Preface by Sartre, Jean-Paul, Translated from the French by Constance Farrington, MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1965 (originally published 1963 by François Maspero, Paris, under the title *Les damnés de la terre*, copyright 1961 by François Maspero, ed., S.A.R.L.), p 171.
[365] *Wretched of the Earth*, p 171.
[366] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p 170.

country.[367]

The "Negro's country" exists only by virtue of being labelled thus by the West. It is a western colonial term used to derogate and classify all black people under a banner that eliminates both cultural and ethnic difference, as well as a pre-colonial history. Hence the people of Africa come to be seen only in relation to their colonisation by the West, allowing for what Fanon calls a "lightening of their darkness".[368] In this sense, Antoinette chooses only to see Christophine in so far as she can fulfil her needs through the power of the *obeah* spell. Antoinette assumes the contradictory role of the coloniser in this scene: she begs Christophine for her help, thereby acknowledging her dependence upon her. Yet Antoinette also feels condescension towards Christophine, through her inward categorisation of "negro", thus judging Christophine's power structure – one that lies outside of the white colonial system – as inferior. The "existence of England" is used as a means of judging Christophine and othering her, and it is this doubt over the existence of the heart of western colonialism that is attributed to her blackness. Being an "ignorant, old negro woman" is, in Antoinette's view, what allows Christophine to make such a foolish judgement.

By gazing at Christophine, Antoinette defines her, makes her into a simple black woman who lacks sense and reason, who does not understand white realities such as the existence of England. Although Antoinette desires the benefits of Christophine's *obeah* spell, when this is not immediately surrendered she dismisses Christophine's reasoning as folly, the product of a black mind that does not think in the same way that Antoinette does. Burrows states that Antoinette's ambivalence towards Christophine and therefore towards blackness is evident in the way she asserts her sense of white superiority, every

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[367] *Wretched of the Earth*, p 171.
[368] p 170.

time she feels threatened.[369] When Christophine refuses to help her by supplying an *obeah* potion, Antoinette asserts her sense of white superiority by throwing a purse of money on the bed. This act, Burrows points out, indicates her colonialist belief in the "automatic ownership through money of any black knowledge."[370]

Yet Christophine herself subverts this power that Antoinette attempts to exercise over her. Although Antoinette throws her purse on the bed, she does not verbally insult Christophine, but keeps these objectifying thoughts to herself. Christophine's outward gaze against Antoinette, however, is a subversive reaction against the white power which Antoinette attempts to exercise over Christophine in her objectification of the latter. The lack of expression in Christophine's eyes allows her to transcend the confines of a system that attempts to define her. A psychoanalytical interpretation may translate this lack into the lack of the female other, the negated black woman who is marginalized in a white-dominated society. However, Christophine's actual power within the narrative, demonstrated both against Rochester (as will be seen) and Antoinette, indicates her ability to use the power she draws from her "otherness" as a means by which to subvert conventional power.

Black Looks: The Oppositional Gaze

Feminist film theory has not always recognised black female subjectivity. As bell hooks points out in "The Oppositional Gaze", a chapter in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), the black female spectator lies outside of the binary distinction used by Mulvey which posits "woman as image, man as bearer of the look".[371] This structure has been continually deconstructed, according to hooks, by black women's

[369] Burrows, *Whiteness and Trauma*, p 62.
[370] *Whiteness and Trauma*, pp 63-64.
[371] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure", p 117.

refusal to identify with the woman onscreen. hooks states that feminist film theory utilises psychoanalysis as its main theoretical framework, and thereby takes an ahistorical stance that ignores the significance of the black female spectator and the black female gaze.[372] Mainstream feminist film cites "women", or "woman" as a universalising category that applies to white women only, without recognising the exclusion of other races. Thus white women are presented as representing women in general or "woman", that is, all women. Black and other women are not acknowledged as belonging to this category. It is a "totalising category", as hooks points out.[373] Mainstream feminist film theory does not allow for a theoretical framework for black female spectatorship; it does not "theorize any aspect of black female representation or spectatorship".[374] As Janice Gaines indicates in "White Privilege and Looking Relations", using psychoanalysis as a model can "inadvertently reaffirm white middle-class norms".[375]

hooks criticises these theorists for not "seeing" the whiteness of the image in their totalising categorisation of "woman" as white women. She argues that mainstream feminist film theory engages in a process of denial, as "film criticism was initially rooted in a women's liberation movement informed by racist practices".[376] This racism is evident in the fact that women's film theory has not recognised black female looking relations as being important enough to theorize.[377] Part of the reason why black female spectatorship is different to the filmic experience of the white woman, according to hooks, is that the latter is founded on a "relationship of adoration and love", whereas the black female spectator does not share this privilege in looking relations as far as mainstream

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[372] hooks, *Black Looks*, p 124.
[373] *Black Looks*, p 124.
[374] p 124.
[375] Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory", *Screen*, London, Vol. 29.4, 1988, pp 12-27, pp 12-13.
[376] hooks, *Black Looks*, p 125.
[377] *Black Looks* p 125.

film is concerned.

With regard to non-mainstream film, hooks criticises Jacqui Roach and Petal Felix's lack of explanation and definition of the black female gaze, which sees things "rather differently" to white female viewers. She states that they are assuming an essentialist stance, which presumes that black women, by virtue of being black, have an inherently different viewing experience.[378] hooks argues that many black women do not see differently to white women, because they are "so profoundly colonized, shaped by dominant ways of knowing".[379] However, her critique favours difference as something that is inherent, as it suggests that if the complexities of being "so profoundly colonized" did not exist, then black viewers *would*, by virtue of being black, see the world differently to white viewers. This creates an essentialist stance. Paradoxically, however, hooks attacks essentialism by noting the phenomenon of colonisation and how this ideological process can influence the perceptions, beliefs and opinions of individuals, including black people living in a white-dominated society. But this poses a conundrum, in that in order for black viewers to see things differently, there has to be some sort of social – that is, ideological – difference at play. Thus, without colonisation, black viewers would not possess an inherently different way of viewing. It cannot be said, conclusively, that a black person sees things differently to a white person, given that they may belong to the same culture, grow up with the same ideology and share the same values. It is precisely because of being a minority in a white-dominated culture that this difference exists. Thus difference is the result of the ways in which an ethnic minority is treated and portrayed within a white-dominated society.

Fanon notes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that any sense of inferiority that a black

[378] hooks, *Black Looks*, p 128.
[379] p 128.

person feels is a result of the way in which such a black person would have been perceived and treated. The very categorisation of black and the connotations of inferiority such as cannibalism and savagery, are solely the result of a white identification made against black people: "For not only must the black man be black, he must be black in relation to the white man. This cannot be true of the reverse".[380] Fanon goes on to say that any shame felt by the black person comes as a result of being "overdetermined from without".[381] However, as shown in previous examples of Rochester's relationship with Antoinette, and as will be shown in the relationship between Antoinette and Tia, a role reversal occurs. hooks indicates resistance as one way in which this role reversal can be achieved. She argues that resistance is an active stance, and involves more than mere awareness of "dominant ways of looking and knowing".[382] The development of an oppositional gaze thus emerges as a result of actively resisting, being critical spectators, engaging in such acts as contesting, resisting, revisioning, interrogating, and inventing.[383] It is a political stance, and one that does not emerge merely by being aware of social inequalities.[384]

As shown, hooks' analysis reaches not just for a black feminist film theory, but for the incorporation into and recognition of black female spectatorship in mainstream feminist film theory. Hooks states that mainstream feminist theorists, including Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane and Ann Kaplan, have either ignored or brushed over this phenomenon.[385] They have not sought to theorize the black female gaze, degrading it as

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[380] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p 110.
[381] *Black Skin, White Masks*, p 116.
[382] hooks, *Black Looks*, p 128.
[383] *Black Looks*, p 128.
[384] This is hooks' argument against Manthia Diawara, who cites "resisting spectatorship" in "Black British Cinema: Spectatorship and Identity Formation in Territories" (Manthia Diawara, listed in hooks, *Black Looks* as *Public Culture,* Vol. 1.3, Summer 1989, whereas actual article is located in *Public Culture*, Vol. 3.1, 1990, Fall, pp 33-47). hooks argues that black female spectators do far more than simply resist. For hooks's discussion on films that do allow for a black female gaze, see *Black Looks*, pp 129-131.
[385] *Black Looks*, p 129.

something not worth pursuing within a theoretical framework. hooks argues that such a gaze should be incorporated into film theory and given recognition in its own right. It involves a complexity of gazes, hooks states, which include the black female spectator who is "profoundly colonised" into accepting what hooks terms "white supremacist" ideology, as well as the black female spectator who is aware of power imbalances but does not resist them, to the resisting, critical spectator.[386]

Subversion, Resistance and Power

The degree to which subversion is liberating for the colonised (in the case of Homi Bhabha), or the black female (in the case of hooks), is debatable. As subversion can be reactionary, resistance might be a more empowering method of tipping the power imbalance.[387] The question raised here is whether such subversion is actually liberating for the colonised, or whether it merely perpetuates the power structure that allows for gazing against the colonised in the first place. The enigmatic nature of Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea* draws attention to such a debate. Christophine, Antoinette's black Creole nurse, is identified with the West Indies, a place of warmth, bright colours and happiness. These are associations that Antoinette connects with the place of her birth and her childhood, painting Christophine as a happy, black nanny figure. However, her status as a freed slave problematises such a simple categorisation.

It is evident that many of the freed slaves have become bitter towards their former owners and abandoned them, with Antoinette and her mother as victims of such abandonment, early in Rhys' narrative.[388] Thus Antoinette's simplistic classification of Christophine is problematic. No longer a slave, Christophine continues to be loyal to

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[386] hooks, *Black Looks*, p 130.
[387] Uraizee, "'She Walked Away'", p 262.
[388] "'Of course they have their own misfortunes. Still waiting for this compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed' […] 'Now we are marooned,' my mother said, 'now what will become of us?'" (*Sargasso Sea*, pp 15, 16).

Antoinette out of love rather than for any monetary reward. For example, Christophine refuses Antoinette's monetary offer in exchange for the *obeah* spell: "'You don't have to give me money. I do this foolishness because you beg me – not for money'".[389] Christophine returns Antoinette's gaze, thus enacting a subversive oppositional gaze in the sense of hooks' definition. Christophine, the black nurse who uses *obeah* is clearly in a position of power over Antoinette, in that Antoinette approaches Christophine for help, and depends upon her for returning happiness to her marriage. Both Christophine's status as a black woman and as one who uses *obeah*, give her a subversive power that is not constrained by white patriarchy. She cannot be constrained by the simplistic terms with which Antoinette attempts to define her.

Christophine, in contrast to Antoinette, works outside of the system that threatens to oppress her. Christophine's refusal to act within the confines of the power structure imposed upon her is captured in her walking away "without looking back".[390] This refusal to "look back" indicates her aloofness over the entire power structure of the white colonialism in general, and the white English male in particular, as she walks out of the narrative shortly after having a heated argument with Rochester. During the course of the argument, Christophine pleads with Rochester to be kind and gentle to his wife, who had been made "drunk" with his love, but is now emotionally numb.[391] The first-person male narrative favours Rochester over Christophine in the power imbalance, analogous to male English imperial power over a black female subject. Yet the power has shifted because Christophine is a freed slave, and with her newfound freedom speaks out against Rochester in defence of Antoinette. Christophine not only subverts the power imbalance but challenges it by refusing to participate in the system that establishes it. She walks out

[389] *Sargasso Sea*, p 97.
[390] p 133.
[391] pp 126-127.

of the narrative, "without looking back". In this sense, Christophine resists rather than subverts, and it could be said that she is more empowered by choosing this action over that of subversion, because she does not risk reinscribing an already existing power structure. Rather, by ignoring and resisting it, she expresses her disdain for and aloofness to this system. She refuses to become part of it, and thus, literally, walks away from it.

As Norman Denzin points out in *The Cinematic Society* (1995), the female gaze exists in Hollywood film, but it tends to be a representation of the femme fatale, thus the female gaze is associated with evil, that which threatens the security and values of contemporary western society. In *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Antoinette does possess a gaze, yet she becomes mad, re-inscribing the canonical text of *Jane Eyre*. She thinks, "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do."[392] She sets fire to the house so that she can *become* Bertha Mason of Charlotte Brontë's novel. Thus the degree to which her gaze empowers is debatable, given that it leads to her madness and self-destruction. However, Antoinette's definition of triumph is not constrained within a patriarchal definition of "power". As Julia Kristeva points out in *About Chinese Women*, power is something that belongs to the male sphere, and therefore women should not try to attain it. [393] Instead, they should try to effect a revolution that does not engage with language, with "power" as it is understood in the male sense of the word. Women lie outside of language, and from the fringes should therefore "refuse all roles".[394]

Antoinette thus demonstrates her ability to transcend the confines of the patriarchal system under which she is held captive. She refuses to be defined by such a system, and therefore destroys it in setting fire to the house and destroying herself. The burning of the house represents the destruction of Antoinette's enforced imprisonment. Antoinette

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[392] *Sargasso Sea,* pp 155-6.
[393] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, London: Marion Boyars, 1974, p 38.
[394] Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, p 38.

makes an affirmative statement in her action, so rather than being a passive victim of such patriarchal confinement, she becomes a subversive force against it and takes action to destroy it. But because she is already so defined by this system, she must also destroy herself. In destroying herself, Antoinette destroys what the patriarchal gaze has made her. Now zombie-like, she has lost her soul, yet the degree to which this is lost is debatable. If she were not aware of having lost her soul, she would not be able to make the decision to burn the house and to destroy herself. It seems that she has lost power, and thus in the Kristevan sense, resorts to suicide and destruction of the house in order to act against power, which she is aware of not possessing. But in Antoinette's case, is her lack of power an inherent lack, by virtue of being female?

Hélène Cixous classifies women as "*foreigne*" adding an "e" at the end of the word (in the French manner, to indicate the feminine), thereby emphasising their otherness.[395] As language is linked to power, women therefore lack power. This is not precisely the case for Antoinette. She is born into a system that endows her with wealth, but this is taken from her when she joins another system, the institution of marriage, as defined by English law. Christophine, for example, is not bound by such a system, and therefore has the ability to walk away "without looking back". But because Antoinette does not have this power, she must resort to a different type of action in order to free herself from the literal confinement of being locked up in the attic at Thornfield Hall. Her desperation is evident in the fact that she commits suicide, but her strength lies in her ability to recognise that her life no longer belongs to her – she has become the thing which she deplores, and against which her essence has constantly rebelled. She has become Bertha Mason, the woman that Rochester has made her into by changing her name, taking her wealth, refusing to love her, and confining her as a prisoner. Given these restrictive

[395] Cixous, *Vivre l'Orange/To Live the Orange* trans. by Ann Liddle, Sarah Cornell and Hélène Cixous, Paris: Des femmes, 1979, p 40.

circumstances, Antoinette kills herself in order to destroy Bertha. There is just enough of Antoinette's being to recognise her loss of identity and to make this fatal decision.

Antoinette and Tia

Antoinette's derogatory categorisation "negro" and the attributing of general characteristics to the entire group of black Creoles, contradicts her feelings of attachment to certain black individuals, including her friend Tia and her nurse Christophine. Shortly after Antoinette thinks about not looking "at any strange negro", she is swimming in a pool with Tia. Antoinette has placed some new pennies onto a stone, and bets Tia all of this money that she can do an underwater somersault.[396] Although Antoinette does the somersault, she comes up choking:

> Tia laughed and told me that it certainly look like I drown dead that time. Then she picked up the money.
> 'I did do it,' I said when I could speak but she shook her head. I hadn't done it good and besides pennies didn't buy much. Why did I look at her like that?
> 'Keep them then, you cheating nigger', I said. [397]

Antoinette does look at Tia, which at first seems to indicate a curiosity, a need to know the other. Antoinette wants to know why Tia won't accept her somersault, and looks at her in order to find the answer to this question. Yet this look is also bound up in hatred, desire, envy and objectification – all characteristics of the gaze. The conflation of the look and the gaze in this example reflects the feeling of ambivalence that Antoinette has towards black Creoles, and it is worth briefly examining this ambivalence as an antecedent to the conflation.

Firstly, Antoinette is Tia's friend, the daughter of Maillotte, one of Christophine's friends and a visitor to Christophine's kitchen, a place where Antoinette hides and feels a

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[396] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 20-21.
[397] p 21.

sense of belonging.[398] Antoinette and Tia meet regularly and go swimming together, which shows that they share a bond that transcends racial barriers.[399] Critical interpretations have made Tia Antoinette's double or othered self, a representation of blackness, which is something she yearns to become, but fails to achieve.[400] Significantly, Antoinette feels at home with black Creoles such as Tia and Christophine, with whom she develops close friendships. However, the power structures that exist within the wider cultural framework, ultimately destroy such friendships. For example, Tia rejects Antoinette only after the burning of Coulibri, an incident sparked by racial tension, something larger than the individual relationship between the two girls. The riots are the result of political and social unrest, the aftermath for white colonials of the recently passed Emancipation Act, and racial tension stemming from a long history of slavery. The two girls manage to transcend these obstacles at first, as friends, but when political matters reach a violent climax in the burning of Coulibri, the friendship is ended. They do not want or choose this end, but it is forced upon them, by the social structure in which they live.

In the swimming scene between Antoinette and Tia, Antoinette's desire for approval from her other reveals a sense of insecurity about herself and her identity. She seeks approval from a black person, whereas within the social structure, Antoinette's friendliness with Tia would probably be frowned upon. Antoinette's mother, Annette, for example, refers to black Creoles collectively as "them" and does not appreciate the friendship that Antoinette shares with Tia, failing to see Tia as an individual, and

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[398] *Sargasso Sea*, p 20. Notably, Anna in *Voyage in the Dark* remembers a slave register that describes Maillotte Boyd, a slave girl 18 years of age (*Voyage*, p 48).
[399] *Sargasso Sea*, p 20.
[400] Curtis, "Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*: A Re-assessment", 1987, pp 144-158; Jordan Stouck, "Alternative Narratives of Race, Time and Gender: Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark*, 1995, pp 53-59; Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 1985, p 902.

degrading her to a racial stereotype.[401] When Antoinette returns home wearing Tia's soiled dress, her mother has it burned.[402] Although Antoinette's bond with both Tia and Christophine undermines this racial othering, and allows such friendships to exist, the influence of Antoinette's social structure (perpetuated partly by her mother and later by her husband) confuse her and create ambivalent feelings towards black Creoles. It is such ambivalence that allows Antoinette to be friends with Tia on the one hand, and to call her a "cheating nigger" on the other.

This passage demonstrates Antoinette's inability to commit herself wholly to either hating or loving the black Creoles, an indication of her ambivalence. She wants to be accepted by individuals such as Christophine, and finds comfort in their company. Yet at the same time, she often refers to the black Creoles generically as "they" or "them". This ambivalence points to the displacement of the colonial subject, in Homi Bhabha's theory. According to Bhabha:

> The familiar space of the Other (in the process of identification) develops a graphic historical and cultural specificity in the splitting of the postcolonial migrant subject. In place of that "I" […] there emerges the challenge to see what is invisible, the look that cannot 'see me', a certain problem of the object of the gaze that constitutes a problematic referent for the language of the Self.[403]

Antoinette's ambivalence is demonstrated with the question, "Why did I look at her like that?" followed by the hateful, "Keep them then, you cheating nigger." Antoinette becomes decentred and feels threatened when Tia dares to question Antoinette about the way she is looking at her. This challenge of Antoinette's look abruptly turns it into a gaze when Antoinette calls Tia a "cheating nigger". Antoinette feels her sense of power being threatened by Tia's challenge (both to do the somersault and to explain her look), and it is

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[401] See, for example, Antoinette's response to Rochester over Christophine dragging her skirts: "*They* don't care about getting a dress dirty because it shows it isn't the only dress *they* have", *Sargasso Sea*, p 71 (my emphasis).

[402] "'Throw away that thing. Burn it'". (*Sargasso Sea*, p 22)

[403] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity", p 47.

this threat that causes Antoinette to gaze, that is, to objectify Tia using racially degrading language. Antoinette's self is displaced between two conflicting types of desire: the desire to know the other, and the desire to negate the other. Hence the question "Why did I look at her like that?" contains the "I" of Antoinette, making it impossible for her not to ask this question of herself, though it is probably Tia who voices it. Antoinette herself does not understand why she is compelled to try to know the other through looking, and because this question makes her feel uneasy, she resorts to the objectification of Tia in order to maintain her sense of power over her.

Tia proceeds to explain that "Real white people…They didn't look at us."[404] This statement reflects the refusal of the English to try to understand the black Creoles, and this refusal in Tia's eyes makes the English superior to the white Creoles. The former are, she says, "real" white people, and she uses the objectification that the English would have enforced against the black Creoles, as a way of making Antoinette feel inferior to her. Implicit in Tia's comment about these "real white people" not looking at her and at other black Creoles, is her acknowledgement that the English have never tried to understand or connect with the black Creoles, and Tia's view that they are better off in refraining from doing so. When Antoinette tells Tia that she can get plenty more money, Tia responds, "Real white people, they got gold money". In this response, Tia indicates her understanding that the white English are more powerful than the white Creoles. This is also evidenced by Antoinette's possession of only two dresses, one of which Tia steals.[405]

The foregoing indicates two types of contradiction that take place in the colonial gaze: the ambivalence of the gazer and the shifting of the gaze itself. The latter makes it difficult to determine who possesses the gaze and thereby, who possesses the greater

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[404] *Sargasso Sea*, p 21.
[405] Christophine says to Antoinette's mother: "'She got two dresses, wash and wear.'" *Sargasso Sea*, p 22.

power. As Lee Erwin points out, *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s historical context of the West Indies post-Emancipation, draws attention to the complex social structure in which racist terms often reflect class, rather than racial differences. Erwin cites the following passage from the novel: "The black people did not hate us as much when we were poor. We were white but we had not escaped and soon we would be dead for we had no money left. What was there to hate?"[406]

(Dis)Locating the Gaze

Thus the question arises, "Where does the gaze lie?" and from this, "Who is gazing at whom?" This question challenges perception, allowing for what Kristeva would describe as a "punctum" in the narrative. Both Tia and Christophine challenge what is known as the "studium", that is, a studied reading of a text. The punctum is an unexpected appearance in a text, that which "cannot be expressed in language" and "embodies the failure of the symbolic, and thus belongs to the domain of the 'Real'".[407] This is true especially for Christophine, who cannot be contained by the narrative of the text, and therefore walks away "without looking back". Her refusal to look back symbolises her unwillingness to work within the pre-existing order. She operates outside of language and white patriarchal law, engaging in *obeah* and lives unbound to a man, thus she cannot be defined by such structures as patriarchy and the symbolic order. The enigma of Christophine, as she has been referred to by Joya Uraizee, thus allows for the transcendence of binary structures posited by psychoanalytical film theory. She is the punctum that pricks the narrative, challenging the reader to reach beyond the confines of the narrative itself. As "looking back" seems a retaliatory endeavour that may only serve to reaffirm the power of the gazer, Christophine's defiance in not looking back allows her

[406] *Sargasso Sea*, p 29. This passage is misquoted, as the original reads: "The black people did not hate us *quite so* much as when we were poor." (my emphasis)
[407] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* 1982, pp 26-27.

to “refuse all roles” and transcend the binaries of white patriarchy.

The issues discussed in this chapter include lack, passivity, looking and the male gaze, which all play an important role in shaping the identity of the protagonist, Antoinette. They have been addressed not based on how the reader identifies with the text, but in terms of how various types of looking and/or gazing between and amongst the characters help to shape the identities of such characters. This reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* attempts to challenge a psychoanalytical framework that restricts female identity to its framing by the male gaze. Textual examples indicate not only a distinct female gaze, but different types of female gazes, which subvert patriarchal power and also challenge each other in a struggle for female power.

As has been shown, the female gaze takes on different forms in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette expresses her own individual desire; moreover, she subverts power by negating Rochester, whose character, as indicated, continually experiences a “feminisation”. Thus the male characterises lack and the female is positive. Although such a scenario seems only to reverse the rigid categories of “male” and “female”, the interrelationships between Antoinette, Tia, Christophine and Rochester, all reveal the complexity of racial divisions that also serve to fragment and displace the colonial “I”. Yet such complexities are not free of racial categorisation against the black other. Antoinette uses derogatory terms against Tia and Christophine, for example. However, both Tia and Christophine exert a gaze against Antoinette (Christophine also does so against Rochester), thereby subverting existing power structures of gender and race. This analysis raises the issue of whether subversion is more effective than resistance, in the struggle for power. Taking Kristeva’s notion of power into account, in that women lie outside of its boundaries, the enigma of Christophine manages to transcend the conundrum thereby posed. For Christophine neither engages in a role reversal by seizing

power from white patriarchy, nor is she marginalized by a lack of power. Rather, she utilizes a power of her own that transcends patriarchy's rigid framework in her use of *obeah*, employing what hooks would refer to as a black female gaze. Her defiant walking away without looking back prevents the narrative from framing and identifying her, thus undermining the ability of the male gaze to frame and objectify the female colonised subject.

3. Of Mimicry, Mockery and Mirrors: Echoes of the Other in Jean Rhys's Novels

This chapter will discuss the use of mimicry and mirroring in Jean Rhys's novels, and will consider the unique subject position of a female postcolonial identity. Relevant theorists incorporated into the discussion will include Homi Bhabha and Spivak, as well as Freud, Lacan and Lacanian feminists. Julia Kristeva's theory of language, the *chora* and her critique of Lacan's mirror stage will also be utilised. The purpose of this theoretical application is to examine subjectivity that is problematised not only by notions of the "feminine", but also by the otherness raised in postcolonial literary debate.

The characters of Jean Rhys's novels are culturally displaced while living in England or Paris. This displacement is at times attributable to a sense of belonging or longing for a lost, Caribbean past, analogous with the loss of childhood innocence, as is the case in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. However, as will be shown, further examination into Anna's life in *Voyage in the Dark* reveals a lack of belonging in her West Indian childhood as well as in her adulthood in England. Moreover, in all of Rhys's novels, a sense of not belonging is prevalent. For example, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha, whose family are from England, is on holiday in Paris.[408] There she feels alienated and thinks: "I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere".[409] Although England is her "home", Sasha has long ago been disowned by her family.[410] As Erica Johnson states, Sasha's sense of displacement is exemplified by the fact that although she is on holiday in Paris, she "lacks all of the

[408] *Midnight*, p 11.
[409] *Midnight*, p 38. As Virginia Woolf states, quoting the woman as outsider: "'[T]he outsider will say, 'in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world'" (Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, Naomi Black, ed., Oxford: Published for the Shakespeare Head Press by Blackwell Publishers, 2001, p 99).
[410] *Midnight*, pp 36-37.

markers that render a voyage meaningful; namely, she lacks a 'home' in contrast to which she can understand her 'awayness'".[411] For Rhys's female protagonists, the physical location of "home" plays a crucial role in shaping their identities: "[S]ubjectivity hinges on material locations – on the scale of countries, cities, or buildings – through which subjects come to understand their identities".[412]

Thus Sasha's sense of alienation results not from feeling estranged from a particular home or sense of "home"; rather, it develops as a result of her search for a "homelike space within Europe".[413] Hence Sasha is constantly looking for a comfortable room in which to live.[414] Crucially, Sasha, like the white Creoles, Anna and Antoinette, is at the heart of a paradox: her search for "home" is always unsuccessful, as "she is sure not to find the Creole culture of her island anywhere else in the world."[415]

This background, with its implications of alienation and lack of cultural belonging, has led critics to portray Rhys's female protagonists as lost women.[416] Having negligible family connections, little money and a strong, unrequited desire either to return home, or to find a sense of "home", they are dependent upon men who belong to the cold, harsh climate of London or Paris. Whether alienated from a "mother country", or neglected by their biological mothers, they seem unable to develop a complete, adult identity in later life. As Margaret Joseph states, home for Rhys was "whichever island she was not in",

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[411] Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa*, p 39.
[412] *Home, Maison, Casa*, p 39.
[413] p 39.
[414] p 39. For further discussions on the theme of "home" and Creoleness in Rhys's novels, see Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa*, pp 39-108.
[415] p 40.
[416] See Lori Lawson, "Mirror and Madness: A Lacanian Analysis of the Feminine Subject in *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Jean Rhys Review*, Vol. 4.2, 1991, pp 19-27; Nancy J Leigh,"Mirror, Mirror, pp 270-85; Jamie Thomas Dessart, "'Surrounded by a Gilt Frame': Mirrors and Reflection of Self in *Jane Eyre*, *Mill on the Floss*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Jean Rhys Review,* Vol. 8.5, 1997, pp 16-24; Visel, "Half-Colonization", pp 39-45; Carmen Wickramagamage, "An/other Side to Antoinette/Bertha: Reading 'Race' into *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, OAA, England, 35, No. 1, 2000, pp 27-42; Spivak, "Three Women's Texts"; Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell, "The Paradoxes of Belonging: The White West Indian Woman in Fiction", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 31, Number 2, Summer 1985, pp 281-293; Melaney, "Semiotic Mythologies"; Elizabeth Dalton, "Sex and Race in *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Partisan Review*, Boston, Summer 2000, Vol. 67.3, pp 431-442; Curtis, "Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, pp 144-158; Stouck, "Alternative Narratives", pp 53-59.

adding that her "feelings of isolation and alienation are reflected in her heroines, all of whom experience the Otherness of Caliban."[417] Thus, in Jacques Lacan's terms, such characters have little hope of achieving identity by moving beyond the mirror stage.[418]

The Lacanian Mirror and the Narcissistic Pool

Before examining Lacan's theory, as it is used by contemporary critics in their analyses of Rhys's texts, I will briefly outline some of the basic principles of the mirror stage. According to this theory, the child can recognise itself in the mirror as early as six months of age, experiencing what Lacan calls a "situational apperception".[419] Although the child is still unable to walk or stand up, it leans forward in order to hold the reflection in its gaze and "brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image"[420]. Thus one sees a transformation brought on by the child's identification with its reflection: the child recognises its image, its *imago*.[421] The function shared by both the mirror stage and the

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[417] Joseph, *Caliban in Exile*, 22. This is not to suggest that Rhys's novels are transparently autobiographical. Early and subsequent critics, including Wyndham Lewis and Thomas Staley identified the four female protagonists in Rhys's early novels as representations of the composite, "Rhys woman", that is, they represented Rhys at different stages of her life. This interpretation is widely made, including by Walter Allen in his *New York Times* book review, where he states that Rhys heroine in all of her novels is "hopelessly and helplessly at sea in her relations with men, a passive victim doomed to destruction (Allen, p 5). The composite heroine is also suggested by Elgin Mellown in "Character and Themes", pp 107, 152, 155; and by A Alvarez: "They [the first four novels] have the same heroine – although she goes by different names (Alvarez, "The Best Living English Novelist", *New York Times Review of Books*, 17 March 1974, pp 6-7, p 7)." More recent critics, including Carr and Gregg have disputed this view, arguing that although Rhys's texts are highly autobiographical, it is misleading to categorise her as a "confessional" writer on that basis; her work demonstrates the skill of a fiction writer who painstakingly edited and put everything she wrote through many drafts before she was happy with it (Carr, p 1). Carr goes on to say that the early misconception of Rhys as a naïve writer has "obscured much of the significance and complexity of her writing", leading to Rhys's modernism being "forgotten" (Carr, p 1). See also: Ruth Webb, "Swimming the Wide Sargasso Sea: The Manuscripts of Jean Rhys's Novel", *British Library Journal*, Vol. 14.2, 1988, pp 165-177; Gregg: *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press), 1995, "Jean Rhys and Modernism: A Different Voice", *Jean Rhys Review*, 1987, Vol. 1:2, pp 30-46; and Paula Le Gallez, *The Rhys Woman*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990, pp 1-8; Sue Thomas states: "'The Rhys woman' is a figure of narcissistic self-absorption and is pathologized as a sign of Rhys's own, for she is usually read autobiographically […] I write against the customary assumption of confessional transparency […] and the reductiveness of the concept of 'the Rhys woman'" (*The Worlding of Jean Rhys*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999, p 3).

[418] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage", 1977, in Easthope, *Contemporary Film Theory*, pp 33-39, reprinted from *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London: Tavistock, 1977, pp 1-7.

[419] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage", p 34.

[420] p 34.

[421] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage", p 34.

imago is to establish a relation between the subject and its environment or outside world, that is, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*.[422] This stage precedes the symbolic order, the understanding of language. The child does, at this stage understand the concept of "I", that is, a sense of herself, although this is an uncoordinated, fragmented sense of self.[423] However, she does not possess an understanding of others, because in order to achieve this understanding, she must be brought into the symbolic order. Hence the child cannot yet see herself as both subject and object: she cannot yet differentiate between herself and others. Although she has subjectivity, she is only an object for others, rather than both subject and object.[424]

Critics have used the basic principles of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage as a framework for deconstructing Rhys's female protagonists. They apply Lacan's childhood mirror stage to Rhys's adult female protagonists and the many mentions of mirrors in Rhys's texts. Amongst such critics are Nancy Leigh, Lori Lawson, and Jamie Thomas Dessart, who have analysed Antoinette Cosway's character in terms of her inability to belong to any one culture, thereby making her a placeless, lost individual.[425] Each of these critics discusses the issue of female subject identity (or lack thereof) using a psychoanalytical framework. However, their analyses at times disregard the complexities of Rhys's female characters.

At the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is locked up in Thornfield Hall by her husband, and is deprived of a mirror:

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[422] "The Mirror Stage", p 34.

[423] p 34. I am using the female indicator where gender is ambiguous, given that my thesis deals with a female author and female subject identities.

[424] For further explication of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, including interpretations favouring its relevance to Rhys's texts, see: Dessart, "'Surrounded by a Gilt Frame'" pp 16-24; Lacan, "The Mirror Stage", p 33-39; Lawson, "Mirror and Madness", pp 19-27; John P Muller, and William Richardson, *Lacan and Language*, New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1982; Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "Lacan, Language, and Literary Criticism", *The Literary Review*, Vol. 24, 1981, pp 562-577; Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986; Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror", p 283.

[425] Dessart, "'Surrounded by a Gilt Frame'", pp 16-24; Lawson, "Mirror and Madness", pp 19-27; Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror", pp 270-85.

> There is no looking-glass here and I don't know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us – hard, cold and misted over with my breath. Now they have taken everything away. What am I doing in this place and who am I?[426]

Identity is a major issue for Antoinette throughout the course of the narrative. If one were to assume that Antoinette had not, as a child, passed through the mirror stage, this could explain her inability to recognise her own reflection in the mirror, as above: "The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself." Lawson connects Antoinette's lack of a mirror with a lack of identity: she cannot see herself; therefore, she does not know who she is.[427] However, this line of argument is somewhat problematic, in that it applies Lacan's theory of the mirror stage to Antoinette as a child, then as an adult, but not as an infant. The mirror stage takes place when the infant recognises her reflection in the mirror and becomes both subject and object. Antoinette, as a child and later as a grown woman, would already have passed this stage, by virtue of her ability to interact in the world using language. Lawson, Leigh and Dessart all attribute Lacan's mirror stage (or variations thereof) to Antoinette's lack of identity and sense of self, at various stages of her life, but not as an infant. The reader only knows Antoinette as a child, an adolescent and an adult, not as an infant. Moreover, failure to pass through the mirror stage results in failure to enter into the symbolic order, and therefore failure to understand and communicate using language. However, language is Antoinette's tool: she writes in order to tell the reader her story.

For example, the first line in the above passage indicates that Antoinette has lost touch with her sense of self, deprived of a mirror and unable to see herself as others see her. This does not indicate that she has failed to pass through the mirror stage, as Lawson

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[426] *Sargasso Sea*, p 147.
[427] Lawson, "Mirror and Madness", p 23.

suggests.[428] Rather, left in isolation, Antoinette has not interacted with others and is therefore unable to feel a sense of self-affirmation based on such interaction. Locked up in her husband's attic at Thornfield, Antoinette is isolated from human society. She is treated as a madwoman, a danger to herself and to society. This isolation and disregard for Antoinette's individuality reinforces a negative self-image, thereby destabilising any previous sense of self she may have had.

Antoinette remembers her old self as one who would "brush [her] hair".[429] This comes to her as a visual memory, an image of what she used to be like. What Antoinette remembers and identifies with is her reflected image in the mirror (as it used to be), rather than some aspect of her character. Antoinette remembers herself as one who used to try to conform to society in the hope of belonging to it, as conveyed by the everyday behaviour of brushing her hair. This simple act suggests Antoinette's desire (in the past) to please others by focussing on her physical appearance and beauty. Now locked up in the attic by her husband and deprived of a looking glass, Antoinette is unable to see her reflection and therefore unable to tend to her physical appearance. She can no longer make herself appear beautiful and therefore more acceptable to a patriarchal society. However, she now desires to return to her former self, which is one that existed only by virtue of the way in which others viewed her, and consequently, the way in which she viewed herself.

In the second line of the above passage, Antoinette remembers a time when she did have a sense of identity, when she was able to look into the mirror and recognise herself: "I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me."[430] The experience is both self-affirming and self-annihilating. On the one hand, Antoinette

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[428] Lawson, "Mirror and Madness", p 23.
[429] *Sargasso Sea*, 147.
[430] p 147.

recognises herself in the mirror. This recognition is based on her performing an identity, that of a woman who tries to maintain her physical beauty. She tends to her appearance because she wishes others to view her favourably. At the same time, however, Antoinette is merely acting out a role that has been given to her by a patriarchal society. She is bound to and determined by the behavioural codes of such a society. What comforts her is the recognition of the image in the mirror, which is only a reflection. The image reflects her self, but her understanding of and interaction with that image is largely determined by her awareness of how others see her, of which she is reminded every time she looks at herself in the mirror.

As Margaret Joseph states, Rhys's use of the mirror motif creates a paradox:

> [The] Caliban [figure is able to] fuse illusion and reality in a search for truth. The device is also a means of symbolizing the two perspectives that sum up her perception of colonialism. […] the mirror represents the paradox of Anna and Antoinette, both of whom belong, and at the same time do not.[431]

The fact that the image in the mirror is only a reflected image draws attention to the next line in the passage from the novel, indicating a split in Antoinette's self: "The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself." Antoinette seems to be well aware that the reflected image reveals to her the way in which others see her, within her society. Antoinette's identity is largely determined by those around her, particularly in their rejection of her. She does not feel completely at home in the West Indies, by virtue of the black Creoles rejecting and ostracising her and other white Creoles, as well as English people making her feel like an outsider. The very first line of the novel expresses this sense of not belonging: "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

[431] Joseph, *Caliban in Exile*, p 46.

my mother, 'because she pretty like pretty self' Christophine said".[432]

Here Antoinette, the child narrator, marks a clear distinction between herself and the other racial groups in her society, with the use of "they" and "we". She categorises the others as "the white people", and "The Jamaican ladies", making it clear that she is neither one of the "white people", nor is she Jamaican, that is, black. Her position as white Creole classifies her as "white", but not as English. Antoinette suffers racist remarks from black Creoles, including "white cockroach" and "white nigger".[433] Yet at the same time, she and her mother are described as "pretty" by Christophine. The object of beauty, therefore, is not always desirable, nor is it always admired. The first part of the novel is set at the time shortly after the passing of the Emancipation Act.[434] As a result of this and the death of Antoinette's father, Antoinette, along with her mother Annette and her brother Pierre, are left stranded and without support.[435] Their alienation develops in degrees, beginning with name calling, and climaxing in the death of Annette's horse: "She still rode about every morning not caring that the black people stood about in groups to jeer at her, especially after her riding clothes grew shabby (they notice clothes, they know about money)".[436]

In the above passage, Antoinette applies the same distinction between herself as a white Creole and the black Creoles, as she did in the novel's opening passage. The above passage indicates Annette's pride and arrogance in continuing to ride her horse, hoping that the old ways will continue, even after the slaves have been freed. Annette and Antoinette wish to perpetuate a colonial hierarchy in which she and her family are the

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[432] *Sargasso Sea*, p 15.
[433] pp 17, 35, 85.
[434] p 15.
[435] For discussions on the mother-daughter relationship in Rhys's fiction, including Annette's neglect of her daughter Antoinette, in favour of her son, Pierre, see: Harischandra, "Mirror Images, pp 154-160; Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, *The Unspeakable Mother: Forbidden Discourse in Jean Rhys and H.D.*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989, pp 28-45.
[436] *Sargasso Sea*, p 16.

masters, and the black Creoles continue to be classified as slaves. Although they have been liberated from slavery, Antoinette supports her mother's desire to continue to treat them as inferior. This is betrayed by the derogatory use of "they" and "the black people". The phrase "the black people" categorises all of the black Creoles on the island as inferior, treating them as a collective group, rather than as individuals, their supposed inferiority stemming from their racial status.[437]

This notion that the black Creoles are inferior is also made evident in the comment, "(they notice clothes, they know about money)." Although the narrator categorises the black Creoles as a racially inferior group, she also wishes to make it clear that such a group can still have knowledge of clothes and of money, which tend to fall into the realm of the white people (whether Creoles or English). The use of brackets is also significant here. The phrase "(they notice clothes, they know about money)" undermines the authority that the black Creoles may have in possessing these perceptive attributes. Rather than being empowered by such knowledge, the narrator suggests, they are all the more inferior for being thus aware, for they are merely imitating their white masters.[438]

Although the child Antoinette makes clear distinctions between the various racial groups, her mother's choice of words betrays the inability of these groups to remain completely discrete.[439] As previously noted, Annette's use of the word "maroon" to

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[437] "[T]he grace of body gives, or seems to give, grace also to the eyes and expression. Poor things! it cannot compensate for their colour, which now when they are free is harder to bear than when they were slaves" (Froude, *The English in the West Indies or The Bow of Ulysses*, 1888, p 119).

[438] This notion that black people are an inferior race is echoed in George Berkeley's comment in which he compares the Irish with the "negroes": "Never was there a more monstrous conjunction than that of pride with beggary; and yet this prodigy is seen every day in almost every part of this Kingdom. At the same time these proud people are more destitute than savages, and more abject than negroes. The negroes in our plantations have a saying, 'If negro was not negro, Irishman would be negro'. And it may be affirmed with truth, that the very savages of America are better clad and better lodged than the Irish cottagers throughout the fine fertile counties of Limerick and Tipperary (George Berkeley, *A Word to the Wise*, 1752, p. 7).

[439] As previously discussed, the issue as to whether Rhys herself promotes a racist view in presenting the racist views of the white Creole, is debatable. Parry argues against Spivak's view that Rhys's novel is racist, stating that Spivak ignores the notion that Rhys presents a white Creole settler perspective of black people, which posits the latter as all alike and as savages (Parry, 39). Arguably, Rhys is not being racist, but in her text represents the often-racist white settler position.

describe herself and her children marks her recognition that she is no better off, financially, than the slaves who used to work for her. Without their support, their trust and their co-operation, she is left completely isolated, unable to function as a master, and nearly completely stripped of her former high status. Her shabby riding habit indicates that this status is beginning to deteriorate, but the poisoning of her horse makes it impossible for Annette to maintain the pretence that she still rules supreme over the former slaves.

One of Annette's servants, Godfrey, who found her dead horse, says:

> '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.'[440]

Godfrey urges Annette to try to see black and white people as equals, but she refuses to do so, blaming Godfrey for the death of her horse.[441]

In the convent where Antoinette stays as an adolescent, there are no mirrors.[442] Dessart interprets this lack of mirrors as an inability to know oneself.[443] However, it should be noted that Antoinette is able to see her reflection, not in a mirror, but in a pool of water. Kristeva identifies the phallic function as both symbolic function and as signifier.[444] Thus the mirror itself can be seen as a symbol of patriarchy. Kristeva points out the distinction between masculine and feminine by polarising the semiotic with the symbolic.[445] Although she agrees that the symbolic order is necessary for achieving subjectivity, she also indicates the importance of the *chora* in shaping subjectivity, steering away from a strict polarity between masculine and feminine.

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[440] *Sargasso Sea*, p 16.
[441] p 16.
[442] pp 45, 46.
[443] Dessart, "'Surrounded by a Gilt Frame', p 16.
[444] Kristeva, *Revolution*, p 47.
[445] *Revolution*, pp 48-51.

Based on these nuances, one can make a distinction between a pool of water and a mirror, in a metaphorical sense. The mirror is hard and rigid, its terms strictly defined. It is two-dimensional and gives the illusion of depth by way of a reflection. A pool of water, although it reflects the image, has literal depth and fluidity. Its surface reflects less than what a mirror reflects, and its reflection will appear more distorted than that of a mirror reflection. For example, in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Mr Horsfield remembers having watched Julia walk out on Mr Mackenzie, leaving him alone in a restaurant, and the argument that had led to her decision to leave her lover. Mr Horsfield does not actually see the incident directly; rather, he watches the couple in a reflecting mirror. Viewing the action through the mirror, Horsfield is at a remove from what is actually happening, the reflection creating the impression that he is watching a performance on stage, but with a poor view: "There had been something fantastic, almost dreamlike, about seeing a thing like that reflected in a looking-glass. A bad looking-glass, too. So that the actors had been slightly distorted, as in an unstill pool of water".[446]

However, a pool of water itself is deeper than the flat, two-dimensional surface of a mirror. Antoinette's lack of a mirror in the convent indicates not a lack of identity, but the absence of patriarchy, where identity is concerned. The convent consists entirely of women, so that Antoinette is not constructed by a male gaze. This is symbolised by the presence of water, in which she and the others are able to see their reflections:

> We have no looking-glass in the dormitory, once I saw the new young nun from Ireland looking at herself in a cask of water, smiling to see if her dimples were still there.[447]

Similarly, a passage in *Voyage in the Dark* has Anna seeing herself in a vision, drowning:

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[446] *Mackenzie*, p 28.
[447] *Sargasso Sea*, p 46.

> It was like letting go and falling back into water and seeing yourself grinning up through the water, your face like a mask, and seeing the bubbles coming up as if you were trying to speak from under the water. And how do you know what it's like to speak from under water when you're drowned?[448]

Here Anna sees that her identity is being submerged and she cannot sustain it any longer. As she watches herself drowning, she makes no attempt at rescue. Rather, she is a passive observer, detached from her body. Yet a further split exists, in that she is both passive and active, witnessing and enacting her own drowning. Anna sees herself as both subject and object, in spite of critics such as Jamie Dessart and Lori Lawson, who state otherwise. Although they use a Lacanian framework to argue that Anna has not achieved subjectivity, their theory is arguably a misapplication of Lacan's theory. For, as Copjec points out, in order to be both subject and object, one must be aware of the laws of society that produce one as subject.[449] This awareness or visibility comes about "only through (by seeing through) the categories constructed by a specific, historically defined society. These categories of visibility are categories of knowledge".[450]

In Anna's case, she is the female Other in a male-dominated world, as well as incorporating a complex hybridity of coloniser/colonised, by virtue of her white Creole background. Yet her ability to see through the pool of water allows her the possibility of escape from the confines of her society. The bubbles that go through her mouth represent her lack of speech. Yet one may regard this lack as embodying a "something" rather than a "nothing". For although Anna lacks speech in this scene, what she lacks is a connection to the patriarchal, symbolic order.[451] She is unable to communicate within its parameters. In Lacan's terms, she has not become a subject because she is unable to move beyond the

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[448] *Voyage*, p 84.
[449] Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994, 1995, p 17.
[450] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, p 17.
[451] As Leigh states in "Mirror, Mirror", mirrors symbolise the struggle for power between men and women in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (p 273).

mirror stage. Yet what she has done is to transcend the symbolic order and the mirror stage as mere constructs of patriarchy. In drowning, she is immersing herself into the depths of the *chora* and its pulsions that emerge within texts. This dream-like vision is an unconscious exploration that is expressed in writing, and therefore straddles both sides of the Lacanian divide (the unconscious and the conscious) to reveal a female subjectivity that challenges and unsettles a fixed system of language.

Rather than being hopelessly trapped by the patriarchal positing of identity, Anna sees not a fixed reflection in a looking glass, but a flowing self through the movement of the water. Anna sees through the reflective pool and beyond the construction of the mirror, the surface of which merely reflects and creates images that give only the illusion of wholeness. Through such illusion, the speaking subject gains a sense of power over her environment, albeit an illusory sense of power. Likewise, the child cannot control her environment, but the mirror stage helps her to believe that she can.[452] In seeing through a reflective pool rather than a static mirror, Anna sees beyond the construct of patriarchy and through it, thus achieving the awareness that Copjec states as necessary for subject identity.

Anna's self awareness is narcissistic in a number of ways. Firstly, she is young, only 19 years old when she meets Jeffries for the first time.[453] Secondly, she is heavily influenced by dreams, memories of dream imagery and daydreams, and tends to live in a world that is separated from outside reality. For example, when Walter leaves for a few weeks, Anna spends a lot of time absorbed in self-reflection and stays in her room for an entire week.[454] She stays in bed without dressing, eats in bed and lingers in the bath,

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[452] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage", p 34.
[453] Anna thinks: "'I'm nineteen and I've got to go on living and living and living'" (*Voyage*, p 94).
[454] *Voyage*, p 77.

where she dunks her head underwater to listen to the sound of the running taps.[455] Like Narcissus, who wasted his youth staring at his own reflection, Anna is drawn to water. Although she is not as driven by her own reflection as Antoinette, water plays a prominent role in her understanding of herself. Her recollection of a pool that she used to bathe in as a child in the West Indies is vividly portrayed with heady scents, colours and sensations:

> I was always dreaming about that pool, too. It was clear just beyond where the waterfall fell, but the shallow parts were very muddy. Those big white flowers that open at night grew round it. Pop-flowers, we call them. They are shaped like lilies and they smell heavy-sweet, very strong. You can smell them a long way off […] I was always dreaming about this pool and seeing the green-brown water in my dream.[456]

Now in England, Anna locks herself up in her room when she is not out dining with Jeffries or wandering the streets aimlessly, feeling empty in a colourless world where all of the houses look "exactly alike".[457] She feels most at home by the water, where the pop-flowers grow, another image reminiscent of the Narcissus myth, in which the youth drowns in the pool of water, his death marked by the flower that bears his name, rather than by a corpse.

The relationship between Antoinette and her mother is also a significant theme that has been analysed using a psychoanalytical theoretical framework. For example, as Lori Lawson points out in her article, "Mirror and Madness", Antoinette is unable to reach full subjectivity, in Lacan's terms, because of the lack of a "familial" and "reflective other".[458] That is, she does not have a close relationship with her mother, and is alienated from her early in the narrative. This alienation is further heightened when Annette marries Mr Mason, and when she later mourns the death of her son, Pierre, killed in the fire at

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[455] *Voyage*, pp 77-8.
[456] p 78.
[457] p 152.
[458] Lawson, "Mirror and Madness", p 22. For an explication of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, see my second chapter.

Coulibri. The following passage indicates Annette's stronger love for her now-deceased son, and her neglect of her daughter:

> I put my arms round her [Antoinette's mother] and kissed her […] I could not say, 'He [Antoinette's brother Pierre] is dead,' so I shook my head. 'But I am here, I am here,' I said, and she said, 'No,' quietly. Then 'No no no' very loudly and flung me from her.[459]

A familial, reflective other allows the subject to establish a sense of self and establish an identity as an adult, passing through the mirror stage and becoming a speaking subject. However, without such a familial other, that is, the mother as a role model, Antoinette is "drawn to the looking glass" in her "Desire for identification".[460] It may also be argued that Christophine serves as a replacement mother figure.[461] She cares for Antoinette as she would her own daughter. A psychoanalytical view would suggest that identity is constructed by others, and at the earliest stage of development, by the mother. The mother is not oneself, but at a remove from the individual, which draws attention to the constructed, mediated nature of identity, the paradoxical phenomenon of finding oneself by losing oneself.[462] For it is only in understanding the other that one gains an understanding, that is, an identity, for oneself. Therefore, if Christophine is the replacement mother figure, she is at a further remove yet, from the biological mother, making Antoinette's sense of self an even more elusive one than the illusory identity seen in the mirror.[463]

Nancy Leigh characterises Rhys's female protagonists as women of lack: they lack education and family connections, she argues, which leads to their financial dependence

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[459] *Sargasso Sea*, p 40. For further analysis of the mother-daughter relationship in this scene, see: "Mirror Images: Female Interrelationships in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* Vols. 27.1 and 28.2, 2001/2002, pp 146-160, pp 154-160.
[460] Lawson, "Mirror and Madness", p 22.
[461] See Thorunn Londsdale, "The Female Child in the Fiction of Jean Rhys", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, Vol. 15.1, 1992, pp 63-65.
[462] Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror", p 272.
[463] Dessart, "'Surrounded by a Gilt Frame'", p 16.

on men.[464] However, such an analysis overlooks the family connections that these characters do possess. For example, family is at the heart of Anna's sense of identity: she often remembers her childhood in the West Indies, talks drunkenly about her relatives to Walter Jeffries, and has a stepmother living in England.[465] Antoinette, although she loses her mother to madness, becomes close to her cousin Sandi.[466] It is Antoinette's "family connections" that make her a woman worth marrying, in terms of the financial prospects for Rochester.[467] It is clear that Antoinette is the child of a once-prosperous plantation owner, and with this background, she possesses an attractive dowry.[468] When Christophine urges Antoinette to leave her husband, Antoinette explains that this is not an option: "[Y]ou must understand I am not rich now, I have no money of my own at all, everything I had belongs to him".[469] This passage indicates that Antoinette was once "rich" but as a result of marrying Rochester, loses her wealth and status. This is quite contrary to Leigh's suggestion that Rhys's female protagonists lack family connections and financial security, and therefore rely on men. In Antoinette's case, the reverse is true: it is Rochester who relies upon her for his own financial security.[470]

Anna's family connections, by contrast, do not secure her future, nor is she an

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[464] Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror", p 273.

[465] Anna gets drunk and tells Walter about her West Indian heritage: "'You've learnt to like whisky already, haven't you?' he said. 'It's in my blood,' I said. 'All my family drink too much […] I'm the fifth generation born out there, on my mother's side.'" (pp 44, 45). On their first date together, Walter asks Anna if she stays with Hester. She replies, "'My stepmother?' I said. 'Hester? No, I don't see much of her. She's not often in London'" (*Voyage*, p 18).

[466] This closeness, however, is incestuous. When locked up in Thornfield Hall, Antoinette tries to reform a sense of self, partly through objects and partly through memories of people. She remembers Richard Mason's visit, then asks Grace Poole for her red dress, which, upon holding it, she recalls having worn it when she visited Sandi for the last time: "Now there was no time left so we kissed each other […] We had often kissed before but not like that. That was the life and death kiss" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 152).

[467] When Christophine confronts Rochester over his neglect of his wife, she says: "'Everybody know that you marry her for her money and you take it all […] She is more better than you, she have better blood in her and she don't care for money – it's nothing for her'" (p 125). When Rochester and Antoinette are about to leave for England, he struggles between a guilty conscience and blaming his wife, and thinks: "They bought me, *me*, with your paltry money. You helped them to do it. You deceived me" (pp 139-40).

[468] Rochester thinks about writing a letter to his father: "Dear Father. The thirty thousand pounds have been paid to me" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 59).

[469] *Sargasso Sea*, p 91.

[470] p 59.

attractive prospect in marital terms. While in England, Anna gains some acceptance into white middle-class society, but not complete acceptance. For example, she can be mistress to Walter Jeffries, but cannot be his wife; she can become impregnated by an Englishman's seed[471], but cannot carry the child to term.[472] Anna works as a chorus girl, but as this is a seasonal job, it does not pay enough for her to survive. It certainly does not allow her any luxuries. In order to be able to afford these, Anna engages in a kind of prostitution, sleeping with men who pay for meals in restaurants, and who give her money for beautiful clothes:

> My handbag was on the table. He took it up and put some money into it […] I meant to say, 'What are you doing?' But when I went up to him instead of saying 'Don't do that,' I said, 'All right…anything you like, any way you like.'[473]

In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia is supported by Mr Mackenzie, but her weekly payments are severed after their relationship ends. She receives a letter informing her of this:

> Madame,
> Enclosed please find our cheque for one thousand five hundred francs (fcs. 1,500) […] from this date, the weekly allowance will be discontinued […].[474]

Julia's sister, Norah, is described as "middle-class, no money".[475] Rhys's female protagonists possess varying degrees of financial dependence upon men, which is often complicated by their social hierarchies and family structures. The above passages, with the exception of the one from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, depict the female protagonists as passive and almost completely dependent upon men for their survival. However, these

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[471] Mellown, "Character and Themes", p 109. Anna does not actually know who the father is: "'Oh, I don't mean it's Walter's. I don't know whose it is'" (*Voyage*, p 146).
[472] (See also Rosenberg, "Mother and Country: Implications of Rhys's Construction of Exile", *MaComère*, Harrisonburg, Virginia, Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars, Vol. 1, 1998, pp 161-169, p 166.) Anna chooses to have an abortion (*Voyage*, pp 155-159).
[473] *Voyage*, pp 33-34.
[474] *Mackenzie*, p 14.
[475] p 53.

characters also act in defiance against their male oppressors. For example, it is Julia who leaves Mr Mackenzie, rather than being abandoned by him. Although his financial support ends as a result of the relationship ending, she takes an active part in the break-up. Early in the narrative, she confronts Mr Mackenzie in a restaurant, threatening him with her presence and publicly humiliating him:

> [S]he was a dangerous person. A person who would walk in and make an uncalled-for scene like this was a dangerous person.
> She said, 'Oh yes, look here, this cheque….This cheque I got today. I don't want it.' […]
> 'Wait a minute,' she said. 'That isn't what I came here for.'
> Mr Mackenzie was afraid of the expression in her eyes. He thought, 'My God, she's going to attack me. I ought to stop her.'
> […]
> Assault! Premeditation could be proved. She wouldn't get away with it – not even here in Paris.
> A cunning expression came into Julia's face. She picked up her glove and hit his cheek with it, but so lightly that he did not even blink.
> 'I despise you,' she said.[476]

Similarly, Anna, although at times passive, asserts herself when she jams a lighted cigarette into Walter's hand: "I was smoking, and I put the end of my cigarette down on Walter's hand. I jammed it down hard and held it there, and he snatched his hand away and said, 'Christ!'"[477]

Moreover, when Julia is assaulted by a stranger, she fights back:

> That night, coming back from her meal, a man followed her. […]
> She stopped. She wanted to hit him. She was possessed […] She wanted to fly at him and strike him, but she thought that he would probably hit her back. […]
> They were now arrived at Julia's hotel. She went in, and pushed the swing-door as hard as she could into his face.[478]

As Carr states, Rhys's female protagonists are not merely passive victims. She cites a passage in which Julia confronts her sister to Norah:

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[476] *Mackenzie*, p 26.
[477] *Voyage*, p 74. Savory states that Anna's action here represents the "fickleness with which the Caribs fought the Europeans" (Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 96).
[478] *Mackenzie*, p 45.

> 'Animals are better than we are, aren't they? They're not all the time pretending and lying and sneering, like loathsome human beings' […] And do you think I'm going to cringe to a lot of mean, stupid animals? If all good, respectable people had one face, I'd spit in it. I wish they all had one face so I could spit in it.[479]

As Pearl Hochstadt points out in her article, "From Vulnerability to Selfhood", Rhys's female protagonists work against their circumstances to assert their selfhood.[480] She cites examples within each of Rhys's novels in which the protagonists demonstrate a "reckless ferocity that is at once a source of practical grief and a sign of [a] growing urge towards self-determination."[481] Hochstadt draws attention to the shift in narrative perspective from third person to first person, in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, demonstrating a greater concern for the workings of the protagonist's mind. Part of those workings include a progression from "innocent incomprehension" to "stark recognition" of the foibles of society, and the fact that the protagonist is unable to defend herself against them.[482] In seeing the society in which these protagonists find themselves thrown as flawed, one can also recognise the potential victimhood in other characters, including the male characters.[483]

Leigh indicates that Anna does not recognise her reflection as her own.[484] She thinks: "I walked up to the looking-glass and put the lights on over it and stared at myself. It was as if I were looking at somebody else".[485] As Anna looks at her reflection in the mirror, it is as though her self is divided into two: one self that acts, and one that watches. She feels dissociated from her self, as her body and image have become detached from her notion of identity. Although Leigh does not explicitly make a parallel with Lacan,

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[479] *Mackenzie*, pp 97-98.
[480] Pearl Hochstadt, "From Vulnerability to Selfhood: The Pain-Filled Affirmations of Jean Rhys", *Jean Rhys Review*, Vol. 2.1, 1987, pp 2-6, p 3.
[481] Hochstadt, "From Vulnerability to Selfhood", p 3.
[482] From Vulnerability to Selfhood", p 3.
[483] From Vulnerability to Selfhood", p 3.
[484] Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror", p 272.
[485] *Voyage*, p 21.

such a parallel can be drawn between Anna's split identity and Lacan's notion of the split "I" or self, which exists between the "*je*" and the "*moi*".[486] The "*je*" is the speaking subject and the "*moi*" is that which merely receives outside stimuli (whether sensations or projections of an identity from an other onto the self).[487] Anna's two selves can also be divided into that of the West Indies and of England, which cannot be reconciled.[488] In the opening line of the novel, Anna contrasts the sense of belonging associated with her homeland and that of alienation when living in England: "It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again".[489]

This rebirth is hardly a religious epiphany for Anna; rather, it marks the closing of a seemingly joyful chapter in her life, and heralds one of misery and monotony, exemplified by the cold, grey streets of London, the men she must sleep with in order to afford small luxuries, and her exclusion from "respectable" society. During this bleak existence in a foreign country, Anna seems to regress to the "*moi*" stage, where things happen to her, and she loses her "*je*" and the ability to exist as a speaking subject.

Elizabeth Grosz also supports the Lacanian notion of a subject that is split within itself by analysing Lacan's reworking of Freud's theory of the Narcissistic ego.[490] Grosz explains that the theory of the Narcissistic ego stands in direct opposition to that of the Realist ego.[491] The Realist ego is both innate and natural, whereas the Narcissistic ego is "non-biological", and determined by "social/familial" factors.[492] This is what makes the Narcissistic ego capable of being simultaneously subject and object, a capability that problematises the Realist ego, which relies on a distinction between internally governed

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[486] Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan*, p 2.
[487] *Jacques Lacan*, p 2.
[488] Leigh, "Mirror, Mirror", p 272.
[489] *Voyage*, p 1.
[490] Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction,* London, New York: Routledge, 1990, pp 28-31, 48-49.
[491] Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p 28.
[492] p 28

ego instincts and their being directed toward external objects or sexual instincts.[493] While the Realist ego is given "psychic substance", that is, a definite identity or positing determined by external reality, the Narcissistic ego is an "entirely fluid, mobile, amorphous series of identifications, internalizations of images/perceptions".[494] This fluidity and mobility make it impossible to posit the Narcissistic ego definitely, for it is always subject to change.[495] Hence the Narcissistic ego is not an entity or agency existing within the subject. Moreover, the Narcissistic ego is governed by fantasy and modes of identifications and "introjection", from which emerges the desire for the other.[496] Thus the Narcissistic ego can, unlike the Realist ego, take parts of itself, including its own image or body, as an object and treat these as if they were external or "other".[497]

As the Narcissistic ego appears to favour the notion of a fragmented subjectivity, this would forestall a dual or binary identity. However, Spivak problematises the notion of the primitive in psychoanalytical theory. In her essay "Echo", she critiques Freud's methodology as faulty and inconsistent. Grosz cites Juliet Mitchell's defence of Freud, stating, "He functions as scientist or observer, not advocate".[498] Spivak, however, argues that Freud contradicts himself, and that his theory can thus be used in opposition to the claims that he makes about the inferiority of "other" races.[499] Spivak accuses Freud of "casual racism", whereby he uses words such as "us" and "them" when addressing a Eurocentric audience.[500] Spivak also takes Freud to task for drawing similar conclusions about "the mental life of primitive peoples" and "the mental life of children", conflating

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[493] Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p 28.
[494] p 28.
[495] p 28.
[496] Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, p 31. The term "introjection" is used in Freudian, Lacanian and other psychoanalytical writings to mean the exertion of one's inner drives towards an outward object.
[497] p 30. Parallels between the Narcissistic ego and Kristeva's *chora* will be drawn shortly.
[498] p 20.
[499] For Spivak's detailed critique of Freud's essay, "On Narcissism, see her 1993 essay "Echo", in Donna Landry, and Gerald Maclean, *The Spivak Reader:* 1996, pp 175-202.
[500] Spivak, "Echo", 1993, p 180.

the two groups.[501]

Leigh suggests that Anna's dependence upon men indicates her dependence on the male gaze and on a patriarchal system of identity. However, such a formulation is the result of strict, simplistic binaries that ignore the further fragmentation that exists both during and after the mirror stage. Lacan notes that the formation of the "I" is symbolised in dreams by a fortress or stadium – the "inner arena and enclosure surrounded by marshes and rubbish-tips, dividing it into two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle" – the id.[502] The self is, in Lacanian theory, inherently split within itself.[503] The self is not unified, but the impression of unity exists in the subject's ability to communicate via the symbolic order, and thereby in his ability to distinguish between himself and others.[504]

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's colonial identity is ambivalent, even before she moves to England. In the West Indies, she does not share the privileges of an English person, in terms of her treatment by the black Creoles who live there. Like Homi Bhabha's theory of the split, ambivalent "I", in his essay "Signs Taken for Wonders", the categorisation of Antoinette by others, as well as her attitude towards black Creoles is problematic. For on the one hand, she is friendly with Tia and looks up to Christophine, her nursemaid, who is black. Paradoxically, Antoinette also often refers to the black Creoles generically and in a derogatory, antagonistic way as "they". Yet, critics have

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[501] Spivak, "Echo", 1993, p 177. The translation I have used, Freud, "On Narcissism", from *Sigmund Freud: A General Selection*, Rickman, John, ed., 1937 (originally published 1914)**,** states the following: "This development of the libido-theory […] receives reinforcement from a third quarter, namely, from the observations we make and the conceptions we form of the mental life of primitive peoples and of children. In the former we find characteristics which […] might be put down to megalomania […] a belief in the magical virtue of words, and a method of dealing with the *other* world – the art of 'magic' – which appears to be a logical application of these grandiose premises". (p 120, my emphasis) This polarisation of logic and magic will be addressed in the discussion of the *chora*.

[502] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage", p 37.

[503] "The Mirror Stage", pp 36-37.

[504] "The Mirror Stage", pp 36-37.

interpreted a particular scene as a two-way mirroring between Antoinette and Tia.[505]

The scene occurs during a riot in which a crowd of angry black Creoles have burned Antoinette's family home, and she and her family are trying to escape. Outside, Antoinette sees her friend Tia, who throws a rock at her and starts 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".[506] William D. Melaney in his article "Jean Rhys and the Postcolonial Novel", states that in this passage, the gaze of the other draws attention to how the subject has constructed a false self.[507] That is, Antoinette is being gazed at by Tia, and the "gaze of the other" influences the way in which Antoinette sees herself. Tia's tears express the gulf that divides the two characters as a result of the social and racial hierarchy. The divide and the sorrow create a yearning, a desire, in the psychoanalytical sense, for the other. As bell hooks states, "yearning" is a "common psychological state shared by many of us, cutting across boundaries of race, class, gender and sexual practice."[508] Antoinette wants to be with Tia, in order to feel a sense of belonging. She thinks about living with Tia, in a hopeless attempt to gain a sense of self and belonging amidst the chaos of the riots and burning. Seeing Tia is like seeing herself "in a looking-glass." Melaney points out that the gaze, both between Tia and Antoinette, but especially Antoinette's perception of Tia's gazing at her, constructs a false identity.[509] That is, although Antoinette is white, she sees herself as black.

In "Oedipus Again; or, Phallic Monism", Julia Kristeva argues that the self is not only split, but fragmented and multifarious.[510] Kristeva notes that the self is already split

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[505] See Lawson, "Mirror and Madness" pp 19-27; Dessart, "'Surrounded by a Gilt Frame'", pp 16-24; Curtis, "Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*" pp 144-158; Stouck, "Alternative Narratives" pp 53-59.
[506] *Sargasso Sea*, p 38.
[507] Melaney, "Semiotic Mythologies", p 36.
[508] hooks, *Yearning*, p 27.
[509] Melaney, p 36.
[510] Kristeva, "Oedipus Again; or, Phallic Monism", in *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, transl. Jeanine Herman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp 65-93.

in the Freudian sense, between the conscious and the unconscious. She also cites Lacan's split between the "*je*" and the "*moi*". In this sense, the self already possesses an otherness within itself, its own otherness, before it has even encountered an other subject.[511] This split is due partly to the fact that a subject has within itself an "other-being", that is, the unconscious.[512] Kristeva also acknowledges that even at the Freudian or Lacanian split, the self is not prone to a self/other polarity, nor to a self that exists merely in relation to an other.[513] Rather, she says, "I am a subject (an "I" who thinks and is) addressing another subject in being."[514] Because this being is shared yet occupied differently by me and by the Other, the "being that bears us" is altered and plural.[515] Hence it is not the case that Tia and Antoinette merely reflect each other as if looking in a mirror. Each of these subjects is already split in terms of the conscious and unconscious, as well as the "*moi*" and "*je*". In addition, if one applies Kristeva's model, a further fragmentation occurs when Antoinette and Tia encounter each other, a plurality of being. Because Tia is a being in a different way from Antoinette, Antoinette becomes an altered subject. Their relationship is not merely an encounter or communication from one ego to another, but from one altered subject to another. This leads to a decentred self, one that is "brimming with [its] 'own' unconscious otherness".[516]

Pulsional Pressures in the Text: Julia Kristeva's Semiotic *Chora*

Kristeva's theory of language, incorporating her concept of the semiotic *chora*, is an attempt to achieve a perspective that is free from the binary positing of male/female, and the essentialism to which such a positing can be prone. The *chora* is characterised by

[511] Kristeva, "Oedipus Again", p 66.
[512] "Oedipus Again", p 67. The unconscious will be further examined and applied to Rhys's texts with reference to Lacan.
[513] p 66.
[514] p 66.
[515] Kristeva, *Sense and Non-Sense*, pp 66-67.
[516] *Sense and Non-Sense*, p 67.

what Kristeva terms the "semiotic".[517] The semiotic is a pre-linguistic phase, which "precedes the establishment of the sign".[518] As previously noted, Lacan defines the imaginary as the pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal stage that embodies the mirror stage and precedes subjectivity.[519] For Kristeva, this semiotic stage both precedes the symbolic order, and acts upon it.[520] Kristeva allows the semiotic and the symbolic a degree of interdependence. They do not exist as two separate realms, but interact with each other in the process of subjectivity.[521] Kristeva states that the semiotic and the symbolic are "two modalities of the same signifying process".[522] Kristeva notes that the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, and "can never produce a signifying system that is exclusively one or the other".[523] The signifying process, which constitutes language, makes the semiotic and the symbolic inseparable. This is because language itself is not identified in the way that Structuralism would posit it, as a fixed system of difference.[524] Rather, language is a process.[525] Through this process, signification takes place, that which allows the subject to achieve her own subjectivity, to become a speaking subject within the symbolic order.[526]

The *chora* fits into the above framework as it belongs to the realm of the semiotic.[527] Because the *chora* precedes language, it cannot be bound by its terms.[528] The word in

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[517] Kristeva, *Revolution*, p 25.
[518] *Revolution*, p 27.
[519] Kristeva, *Sense and Non-Sense*, p 87. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin Books, 1977, 1979, 1986. First published as Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XI, "Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse" by Éditions du Seuil, 1973, p 6; Easthope, *Contemporary Film Theory*, pp 34-39
[520] Kristeva, *Revolution*, pp 26-27.
[521] *Revolution*, pp 26-27, pp ix, 22, 58, 233.
[522] pp 23-24.
[523] p 24.
[524] Jeremy Hawthorn, *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Fourth Edition), Oxford University Press, 2000, pp 338-340. See also Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, Ferdinand de, Jakobson, Roman, all in Rivkin, J and Ryan, M, 1998, pp 76-90; 91-95; 101-118.
[525] Kristeva, *Revolution*, pp 23-24.
[526] *Revolution*, pp 23-24.
[527] Although such a rigid division between semiotic and symbolic is being problematised by Kristeva, I will use this distinction when necessary for the sake of clarity.

Greek means "enclosed space" or "womb".[529] The term is one that Kristeva has appropriated from Plato's *Timaeus*, in which he defines it as "an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible".[530] Kristeva defines the *chora* as:

> an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases […] Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm.[531]

Kristeva's definition suggests that the semiotic *chora* characterises movement, it cannot be defined or posited within language, and it occupies various changing states ("stases"). Being "neither model nor copy" may indicate the impossibility of positing the *chora* using language.[532] Although it exists in language, the *chora* can never be "definitely posited", nor can it be given "axiomatic form".[533] The "provisional articulation" that characterises the *chora* would suggest the lack of a discrete definition, for it is provisional rather than fixed or definite. The word "articulation" makes the *chora* a form of expression, something that is being communicated. Kristeva states: "The subject is always both semiotic and symbolic".[534] The "articulation", the expression that characterises the *chora*, is something that embodies both the semiotic and the symbolic.[535]

Although Kristeva escapes rigid binary structures between male and female, this is not always the case for the characters in Rhys's fiction. For example, Christophine and other black characters in Rhys's novels, are often depicted in wholly sensual and

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[528] Kristeva, *Revolution*, p 26.
[529] Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p 161.
[530] *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p 161.
[531] Kristeva, *Revolution*, pp 25-6.
[532] If language is seen as something that attempts to replicate the "real", then signs, used within the system of the symbolic order, are examples of such an attempt at "copying". For a fuller discussion of mimesis, see Chapter 8 in Kristeva's *Revolution*, pp 57-61.
[533] Kristeva, *Revolution*, 1984, p 26.
[534] Kristeva, *Revolution,* p 24.
[535] Luce Irigaray states that "woman" only exists as a category as a result of language: "[w]oman does not exist owing to the fact that language […] rules as master" (Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, Cornell University Press, 1988, p 89).

emotional terms, such as "warm" and "gay".[536] These are stereotypes that contrast with the depictions of white English female characters, such as Hester, Anna's stepmother in *Voyage in the Dark*. The following two examples show Anna comparing Hester with Francine, a black servant girl whom she remembers from the West Indies: "I wanted to be black. I always wanted to be black. I was happy because Francine was there […] Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad. She used to sing […]".[537] By contrast, Anna detests whiteness: "I hated being white. Being white and getting like Hester, and all the things you get – old and sad and everything. I kept thinking, 'No…No….No…'".[538]

In the above passages, Anna identifies Hester with unwelcoming England, the place to which she has been forced to move, as a young girl. Francine, on the other hand, is associated with warmth, happiness, comfort, sunshine and gaiety. Francine is colourful, bright and cheerful, whereas Hester is cold, grey and miserable. This binary indicates Anna's identification with the place of the West Indies and its sharp contrast to her sense of alienation from England. As Margaret Joseph points out, the dichotomy between Anna's past in the West Indies and her current life in England is marked by memories of her past, as well as by desire: she wants to be black. This represents Anna's "desire, not just the thought, of being different."[539]

When Anna sees London for the first time from a train, she is with Hester. Anna is struck by the uniformity of the place:

> …This is England Hester said and I watched it through the train-window divided into squares like pocket-handkerchiefs; a small tidy look it had everywhere fenced off from everywhere else […] hundreds thousands of white people white people rushing along the dark houses all alike

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[536] *Voyage*, p 27.
[537] p 27.
[538] p 62 (Rhys's ellipses).
[539] Joseph, *Caliban in Exile*, p 27.

frowning down one after the other all alike all stuck together […][540]

Hester's status as Anna's stepmother indicates not a natural, biological connection between the two, but the sense of imposition, for Hester has become Anna's mother without Anna's consent. This turn of events is not something over which Anna would have had control; she would not have chosen Hester as her stepmother. Francine, however, belongs to the West Indies, the place of Anna's birth, and therefore represents the "mother land". Yet Anna herself is white and has a colonial heritage, which problematises such a simple polarity. Although Anna associates these two characters in this binary way, she seems to do so as a result of her need to identify with the West Indies. She wishes to see the islands as her home, and yet they are not.

The lack of a fixed position, the conflation of two seemingly distinct entities and the fragmentation that presupposes any notion of identity, all prevent mimicry from being a straightforward representation. In Rhys's texts, many of her female protagonists tend to mimic and yearn for the "other". As previously discussed, the dual status of "coloniser" and "colonised" shared by these female protagonists is itself problematic, given the complexities of the white Creole's place in post-Emancipation West Indian history. Moreover, when they find themselves living in England or Paris, they identify more strongly with the so-called "colonised" aspect of their identity. They yearn to be black, yet this can never be; thus they imitate blackness. Such imitation or mimicry, is not, in these instances, done out of parody. Rather, it is an attempt for the "coloniser" to be more like the "colonised". For example, Hester, while visiting Anna in England, expresses her contempt for Francine, a black servant girl, saying to her stepdaughter: "'Exactly like a nigger you talked – and still do. Exactly like that dreadful girl Francine. When you were

[540] *Voyage*, pp 15-16.

jabbering away together in the pantry I never could tell which of you was speaking'".[541]

The above scene marks a conflation between what might be read to be the symbolic order (standard English), and the dialect used by Francine. Hester insists on placing the two categories – the ladylike and the jabbering – as distinct and antithetical to one another. Their conflation, which results from Anna's befriending of the black servant girl, Francine, confuses Hester. It is her inability to distinguish the two voices – which in her mind must be distinct and antagonistic – that causes her anxiety.

As noted previously, Freud's dismissal of so-called "primitive" people is based on his presumptuous fascination with their supposed occupation of "magic". Such a term has connotations of the feminine, the colonised, and the dark, mysterious East. A Eurocentric ideology triggers notions of the exotic "Other" in such terminology, allowing Freud to apply his theories in a biased way.[542] Thus Christophine's use of *obeah* would be categorised as alien, exotic and "other" in relation to the conventional, "western" practice of medicine, the latter operating under the guise of logic, reason and objective observance. However, Toni Morrison states that the concept of magic offers "another way of knowing things", that is not bound by Eurocentric ideology:

> We are very practical people, very down-to-earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things. But to blend those two worlds together at the same time was enhancing, not limiting. And some of those things were 'discredited knowledge' that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was 'discredited'. And also because the press toward upward social mobility would mean to get as far away from that kind of knowledge as possible. That kind of knowledge has a very strong place in my work.[543]

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[541] *Voyage*, p 56.
[542] See Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", in Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton, Willy Maley, eds., *Postcolonial Criticism*, Harlow, Essex, published in the United States by Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., New York, 1997, pp 126-44.
[543] Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: the ancestor as foundation" in Walder (ed.), *Literature in the Modern World*, pp 326-32, p 330.

According to Kristeva's theory, the *chora* is characterised by "discrete quantities of energy" that move through the body of the subject, who is "not yet constituted".[544] In other words, the individual, before reaching full subjectivity in the symbolic order, experiences discrete amounts of energy that flow through her body. These energies – pulsions – flow through her while she is in the process of subjectivity. They are arranged by the various constraints placed against the individual by family and/or society.[545] Kristeva states that the "endless flow of pulsions is gathered" through the *chora*.[546] Although the pulsions belong to the semiotic *chora*, the interdependent nature of the symbolic and the semiotic allows pulsions to be evident in language, as well as being a product of the semiotic. For example, pulsional pressure may be evident in a given literary text, through such instances as breaks, interruptions, inconsistencies, poetic interjections, rhythmic movement, and so on.

Carnival and the *Chora,* Abortion and the Abject

In light of this supposed ability of the *chora* to unsettle language, there are examples of subversion in Rhys's texts. One such example occurs in the carnival scene in *Voyage in the Dark.* Towards the end of the narrative of *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna is recovering from an abortion. In her semi-conscious state, she has a flashback to her childhood in the West Indies of herself and her family spying on a group of Carnival dancers. Anna's being is dispersed and fragmented amongst the various adult voices.

> *I was watching them from between the slats of the jalousies dancing along dressed in red and blue and yellow the women with their dark necks and arms covered with white powder – dancing along to concertina-music dressed in all the colours of the rainbow and the sky so blue – you can't expect niggers to behave like white people all the time Uncle Bo said it's asking too much of human nature – look at that fat old*

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[544] Kristeva, *Revolution*, p 25.
[545] *Revolution*, p 25. Spivak criticises Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis on the basis that both presuppose a value judgment of the family in general, and the nuclear family in particular (Spivak, "Echo", in Landry and Maclean, p 59).
[546] Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p 161.

> *woman Hester said just look at her – oh yes she's having a go too Uncle Bo said they all have a go they don't mind – their voices were going up and down – I was looking out of the window and I knew why the masks were laughing and I heard the concertina-music going*
> 'I'm giddy,' I said.[547]

The above extract reveals the carnival scene flashback as a pulsional pressure working on the main narrative. The main narrative is of Anna in the present tense, in a semi-conscious state, recovering from her abortion, and the pulsional pressure applied is the flashback memory of the carnival, a harkening back to her childhood in the West Indies, and thus an awakening of what Lacan would refer to as the unconscious.[548] According to Lacan, two distinct states of mind exist, the waking and the dreaming.[549] He states that to accede to the imaginary, that which is embodied by the dream state, rather than to what is offered by the waking state, is a "profound *méconnaissance*".[550] However, Anna straddles both the unconscious and the conscious states. Her current, waking existence is influenced by the images of her dream-like memory, yet it is also her state of giddiness that heightens the vividness of the images in her memory. Thus the two states of mind, dreaming and waking, are blurred.

Sally Minogue and Andrew Palmer state that Anna's response to her abortion takes the form of "delirious dreams or visions", representing the individual's isolation "from the common social body, trapped in her own angst".[551] They go on, however, to argue that such a representation of abortion has a subversive function.[552] As Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik point out, the above scene engages a "conflation of masquerade with Anna's experience of abortion" which:

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[547] *Voyage*, p 157.
[548] Lacan, *Concepts*, p 68.
[549] p 74.
[550] p 74. The word is translated with several meanings: "(total) ignorance", "lack of knowledge", "misreading (of)", "undervaluing (of)" and "disregard (of)" (M H Corréard, & V Grundy, eds., *The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p 524).
[551] Minogue and Palmer, "Confronting the Abject", p 105.
[552] "Confronting the Abject", p 105.

> allows her to half perceive the parallel between the hierarchical and oppressive social system of the West Indies, based in colour and deriving from a slave society, with that of England in the years 1912-14 in which women are exploited and constrained.[553]

The above scene embodies several layers of voyeurism, blurring the distinction between gazer and gazed at. Anna watches her family and the Carnival dancers, the coloniser and the colonised. However, the latter subvert the gazer-gazed at relationship by deliberately making themselves the subject of the gaze. Their display has inverted the expected hierarchy by making a bold and daring display of white parody. Their masks are white with exaggeratedly large, blue eyes, gaudy red lips, caricaturing whiteness as a symbol of their oppression. Through this subversive act, they defy any attempt at categorisation or victimisation in being the subject of a colonial gaze. Anna's family look into the mirror by watching their antithesis, the Carnival dancers, and search for a difference in an "Other". Instead, they find their selves othered. As Mikhail Bakhtin states in *Rabelais and His World*, the carnival "does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" and it "is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it".[554] Self and Other are no longer two distinct categories, but incorporate elements of each other, challenging the notion of a fixed identity and the restrictive polarity that results.

The above scene draws attention to Kristeva's concept of the abject, in which experiences that emphasise the "messy openness of the body", such as maternity and death, are viewed as horrible, such a view being imposed upon women by the patriarchal symbolic order.[555] As Kristeva explains in *Powers of Horror*, the abject does not exist as

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[553] Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Landscapes of Desire: Metaphors in Modern Women's Fiction*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, p 160.
[554] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 1965, *trans.* Héléne Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1984, p 7.
[555] Sally Minogue and Andrew Palmer, "Confronting the Abject: Women and Dead Babies in Modern English Fiction", *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 29.3, Winter 2006, pp. 103-125, p 105.

object, nor does it exist as subject.[556] It is not "an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire", nor it is one's "correlative".[557] The abject is necessary for the existence of oneself, and is therefore described as "[t]he primers of my culture".[558] The abject is that which one strongly defines as the *not*-being of oneself. This negation is also marked by the "meaninglessness" of the abject.[559] These negative attributes, however, do not diminish the abject; rather, the nothingness which characterises the abject makes the abject all the more threatening:

> The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. […] Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me.[560]

The abject is "meaningless" because it does not fit into a definite category as a self or an other, as a subject or an object. Rather than being an object or an "other", against which one defines oneself, the abject exists outside of any self/other polarity, and it is this lack of classification, this "meaninglessness" that makes it so unsettling. Kristeva gives an example of a child who experiences abjection in rejecting curdled milk. The rejection is marked by screaming, retching and other bodily reactions, and amounts to the rejection of those who offered the milk to the child – its parents.[561] As the milk is "not an 'other' for 'me' [the child]", who exists "only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*".[562] As the parents occupy the child's entire world, Kristeva explains, a rejection of that which is offered by the parents marks a rejection of the parents and in turn, the child's rejection of

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[556] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, transl. Leon S Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, originally published as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, Editions du Seuil, 1980, p 1.
[557] *Horror*, p 1.
[558] *Horror*, p 2.
[559] *Horror*, p 2.
[560] pp 1-2.
[561] Kristeva, *Horror*, p 3.
[562] *Horror*, p 3.

itself.

Anna repeatedly describes herself as feeling "giddy" in the scene from which the above passage is taken.[563] It is this giddiness that marks her own abjection, the nausea that she experiences as a result of lapsing between her childhood flashback and her current reality, the latter of which has her hovering between life and death, losing her unborn child, rather than giving birth to it. This reflects Kristeva's point that abjection marks a rejection that is reflected in one's own body with such phenomena as "gagging", "dizziness", "nausea" and the deep desire *not* to assimilate.[564] As discussed, Anna chooses to have an abortion, therefore rejecting the unborn child as a "weight of meaninglessness about which there is nothing insignificant".[565]

Notably, the West Indian Carnival was a sanctioned event, in which the black Creoles were given permission to dance and parade in the streets for three days.[566] In this sense, the empowering, subversive aspect of the Carnival seems diluted by the fact that this is not a wholly rebellious act on the part of the black Creoles. They are permitted by the state to perform. Yet in the scene indicated from *Voyage in the Dark*, the white Creoles hide from the Carnival dancers, spying on them rather than watching them openly as spectators. The white Creoles are afraid of *being seen* to be watching the black Carnival dancers. Hence, spectatorship in this instance is not empowering for the white Creoles; rather, it is something they feel they must do inconspicuously. Their own identities as well as those of the Carnival dancers intermingle and exchange elements of each other, so that the white Creole, the gazer-cum-voyeur, is shamed by what he sees: himself as viewed through the eyes of the Other. This identity, rather than being imposed

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[563] "'I'm a bit giddy,' I said. 'I'm awfully giddy" (*Voyage*, p 155); "'I'm giddy,' I said. 'I'm awfully giddy" (p 157); "'I'm giddy,' I said" (p 157); "'*I'm awfully giddy*'" (p 157).
[564] p 3.
[565] p 2.
[566] Balutansky and Sourieau, eds., *Caribbean Creolization*, pp 138-139.

upon the Other, is thrust back at the white Creole by the black Carnival dancers.

Furthermore, the Self/Other polarity is inverted, portraying and enacting whiteness as gaudy, colourful, loud, grotesque and repulsive. Thus whiteness becomes alien, strange, ugly and Other, because the black Carnival dancers have taken their own perception of whiteness and exaggerated this image, thereby inverting the balance of power. Hence the categories of "Self" and "Other" become blurred and conflated, as do those of gazer and gazed-at. To view one's own identity as against a supposed Other is shown to be problematic. Homi Bhabha states:-

> In place of that "I" […] there emerges the challenge to see what is invisible, the look that cannot 'see me', a certain problem of the object of the gaze that constitutes a problematic referent for the language of the Self.[567]

Moreover, the Carnival itself is not a straightforward example of subversion, where the black, oppressed Other mimics its white, oppressive counterpart. The Caribbean Carnival began as a parody of blackness, in which white French settlers wore black masks, dancing and parading, in order to objectify their black subordinates. [568] Eventually, this practice was appropriated by the black Creoles of the islands, and the nature of the parody was completely reversed.[569] In the passage cited in *Voyage in the Dark*, such a complexity of selfhood and otherness highlights the lack of an "original moment", for the parodying and objectification is performed by both sides. Bhabha states that mimicry is in a constant process of continually producing "its slippage, its excess, its difference".[570] Hence mimicry reveals itself as a "*process* of disavowal".[571]

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[567] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity", p 47.
[568] Balutansky and Sourieau, eds., *Caribbean Creolization*, p 136.
[569] *Caribbean Creolization*, p 136.
[570] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse", in *The Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994, 1997, pp 85-92, p 86.
[571] "Of Mimicry and Man", p 86 (my emphasis).

Likewise, Lacan states that there is no "universal seer"[572], no "ultimate gaze", but that the notion of such an "ultimate gaze" is "illusory".[573] He states that although we are related to things in our world through vision, there is always a slippage:

> In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze.[574]

The above passage indicates the gaze as that which "slips" and "passes" in one's experience of representations through vision. This expresses the notion that one is related to the outside world, and one's relation with that outside world is mediated through one's vision. Thus one does not have direct access to the world and its objects and phenomena. Lacan notes, rather, that the outside world is understood as "representation". The gaze, although it can never be definitely placed, constitutes an attempt to understand the outside world through such representation, which creates an impression of the real. As previously noted, this process begins with reaching beyond the mirror stage and coming to differentiate between oneself and the outside world, between oneself and others. Given that visual perception is formed by representations, which themselves are informed by a socially constructed understanding of the world and of oneself, there can never be an inherently existing "self", nor can there be an inherently existing "other".

Therefore, the gaze serves as an attempt to fulfil a lack that is created when one reaches beyond the mirror stage. As Kristeva notes, when the child moves beyond the mirror stage and is severed from the Oedipal connection to the mother, the child is characterised by a lack, that is, the loss of such an all-encompassing bond.[575] The gaze, therefore, constitutes an attempt to restore that lack, a concept that lies at the core of

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[572] Lacan, *Concepts*, p 74.
[573] p 77.
[574] p 73.
[575] Kristeva, *Revolution* p 47.

psychoanalytical theory.[576] When the child is detached from the mother through entry into the symbolic order, the child loses his dependence upon her. Kristeva notes that this lack (*manque*) is a "perceived lack", which "makes the phallic function a symbolic function - *the* symbolic function".[577]

Thus the encounter between Antoinette and Tia does not constitute two individual gazes, one from Antoinette to Tia and one from Tia to Antoinette. Rather, the point of origin of these gazes cannot be determined. That is, it is problematic to posit either Tia or Antoinette as gazer/gazed at. A parallel can be drawn here with Lacan's analogy of a woman being seen. She is satisfied in her awareness of being looked at, but this satisfaction can only exist if those who look at her do not reveal their knowledge that she is aware of them looking at her.[578] Similarly, the split subjects of both Antoinette and Tia create a fragmentation of their gaze, eliminating the possibility of a gaze that is "all-seeing" and "Platonic".[579] Lacan calls this interaction between two subjects "mimicry".

As previously noted, the colonial "I" is split and ambivalent, lacking a "pure", independent existence, as it relies heavily upon the colonised other for its own sense of identity. This is evident in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, when the colonial "I" of Rochester is split and diffused within the speech of the once-colonised Christophine. A scene occurs between Rochester and Christophine, in which Christophine's words are echoed inside his head. The scene takes place shortly after Antoinette has outwardly taken on the appearance of a zombie, having little response to outer stimuli, crying and sleeping alternately and often, and drinking heavily.[580] Rochester blames Christophine for

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[576] See Freud from *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and other works*, transl. Strachey, James, ed. Richards, Angela, Penguin Books, London, 1953, 1977, pp 331-343; Lacan, *Concepts*, pp 76, 83-85, 89, 206, 214-215; Easthope, *Contemporary Film Theory*, p 37; Kristeva, *Revolution*, 1984, pp 17, 95-98.
[577] Kristeva, *Revolution* p 47.
[578] Lacan, *Concepts*, p 75.
[579] Lacan, *Concepts*, p 75.
[580] Christophine explains to Rochester: "'When they get like that,' she said, ' first they must cry, then they must sleep'" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 124).

Antoinette's condition, and berates her for "poisoning" him.[581] This scene, which is interspersed with dialogue, as well as echoes of Christophine's voice in Rochester's mind, occurs in the section of the novel that is narrated primarily by Rochester. Yet it also indicates a pulsional pressure from someone who lies outside of the patriarchal structure – Christophine, the black woman who cannot read or write English, who walks out of the text without looking back.[582] It is as if she cannot be contained by the written word, that is, the symbolic order.

Belonging to the realm of the *chora*, Christophine "unsettles"[583] the text with her "poetic language"[584], reducing Rochester to mere inward response:

> Now every word she said was echoed, echoed loudly in my head.
> 'So that you can leave her alone.'
> (*Leave her alone*)
> 'Not telling her why.'
> (*Why?*)
> 'No more love, eh?'
> (*No more love*) […]
> '[…] I don't meddle in that for *béké*. I tell her it's foolishness.'
> (*Foolishness foolishness*).[585]

The above passage places Rochester's echoed thoughts in italics, thereby subordinating his speech to an inferior position in relation to that of Christophine's. Her pulsional pressure upon the symbolic order allows her identity to emerge, as it disrupts and unsettles the main narrative voice, which is, in this section of the novel, the voice of Rochester. Rochester's voice is confined to his inner thoughts, apart from a few occasional statements within the passage. As his voice is thus internalised, he lacks the power that Echo in *Narcissus* had: although Echo was only able to repeat what was said to

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[581] Christophine has used *obeah* on Rochester in order that he may love Antoinette again (*Sargasso Sea*, pp 97, 112-113).
[582] *Sargasso Sea*, p 133. See also Joya Uraizee, "'She Walked Away'" pp 261-372.
[583] Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p 162.
[584] Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject", Lisse, Netherlands: The Peter De Ridder Press, 1975, reprinted from Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., *The Tell-Tale Sign: A Survey of Semiotics*, Lisse, The Peter de Ridder Press, 1975, pp 47-55, p 6.
[585] *Sargasso Sea*, p 126.

her, she had a voice.[586] Rochester, by contrast, cannot truly speak his mind, but is condemned to suffer his thoughts in silence. His words, therefore, are merely echoes of echoes. They echo Christophine's spoken words, and they also echo his own thoughts. Thus his double subordination is evident in his words being both parenthesised and italicised.

The passage also allows for a female subject identity in both Christophine and in Antoinette, for later in the passage, Antoinette's thoughts come into the text in italics: "(*I lay awake all night long after they were asleep, and as soon as it was light I got up and dressed and saddled Preston. And I came to you. Oh Christophine. O Pheena, Pheena, help me*)".[587]

Antoinette's voice emerges here as an echo of Rochester's thoughts, over which he lacks control. Rather than the male voice speaking for Antoinette, it is Antoinette who speaks through Rochester, as the pulsional pressures of Antoinette's voice disrupt Rochester's narrative. Moreover, Antoinette's voice is an echo of two different incidents, both of which involve her riding her horse, Preston. The first incident occurs when Antoinette rides off to see Christophine, in hope of an *obeah* aphrodisiac. This scene cuts into Rochester's section of the narrative, and is told in the first person by Antoinette.[588] The second echo of the above quotation occurs shortly after Rochester has had sex with Amélie, aware that his wife can hear them in the adjoining room. Rochester thinks: "I lay and listened for the sound I knew I should hear, the horse's hoofs as my wife left the house".[589]

The italicised voice above (ending "*O Pheena, Pheena, help me*)" forms both

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[586] For the potentially subversive power of Echo in Ovid's myth, see Spivak, "Echo" (1993), in Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, eds., *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, New York, London: Routledge, 1996, pp 175-202.
[587] *Sargasso Sea*, p 127.
[588] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 89-98.
[589] p 116.

Antoinette's unconscious, as well as Rochester's unconscious thoughts.[590] Rochester has attempted to repress Antoinette's voice, partly by naming her, by refusing to love her, and by being unfaithful to her sexually. However, her voice cannot be repressed, but acts as an unconscious voice that haunts Rochester's thoughts through guilt. This repression forms a split between Rochester's desires and his actions: he feels guilty, but he continues to mistreat his wife. Antoinette straddles both sides of this binary within Rochester's subjectivity, existing as a speaking subject by "speaking" to Rochester's unconscious. When Christophine confronts him, he is overcome by guilt, and the words she speaks to him echo as a resonance of his ill treatment of Antoinette.

Moreover, Antoinette's voice emerging into Rochester's speech also prevents a role reversal between "masculine" and "feminine", in terms of the way in which Rochester's voice has been suppressed in his "dialogue" with Christophine. The echoes of Christophine's voice, as well as Antoinette's italicised voice, form the unconscious of both Rochester and Antoinette. Antoinette goes to Christophine for help, but Rochester "hears" Antoinette's thoughts in his mind.

The Ambivalent Colonial "I"

As Bhabha points out, the colonising Self cannot control the identity of the so-called colonised Other, but the Self's construction of a binary that posits Self against Other in such a power structure creates the illusion of colonial superiority.[591] Although the mask highlights the constructed nature of identity, there is no essence behind this mask, thereby unsettling authority.[592]

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's husband condescends towards her for daring to

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[590] p 127.
[591] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity", p 47.
[592] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", p 88.

compare St Pierre with Paris:

> She seemed pleased when I complimented her on her dress and told me she had it made in St Pierre, Martinique. 'They call this fashion *à la Joséphine*.'
> 'You talk of St Pierre as though it were Paris,' I said.
> 'But it is the Paris of the West Indies.'[593]

In both of the above cases, Bhabha's notion of a "'partial' presence" is reflected in Antoinette's identity as seen through the coloniser, Rochester.[594] In this state of existence, the colonial subject, also known as the colonised, is perceived by the coloniser as "*almost the same, but not quite*".[595] Bhabha later changes this phrase to "[*a*]*lmost the same but not white*".[596] In this sense, one may regard the colonised as being incomplete, for s/he is dependent upon the coloniser for a sense of identity. This is what leads to the colonised having a "'partial' presence".[597] However, upon closer examination, it is evident that although the colonised may be dependent upon the coloniser, this dependency is based upon a limitation of the coloniser. Bhabha cites an address made by Sir Edward Cust in 1839, in which Cust states that a colony would "not be a colony for a single hour if she could maintain an independent station".[598] In this sense, the word "colony" is defined as that which is dependent upon its coloniser, and to regard a colony as having any independence contradicts such a definition, thereby acting as what Cust calls a "mockery".[599] In terms of Cust's definition of a colony, therefore, one may see the colonised as characterised by its tendency to mimic its authoritative counterpart, the coloniser. If the colonised is seen as a reflective mimicry of its coloniser, then any incompleteness conveyed by the colonised is a reflection of such incompleteness as

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[593] *Sargasso Sea*, p 67.
[594] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", p 86.
[595] "Of Mimicry and Man", p 86 (Bhabha's emphasis).
[596] p 89 (Bhabha's emphasis).
[597] p 86.
[598] Sir Edward Cust, 'Reflections on West African affairs…addressed to the Colonial Office', Hatchard, London, 1839, as quoted in Bhabha, Of Mimicry and Man, p 85.
[599] Cust quoted in "Of Mimicry and Man", p 85.

inherent in the authoritative system of the coloniser. As the colonised mimics the coloniser, the latter takes on attributes of the former. This mimicry points to the similarities between coloniser and colonised, much to the threat and annoyance of the coloniser, causing the two categories to become conflated and indistinct. It creates what Bhabha calls a "menace" because this mimicry undermines the authority of the mimicked, thereby making a mockery of it.[600]

In order to more clearly understand the point Bhabha is making here, it is worth briefly examining his notion of ambivalence. As Bhabha states, the relationship between the "coloniser" and the "colonised", is not a confrontational situation. Rather, the two are inextricably linked, creating a destabilising effect for the "coloniser":

> [T]he image of post-Enlightenment man [is] tethered to, *not* confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being.[601]

Here Bhabha expresses his notion of ambivalence, which forms one of the fundamental concerns of his theoretical writing.[602] This theory, expressed succinctly in the above passage, is partially a response to Said's *Orientalism*, which stated that the "Orient" is nothing more than a construction that results from the West's projection of its own ideals, ideology and desire to control its antithetical Other.[603] Bhabha noted that this totalising approach was far too simplistic.[604] In Said's theory, Orientalism results from the construction of knowledge. That is, the West's understanding of the East is based upon the former's prejudices of the latter, and the need to dominate and assert power with the justification of empirical "facts".[605] Such facts, Said states, would have actually been

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[600] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", pp 86, 88.
[601] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity", p 44 (Bhabha's emphasis).
[602] Bhabha, "Interrogating Identity"; See also "Of Mimicry and Man", pp 85-92; "Signs, pp 163-184.
[603] "Orientalism Reconsidered", Said, p 131.
[604] Young, *Colonial Desire*, p 161.
[605] Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", p 128.

the result of biased opinion.[606] Bhabha's development of Said's theory is the notion that not only is colonial discourse the result of constructed knowledge, but it is also accompanied by fantasy and desire.[607]

Fantasy and desire, according to Bhabha, reveal an ambivalence that characterises colonial discourse. For on the one hand, the coloniser is repulsed by the colonised, identifying himself as "civilised" and therefore antithetical to the "savage". Paradoxically, the coloniser desires the colonised, but this desire is repressed. Ambivalence is characterised by feeling a hidden, suppressed desire towards that which one abhors.[608] This ambivalence may be partly a result of the coloniser's insecurity over his own status. Thus it becomes apparent that what was formerly marginalised, peripheral and "other" actually forms an ambivalence that characterises the centre.[609] Hence the coloniser, positing himself as antithetical to the colonial other, is revealed as desiring his so-called antithesis. If such a desire is repressed, it may be argued that it represents elements of the colonial self, which that self is trying to deny. Moreover, using historical examples, including missionary records and governmental decrees, Bhabha notes that the coloniser becomes decentred from his position of authority.[610] This is because the coloniser is placed in a situation that is alien to himself, in which his own rules and ideologies – which he had maintained as universal – are challenged and unsettled. In the example footnoted below, it is the colonial who is seen by the colonised as barbaric, an inversion of the colonial's perception of the colonised. Thus colonial self and colonised other reveal themselves as incorporating elements of each other in a hybridity, rather than

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606 "Orientalism Reconsidered", p 128.

607 Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", p 128. See also Freud from *On Sexuality*, pp 331-343; Lacan, *Concepts*, pp 76, 83-85, 89, 206, 214-215; Easthope, 1993, p 37; Kristeva, *Revolution*, 1984, pp 17, 95-98.

608 Fantasy and desire play an important role in psychoanalytical theory. For more details, see Lacan's theory of the mirror stage and the role that fantasy plays within it.

609 Young, *Colonial Desire*, p 161.

610 Bhabha, "Signs", pp 165-6. Bhabha discusses the phenomenon of Indian people learning the Bible in Hindi, as part of the "civilizing mission", and being horrified at the carnivorous (barbarity) of the white English colonials (pp 165-6).

occupying two discrete, polarised positions.

Therefore, in the case of Antoinette and Rochester, if Rochester is interpreted as the coloniser and Antoinette the colonised,[611] Rochester himself feels threatened by Antoinette's mimicry of Englishness. Rochester regards Paris as the "original" city of fashion, by virtue of its European location. He considers anything else as a cheap imitation. St Pierre, therefore, is not a place that impresses Rochester, in the way that it does Antoinette, for Rochester is positing himself as the superior being in his relationship with Antoinette, identifying his own cultural reference points as "original" and "authentic". He regards anything that is unfamiliar to him, such as St Pierre, as alien, and therefore threatening. When Antoinette informs Rochester that her dress was made for her in St Pierre, and when she proudly tells him the name of the fashion used in its creation, she is adopting a tone of snobbery that Rochester finds unappealing. It is unappealing because it threatens and mocks Rochester's sense of authority by revealing his own ambivalence. For although he is English, he travels to the West Indies and marries the white Creole Antoinette in order to secure his fortune. Thus Rochester's identity is torn between England and the West Indies, between Englishness and something "other", and it is this hybridity that unsettles his sense of self. In Rochester's view, it would be considered "proper" or "normal" for an English woman to speak in such a way about a dress made for her in Paris. But the West Indies, Antoinette's Creole heritage, and her casual reference to fashion in her part of the world, are a disturbing incongruity to Rochester. The incongruity lies in his recognition of a cultural signifier that takes place outside of the context that he would consider as the centre and the norm.

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[611] This positing, by virtue of Antoinette's Creole heritage, is problematic, for as a white Creole she also has a heritage as coloniser. However, in the relationship between Antoinette and Rochester, the latter has the greater economic power, by virtue of his marriage to Antoinette, through which he receives full right to her legacy (see *Sargasso Sea*, p 91). In addition, the white Creoles in Rhys's texts are regarded as inferior, both by the black Creoles and by the English. Thus Antoinette assumes the role of colonised in relation to Rochester, the coloniser, a relation which itself is prone to slippage, as noted.

As Bhabha states, those who mimic (i.e., the "mimic men") emerge as "part-objects of a metonymy of colonial desire".[612] Thus St Pierre becomes "the Paris of the West Indies", and the presence of Paris within this new hybridisation undermines the authority of Paris and all that it represents to Rochester, the coloniser. "Paris" is thus reduced to a cultural stereotype, and Antoinette, in mimicking this as a cultural signifier of Rochester, attains such a stereotypical quality. As a "part-object" of Rochester's cultural identity, Antoinette "alienate[s] the modality of normality".[613] What was seen as "normal" to Rochester now becomes alienated from him, and he begins to become alienated from himself as Antoinette emerges as an "'inappropriate' colonial subject".[614]

In this sense, Antoinette's mimicry "*repeats* rather than *re-presents*", creating a "diminishing perspective" that has a destabilising effect for Rochester.[615] The more the repetition occurs, the less clear the original perspective becomes, and the farther away one moves from that original point of focus. Such an original moment, as Bhabha points out, never was "original", for it always encompassed that which it tries to repress – its antithetical Other.[616] In order for Rochester to have an identity as coloniser, English, male, superior, European, he must repress everything that he believes to be antithetical to these significations.[617] Yet, these so-called "other" attributes, for example, savagery, blackness, a non-European, non-white identity, inferiority, the feminine, all must exist in Rochester in some form. If identity is multifarious and split, then there is a lack of a "pure" "Self", and a "pure" "Other".

Moreover, Rochester's presence in the West Indies represents a form of colonialism

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[612] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", p 88.
[613] "Of Mimicry and Man", p 88.
[614] p 88.
[615] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", p 88.
[616] p 88.
[617] For analyses of the use of repetition in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, see: Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, pp 96-100; Joseph, *Caliban in Exile*, p 34; and Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel*, 215.

fuelled by a capitalist urge for maximising personal monetary profit. As previously noted, Antoinette's status as heir of a plantation owner is a dwindling one, given the recent passing of the Emancipation Act; moreover, she loses her wealth to Rochester when she marries him. Hence Rochester's exploitation of Antoinette is analogous to what Deleuze and Guattari call the "deterritorialising" and subsequent "reterritorialising" that occur in the process of colonialism.[618] In this sense, Rochester represents the capitalist project and its relentless desire to maximise profit. In the encounter described above, as well as throughout his narrative, Rochester constantly denies the importance of Antoinette's cultural identity. He dismisses Christophine as a careless black woman who is prone to superstition and meddling. He stereotypically and condescendingly portrays various "minor" black characters. Such representations betray Rochester as the exploiting capitalist. For example, when Christophine confronts him towards the end of his narrative section, he laughs before she asks him: "'You laugh at me? Why you laugh at me?' 'Of course I laugh at you – you ridiculous old woman. I don't mean to discuss my affairs with you any longer. Or your mistress'".[619] Later, he thinks, dismissively: "She's as mad as the other".[620] When Baptiste enters the room shortly after Rochester has slept with Amélie, Rochester thinks: "Baptiste and I stared at each other. I thought that his large protuberant eyes and his expression of utter bewilderment were comical".[621]

As indicated, Rochester seeks to "deterritorialise" Antoinette and all the non-English people who live on the islands, in order to subjugate and dominate them. His subsequent "reterritorialising" is evident in his renaming of Antoinette as Bertha, and the fact that he takes her to England against her will and locks her in his attic. These violent acts that

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[618] Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Vol. 1, 1972, transl. Hurley, Robert; Seem, Mark and Lane, Helen, New York: Viking, 1977, pp 94, 169.
[619] *Sargasso Sea*, p 131.
[620] p 132.
[621] p 120.

Rochester commits against his wife form Rochester's "reterritorialising" of Antoinette's person, for they restructure her identity to such a degree that she is no longer the Antoinette the reader knew earlier in the narrative. At first, she is wild and violent. But when Christophine comforts her, she cries, sleeps and eventually becomes passive and unresponsive.[622] In this sense Rochester has stripped Antoinette of her identity, and through his emotional and psychological abuse of her, has forced a new identity upon her. Thus, Rochester's tendency to degrade Antoinette and others in the West Indies reveals a lack on his part. He desires that which is antithetical to him. Likewise, the encounter between Antoinette and Tia previously described indicates this lack. Antoinette does not actually see herself, but feels as though she has. It was "as if" she saw herself in Tia's face. As Bhabha states, there is continual slippage between the identities of both coloniser and colonised, in that there is no original moment. [623]

As Nancy Chodorow points out, assumptions about the inferiority of the feminine run contrary to Freud's hypothesis that "woman is made, not born".[624] This aspect of Freud's theory should logically prevent any notion of biological essentialism, such as the "natural" inferiority of women. The assumption that women are inherently inferior to men applies both to the nature of the female, as well as to her treatment by the male in sexual relationships. For example, Freud argues in "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes"[625] that the sexual interest that does eventually emerge in the young boy is only the result of the male fear of castration.[626] As a result of this fear, the male "recollects or *repeats* it, it arouses a terrible storm of emotion in him

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[622] *Sargasso Sea*, pp 120, 124, 136, 137.
[623] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", p 86. For a discussion of Parry's critique of Bhabha's and Spivak's theories, on the grounds that they are out of touch with socioeconomic reality and social change, see Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, London, New York: Routledge, 2004, p 43.
[624] Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytical Theory*, 1989, p 174. See also Beauvoir, "Woman and the Other", p 301.
[625] Freud, from *On Sexuality*, pp 331-343.
[626] p 336.

and forces him to believe in the reality of the threat which he has hitherto laughed at."[627] Likewise, one may see this repetition as a form of mimicry, based on a fear of one's identity being threatened. As Bhabha states, through mimicry, the identity of the coloniser is threatened, as it emerges that aspects of the coloniser exist in the colonised. This prevents any "pure" existence of either coloniser or colonised, and destabilises the polarity between the two. In the case of Freud's example, one may conclude that the male feels threatened by the female genitals, and so must "repeat" this symbol of castration, both identifying with and alienating himself from it.

Mimicry conflates the object of mimicry and the one who mimics, thus challenging the notion of a fixed identity. In the scene between Rochester and Antoinette cited above, Rochester himself "repeats" Antoinette and all that she symbolises: he marries her, lives with her for a time in the West Indies, takes all of her wealth, renames her, and returns with her to England where he imprisons her. Were it not for Antoinette's money, Rochester would have no status as a gentleman in England. It is her wealth that allows him to maintain such a lifestyle in Thornfield Hall, yet by locking her in the attic, he represses this in much the same way that the unconscious is repressed. Bertha Mason is now the madwoman, the cause of Rochester's current existence and indeed his troubled state of mind. By confining her, he attempts to deny the importance of her role and the fact that he is entirely indebted to her for his current state. The latter manifests itself both in terms of his wealth and status, but also in terms of the emotional detachment he develops as a result of the *obeah* spell, and his belief in Antoinette's impending madness. By keeping Antoinette, rather than abandoning or destroying her, Rochester recognises, although reluctantly, her integral role in his life. Although at first horrified by her

[627] p 336 (my emphasis).

madness, he keeps her as a possession, something over which he must have dominance, in order to tackle her perceived threat against him.[628]

The complexity of Rhys's characters is unique to their cultural and social context. Their "split" identity includes that of the West Indies, England and (on occasion) France. Thus, a comparative and integrated analysis of both Kristeva's *chora* and Lacan's theories of subject identity, have examined ways in which these protagonists identify themselves and are identified by others. Language, the mirror stage and the symbolic order have all been important considerations in such an analysis. Rhys's characters reveal the most about themselves through their inner thoughts, their flashbacks and psychic visions. All of these act as pulsional pressure upon the main narrative, and allow such characters to emerge in brief but intense outbursts of female subjectivity. Although, as noted above, the characters themselves seem ignorant of their own identities, ironic revelations of such identities develop for the reader in their complex, fragmented identities and in their ability to mimic and to mock.

[628] Rochester thinks, "I'll take her in my arms, my lunatic. She's mad, but *mine*, *mine*" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 136).

4. Clothes, Hair and Make-up: Performativity in Jean Rhys' Early Novels[629]

The female protagonists in Jean Rhys's novels are often unable to fit into the society in which they find themselves. As has been previously noted, this is attributed to their lack of family connections, money and status, and to the lack of a fixed racial identity.[630] In all of Rhys's novels, there are varying degrees of performativity enacted by the female protagonists as well as by the secondary characters, male and female. Marya Zelli in *Quartet*, Julia Martin in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark*, and Sasha Jensen in *Good Morning, Midnight*, all perform their identities in an attempt to fit into their given social structures. This chapter will examine performativity in these early novels.[631] It will examine the degree to which performativity restricts as well as liberates these characters from their designated roles. They are acutely aware of the various roles designated for them, in terms of age, race and gender. However, playing along to these roles at times liberates them, whilst on other occasions serves to re-inscribe hierarchical social codes that work against them as marginalised women.

Anne-Marie Fortier defines performativity as the "reiteration of social norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer".[632] This is partially evident in the texts' emphasis on hair, clothes and make-up. These outward, superficial aspects of identity draw attention to the constructed and malleable nature of identity itself, in terms of race, gender and age. As Ma Dolores Martinez Reventós states in "The Functions of Clothes in

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[629] I am indebted to Danielle Honoré for the phrase "Clothes, hair and make-up": "It's all we girls ever talk about – clothes, hair and make-up" (Edinburgh, 1999; said with irony).

[630] See my first three chapters for discussions on the ethnic make-up of Jean Rhys's female protagonists. For information specifically about the white Creole, see my third chapter.

[631] Although performativity is evident in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is more akin to the female gaze and mirroring, both of which are discussed in my second and third chapters. Moreover, these early novels can be studied collectively in terms of their social context, in which post-war alienation and loss of identity led to greater materialism and placed physical appearance in high regard. See Hagley, "Ageing" p 115.

[632] Fortier, "Re-Membering Places", p 43.

Jean Rhys' Fiction":

> In Jean Rhys's fiction clothes play a very important role, which is not represented as being merely ornamental, that is, frivolous […] rather the opposite: clothes always function in this narrative in relation to issues of female subjectivity and identity.[633]

Rhys's protagonists strive to fit into English and/or respectable society, but are unable to do so in any permanent sense.[634] This does not mark an inherent disadvantage in terms of an indeterminate racial and social standing, but their society's inability to see beyond its prejudices, which include the inability to recognise flexibility in social classes, along with the constructed nature of social hierarchies and the disdain with which older single women are regarded.[635]

Rhys's critics have tended to attribute her protagonists' inability to successfully perform their identities as English or black, that is, their inability to belong to one of these cultural groups, to the fact that these characters have ambivalent racial origins.[636] It is the case that they are unable to fully belong either to respectable English society or to black West Indian culture, between both of which they find themselves torn. However, to attribute such a lack of belonging to mixed racial origins is to fail to recognise the constructed nature and changeability of identity itself. This outlook assumes that racial identity is fixed and not subject to change. Jean Rhys's characters, the female protagonists and the male and female secondary characters, all perform their identities to varying degrees and for different reasons.

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[633] Ma Dolores Martinez, Reventós, "The Functions of Clothes in Jean Rhys' Fiction", *Proceedings of the XIXth International Conference of AEDEAN, Vigo,* Universidade de Vigo, Universidad de Murcia, 1996, pp 397-400, p 397.

[634] Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, however, is the most ambivalent of all of Rhys's female protagonists, as she relates to the black Creoles, including Christophine and Tia, but is also proud of being white. For my discussions on Antoinette's ethnic ambivalence, see my Chapters 1 and 3.

[635] See Port, "'Money, for the night is coming': Jean Rhys and Gendered Economies of Ageing", 2001; and Hagley, "Ageing", 1988.

[636] For example, Londsdale, in "The Female Child", classifies Rhys's heroines' cultural hybridity as a "confused awareness of cultural identity" (p 62; see also pp 65, 67 and 68); Urmila Seshagiri, "Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix: Jean Rhys and the Evolution of the English Novel in the Twentieth Century", *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 13.3, 2006, pp 487-505, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Before examining textual examples from Rhys's early novels, a brief outline of performativity will help to illuminate an understanding of the characters within these texts. As Judith Butler states in *Gender Trouble*, the term "women" is problematic, in that it "denotes a common identity", and is not exhaustive: "If one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is".[637] She then goes on to critique de Beauvoir's view of "woman as the other", against Irigaray's theory of "phallogentricism", which suggests that any power imbalance between male and female is based on a masculine system of language.[638] Significantly, Butler draws attention to Irigaray's point that "woman" is not the sex she is designated to be; rather, she is the "masculine sex parading in the mode of otherness."[639] Thus, Rhys's female protagonists in her early novels are performing their identities as feminine, wearing clothes that will make them look "feminine" within a male discourse. Their clothes are a metaphor for the "phallogentric" system of signification, which traps them into playing a male-determined role of femininity.

"Orange-trees" and the Dying Mother(land)

As previously discussed, the female protagonists of Jean Rhys's early novels come from ambivalent social and ethnic/racial backgrounds. They were either born in a country with a hot climate, such as the West Indies, or have their roots in a hot climate, as is the case for Julia, whose mother is from Brazil. On her deathbed, Julia's mother is described as "[d]ark-skinned".[640] Later, Julia tells her sister Norah that she thinks she understood what her mother had muttered earlier: "'Yes. It sounded like "orange-trees". She must have

[637] Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire", in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Linda J Nicholson, eds., New York, London: Routledge, 1990, p 3.
[638] For Butler's critique of de Beauvoir in light of Irigaray's theory of "phallogentricism", see Butler, "Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures" in Bell, *Performativity and Belonging*, pp 11-20.
[639] Butler, "Revisiting Bodies" p 12.
[640] *Mackenzie*, p 70.

been thinking of when she was in Brazil.'"[641] These are the only hints of Julia's racial "otherness", both of which are made evident when death is imminent. The death of the mother represents the death of Julia's (and Norah's) racial background, the death of this aspect of her identity. It is briefly "resurrected" when she hears her mother's words, marking Julia's recognition of her racial background and its significance. Norah does not hear her dying mother speak (these or any other words) and is waiting until the moment of her death, anticipating it as a reward for her duties as a daughter. Unlike Julia, Norah will inherit her mother's money. While alone in her room:

> [S]he had begun to think – in a dull, sore sort of manner – about Aunt Sophie's will, and the will her mother had made. And that at long last she would have some money of her own and be able to do what she liked.[642]

Norah's attitude towards her mother's impending death is marked by a pain that is dulled, diminished by her anticipation of inheriting her mother's money. It also represents Norah's anticipation of the death of her otherness, something that she seems to have barely acknowledged, unlike Julia:

> 'But I think she did know me,' persisted Julia in a whisper. 'She said something.'
> 'Oh, did she?'
> 'Yes. It sounded like "orange-trees". She must have been thinking of when she was in Brazil.'
> 'Oh, I daresay,' said Norah. 'You know, she called me Dobbin the other day. And I was feeling so exactly like some poor old cart-horse when she said it, too, that I simply had to laugh.'[643]

The above passage indicates Julia's desire to understand her mother and her heritage before having arrived in England, whereas Norah dismisses her sister's observation as insignificant, using more typically English expressions, such as "I dare say", "Dobbin",

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[641] *Mackenzie*, p 72.
[642] p 76.
[643] p 72.

"poor old cart-horse" and "I simply had to laugh."[644] As it is clear that neither Julia nor Norah lived in Brazil ("'She must have been thinking of when *she* was in Brazil'" – my emphasis), Brazil does not represent Julia's nor Norah's past, as is the case for Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*, who remembers her childhood in the West Indies. Although both daughters were not born in Brazil and were apparently born and bred in England, Julia attempts at least some connection with her mother's homeland, indicating her own feeling of being an outsider.[645] For example, the mother's constant complaint of always feeling cold is an echo of Julia's inability to feel at home in England, although it is where she lives. She recalls her mother's complaints: "But sometimes you could tell that she was sickening for the sun. Julia remembered her saying: 'This is a cold, grey country. This isn't a country to be really happy in'".[646]

Paris has a greater hold on Julia as a place of belonging and more closely resembles a home than England does. Thus Julia is constantly displaced: while in England, the place where she lives, she does not feel at home; while in Paris, a place she much prefers, she does not have any family connections, nor is she French. These circumstances are somewhat similar to Julia's mother, who, having grown up in Brazil, moved to England and does not feel at home in England. Later, in an attempt to relate to her mother's sense of alienation in England, Julia finds herself "thinking of the words 'Orange-trees', remembering the time when she had woven innumerable romances about her mother's

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[644] Norah's not hearing her mother utter the words "orange-trees" suggests either that she has chosen not to hear them or that she cannot hear them, although it is not entirely clear which is the case.

[645] Dell'Amico argues that the "central event" in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is "the decline and death of the protagonist's mother, a Brazilian Creole modelled after the Malay Mrs Almayer" in Conrad's novel, *Almayer's Folly*. She adds that Rhys's novel "positions the daughter as the inheritor of […] an unbearable imperial legacy" (Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*, New York and London: Routledge, 2005, p 4). For further analysis of this comparison between Rhys's and Conrad's novels, see Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment*, pp 71-95.

[646] *Mackenzie*, p 76. Later, after her mother's death, Julia recalls her mother having said, "'I can't rest in this country. This is such a cold, grey country'" (p 89).

childhood in South America".[647]

Likewise, in Rhys's other three early novels, the "current" narrative takes place in either England (often London) or Paris, neither of which the protagonists can call their "home". Their national and racial identities are thus performed, for they wish to be accepted within the society in which they currently live. In an attempt to belong, Marya, Julia, Anna and Sasha perform their identities in terms of how they dress, the make-up they wear and their general conduct with others. Rather than reflecting superficiality in these characters, the texts' attention to these superficial aspects of identity highlights the outward, constructed and transient nature of identity itself. As indicated, ethnic as well as national identity is subject to change and is, to a large degree, constructed. If seen in this light, racial and ethnic identities are somewhat similar to clothes and make-up: they can, to some degree, be "worn" and discarded or replaced by new identities. To what extent this changeability can be achieved, however, is debatable, in light of the societies in which these female protagonists find themselves. The characters with whom the protagonists interact are often victims of their societies in that they are unable to see beyond its constructedness. As Thomas Staley states: "Women are not the sole victims, for sexual exploitation is only a major symptom of a far more pervasive disease".[648]

Moreover, the other characters are unwilling to accept that even their own identities have, for the most part, been created by complex social factors, rather than being an inherent quality that they possess by virtue of where they were born or the colour of their skin. Rhys's female protagonists also often possess such prejudice and inflexibility; therefore, they are unsuccessful in their attempts to perform their identities in any lasting way. Their belief that identity is a final destination at which one can arrive, that is, a state

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[647] *Mackenzie*, p 76.
[648] Thomas Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study*, p 27. See also Hagley, "Ageing", p 115.

of being that one can fully become, also serves as an obstacle to achieving such a point of stasis.

Jean Rhys states in a letter to her editor that she had an idea for *Voyage in the Dark*, which was that the past does not exist behind the present, but alongside it. In a letter to the American writer Evelyn Scott, Rhys discusses the novel she has recently written, *Voyage in the Dark*:

> The big idea – well I'm blowed if I can be sure what it is. Something to do with time being an illusion I think. I mean that the past exists – side by side with the present, not behind it; that what was – is. I tried to do it by making the past (the West Indies) very vivid – the present dreamlike (downward career of girl) – starting of course piano and ending fortissimo.[649]

Similarly, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha's past is conjured up to her present state, blurring the boundaries between these seemingly distinct entities. For example, she sees herself as a young woman, working in a clothing boutique. When she visits places she used to frequent as a young girl, she is taken back to the *place* of the past. It is as if the past is a place that she visits, a location that she can go to and occupy as a literal space. It may be music, a scent, the sound of someone's voice, seeing someone she recognises from her past. Any of these indicators act as a trigger to take her into her past. They work to move her physical and mental *space* to a different plane.[650]

In the novel, there seem to be two different types of people: those who put everything on the same plane, and those who see nuances in everyday situations. Sasha belongs to the latter category. Firstly, she is neither young nor old, neither rich nor poor, neither a respectable English woman, nor a prostitute. Her life, represented as a composite of various experiences leading up to her present state, is comprised of

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[649] Wyndham, Melly, eds., *Letters*, p 24.

[650] "But one mustn't put everything on the same plane". This is then translated to "Il ne faut pas mettre tout sur le même plan" (*Midnight*, p 12).

conflicting voices and aspects that contradict one another.[651]

Shouting "*Anglaise*", Speaking "Sasha"

As noted, Sasha calls herself English on a number of occasions. However, unlike Rhys's other novels, where the English are represented as socially confident and self assured, Sasha's Englishness is questionable. Firstly, there is some doubt as to whether she is truly English. For example, when she is walking alongside two Russian men she meets in the street, she notes: "We stop under a lamp-post to guess nationalities. So they say, though I expect it is because they want to have a closer look at me. They tactfully don't guess mine".[652]

In her hotel, Sasha's *patron* asks to see her passport, as she forgot to put her passport number on the fiche. This throws her into uncertainty as to her own identity, as her inner voice argues it out: "What's wrong with the fiche? I've filled it up all right, haven't I? Name So-and-so, nationality So-and-so…Nationality – that's what has puzzled him. I ought to have put nationality by marriage".[653] In both of these examples, Sasha's identity is doubted by those who see her, suggesting that she does not appear completely English or to belong to one, completely unified national or ethnic identity that can be observed easily. Her national identity is "puzzling" to others, for she lives in a society where national and ethnic identities are synonymous, an assumption that some of Rhys's critics make.[654] For example, Helen Nebeker states: "There is something odd about Sasha; *she does not look Anglo-Saxon* […] in spite of her hat which "'shouts'

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[651] D'Costa discusses the inability of Rhys's writing to fit into one particular school, including West Indian, Modernist and women's fiction ("Jean Rhys 1890-1979", 1986, pp 391 and 395).

[652] *Midnight*, p 39. See also Andrea Lewis, "Immigrants, Prostitutes, and Chorus Girls: National Identity in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys", in *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, 6, No. 1, 1999 Spring, p 82-95, p 82.

[653] *Midnight*, p 13.

[654] Cixous comments on passports and national categorisation: "It is the verb *to be* that has always bothered me. What are you? Are you French? Who am I? Am I her? And to answer with a word or a cross in the box, when I would need one hundred or a blank" ("My Algeriance", p 154).

'Anglaise'"[655]

As Veronica Marie Gregg states, "Sasha constructs herself as constitutive Otherness […] Although she is considered English by some, her nationality is undecided and problematic, though never given."[656] Moreover, as Erica Johnson states, "Sasha's allusion to the form [the fiche] serves precisely to obscure the very categories of identification through which others wish to know her."[657]

For someone to identify herself as "English" at the time would suggest that she must be white, speak a certain way, and look a certain way. Many of Rhys's novels are partially autobiographical, and critics have often assumed that her female protagonists share the same or a similar ethnicity to Rhys herself. If this is to be supposed, then these characters are white in a white-dominated society. However, unlike Rhys herself, visible doubt as to Sasha's ethnic identity is highlighted repeatedly in the novel.[658] Although Sasha calls herself English, further doubt as to her background is created when she remembers having changed her name from Sophia to Sasha:

> Was it in 1923 or 1924 that we lived round the corner […] and Enno bought me that Cossack cap and the imitation astrakhan coat? It was then that I started calling myself Sasha. I thought it might change my luck if I changed my name. Did it bring me any luck, I wonder – calling myself Sasha?[659]

As Judith Butler suggests in "Burning Acts: Incongruous Speech", the relationship between words and actions is a complex one. The prelocutionary view suggests that words are instrumental to the accomplishment of actions, but are not always themselves

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[655] Nebeker, *Jean Rhys*, p 91(my emphasis).
[656] Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 154.
[657] Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa*, p 41.
[658] Sasha's doubt over her own ethnic identity is echoed in Anna's fears about the ethnic identity of her unborn child. Urmila Seshagiri draws attention to this in "Modernist Ashes": "Anna Morgan's inchoate baby symbolizes yet another unassimilable racial identity. The baby's doubly ambiguous lineage conspires to destroy it". (p 499)
[659] *Midnight*, p 11.

the actions which they help to accomplish.[660] The illocutionary view, by contrast, suggests that "the name performs itself" and hence "becomes a thing done".[661] The "pronouncement" equals "the act of speech", and also equals "the speaking of the act".[662] Sasha, in calling herself Sasha and not Sophia, becomes a different person. She changes her identity by changing her name, in an attempt to have greater control over her life, thereby refusing to be associated with the victimhood that her previous name, Sophia, suggests. This change is marked by a breaking away from her family, who preferred to call her by her original, formal name:

> It's so like him, I thought, that he refuses to call me Sasha, or even Sophie. No, it's Sophia, full and grand. 'Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine, Sophia?...' Sophia went down where the river flowed – Wild, wild Sophia….'[663]

In the above passage, Sasha is called back to her family, with whom, it is evident, she has not had contact for some years. The reason for her return is an inheritance from a deceased relative.[664] The last line of the passage reveals the death of Sasha's former self, Sophia. The word "wild" to describe Sophia suggests that even when named by her unloving relatives, her wildness could not be contained.[665] Moreover, in naming herself Sasha, she asserts her identity, allowing her new name to perform itself so that it "becomes a thing done".

Sasha's memory of having changed her name is triggered by the sound of a tune, "Gloomy Sunday", on the very first page of the novel, which Sasha overhears a middle-

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[660] Butler, "Burning Acts: Incongruous Speech" in Andrew Parker, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance*, New York: Routledge, 1995, p 197.
[661] Butler, "Burning Acts". pp 197-8.
[662] Butler, p 198.
[663] *Midnight*, pp 36-7.
[664] For an analysis of this scene with regard to Sasha's death-in-life state, see my fifth chapter on the zombie.
[665] bell hooks changed her name from Gloria Watkins. Her new name allows her to: "affir[m] my link to female ancestors who were bold and daring in their speech. Unlike my bold and daring mother and grandmother, who were not supportive of talking back, even though they were assertive and powerful in their speech. bell hooks, as I discovered, claimed, and invented her, was my ally, my support" ("Talking Back", p. 127).

aged woman humming in a restaurant. The woman, described as "dark", "thin" and "about forty, very well made-up" reacts haughtily when Sasha begins to cry:

> 'I like that song.'
> 'Ah, yes, but it's a sad song. *Gloomy Sunday.*' She giggled. 'A little sad.'
> […] while I was drinking […] I started to cry.
> I said: 'It was something I remembered.'
> The dark woman sat up very straight and threw her chest out.
> 'I understand,' she said, 'I understand. All the same…Sometimes I'm just as unhappy as you are. But that's not to say that I let everybody see it.'[666]

Unlike Sasha, the woman she encounters knows how to perform in public. She confides that sometimes she is as sad as Sasha, but to "let everybody see it" suggests a transgression of a social code, to which Sasha is incapable of adhering. The woman giggles when she tells Sasha that the song is "a sad song […] [a] little sad."[667] This act of giggling masks her inner feelings: if she feels any sadness, she does not behave accordingly by crying, as Sasha does. Rather, she performs an emotion representing the opposite of sadness, by giggling. The giggling masks her feelings of sadness, ensuring that she does not "let everybody see it".

The Cossack cap and the imitation astrakhan coat in Sasha's memory signify a Russian identity, a name which Rachel Bowlby states is Russian sounding.[668] Nebeker, by contrast, suggests that Sasha is an Anglo-Saxon name.[669] Nebeker is undoubtedly mistaken in identifying the name Sasha with the Anglo-Saxon.[670] The juxtaposition of the imitation astrakhan coat and the Cossack cap indicate identification with the former Soviet Union and not with England. Notably, the coat is an *imitation* astrakhan, bought

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[666] *Midnight*, p 9.
[667] p 9.
[668] Rachel Bowlby, "The Impasse: Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*", in *Still Crazy After All These Years*, Routledge, 1993, pp 34-58, p 42.
[669] [S]he does not look Anglo-Saxon in spite of her name, in spite of her hat which "'shouts' 'Anglaise'" (Nebeker, p 91).
[670] The name Sasha is a Russian form of Alexander, or, if used in the feminine, Alexandra, with its origin in Greek (Alexander meaning "man's defender"), (*The Etymology of First Names*: http://mizian.com.ne.kr/englishwiz/library/names/etymology_of_first_names.htm).

by Enno, along with the Cossack cap. As Bowlby points out, Sasha and other characters change their national identities, often on the basis of whim and fashion.[671] In the case of Sasha, her clothes allow her to assume a Russian sounding identity, something that she only decided as a result of the clothes that happened to be bought for her at the time.

Placing and Misplacing Race, Nationality and Class

The Russians, when they meet Sasha, make it clear that they are Russians, although they seldom speak about Russia. She comments on one of them, Nicolas Delmar:

> He comes from the Ukraine, he tells me […] But again he slides away from the subject of Russia and everything Russian, though in other ways he is communicative about himself. He is a naturalized Frenchman and he has done his military service in France. He says his name is Nicolas Delmar, which doesn't sound very Russian to me. Anyway, that's what he calls himself […][672]

Nicolas performs his identity through his words and his actions: he tells Sasha that he comes from the Ukraine, and that he is a naturalised Frenchman, having done his military service in France. Sasha doubts the authenticity of the name that he "calls himself", suggesting her view that names and ethnicities must "match". His place of origin is, however, a point that he "slides away" from. When Nicolas tells Sasha that he is a naturalised Frenchman or that he is from the Ukraine, he performs his identity by speaking it, engaging in what Butler refers to as a speech-act.[673] In saying that he is French or Russian, he becomes French or Russian for the moment in which he says he is so. Having also performed the act of completing his military service in France, he becomes French; therefore, his identity is in this case performed on the basis of his actions, as well as his words, for he tells Sasha this fact about what he has done. Thus

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[671] For more examples of characters in *Good Morning, Midnight* who perform their national identities, see Bowlby, "The Impasse": "The adoption of a new identity, connoting a different country of origin, derives from nothing more than a superstitious whim […] Like any other marketable item, names can be put on or off according to vagaries of fashion or fantasy" (pp 42-43).

[672] *Midnight*, p 54.

[673] Butler, "Burning Acts", p 198.

what he has done (his military service) informs what he becomes (a naturalised Frenchman). He has taken on the national identity of being French, although he retains an affiliation with Russia and the Ukraine.

Likewise, the gigolo, René, says he is French Canadian, but Sasha says to him: "'I'll tell you one thing […] I don't believe you're a French-Canadian.'"[674] From the moment that the gigolo encounters Sasha, he is performing his identity to her in the hope of gaining money from her. Part of this performance includes his confiding in Sasha about his past, telling her that he escaped from the Foreign Legion in Morocco and went through Spain before arriving in Paris the previous night.[675] But later, when he tells her that he needs help with getting a passport, he also informs her that he has already been in touch with people who can help him get a false one.[676] The unlikelihood of this is echoed in Sasha's disbelief: "What, and you only got here last night!"[677] The gigolo's need for a passport indicates his lack of an acceptable identity in Paris. The document would give him a distinct and recognisable identity, making him legally acceptable within France and providing him with a degree of authenticity. But a document such as a passport draws attention to the constructed nature of identity itself, for it is subject to the laws of a given country, which themselves are subject to change.[678] This is further highlighted in the fact that René seeks a "false" passport, thereby adding another dimension to the performativity of his identity.

Sasha notes to herself that the gigolo "speaks English with a very slight accent. I can't place it", again indicating her (and many of Rhys's female protagonists') need to

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[674] *Midnight*, p 63.
[675] p 62-3.
[676] p 65.
[677] *Midnight*, p 66.
[678] René tells Sasha that he escaped "through Spain – Franco Spain", indicating political instability and transition (*Midnight*, p 63).

identify people in terms of fixed categories.[679] Although these female characters are often subject to such classification, they are also trapped into judging others in a similar way. Sasha thinks, "[h]e doesn't look like a gigolo – not my idea of a gigolo at all. For instance, his hair is rather untidy. But, nice hair".[680] Sasha's new hairstyle and old fur coat are an attempt to blend in, rather than to be seen as an outsider. However, it is these outward adornments that make the gigolo mistake her for a wealthy woman. In the same sense, Sasha herself cannot "place" the gigolo, for he does not conform to her idea of what a gigolo should "look like". Although Sasha is classified by society based on her appearance, she can also see through certain performative aspects of the gigolo when she first meets him. For example:

> He throws back his head and laughs. That's the gesture for showing off the teeth […]
> 'Very nice, very nice indeed. Beautiful teeth,' I say in an insolent voice.[681]

Sasha recognises René's gesture of showing off his teeth not as *a* gesture, but as *the* gesture that corresponds to that particular performance. Sasha's recognition suggests that this performative act is one that has been repeated time and again, perhaps by Sasha herself when she was in a similarly disadvantaged position as the gigolo. It is a code of behaviour, an accepted and recognised performative act both Sasha had to resort to in order to survive, and which now, ironically, the (male) gigolo is engaging in for his own survival. Sasha, in recognising the social codes of performance, challenges them in an attempt to undermine them. For example, she lets the gigolo pay for their drinks, rather than assuming her given role in their relationship by paying herself: "I let him pay. (So much the worse for you. That will teach you to size up your types a bit better.)".[682] This

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[679] p 60.
[680] *Midnight*, p 65.
[681] p 62.
[682] p 66.

passage highlights Sasha's ability to see through the social code and her desire to rebel against it. Her outward behaviour is indicated by the words "I let him pay", which corresponds to the observable act of letting of him pay. The next two sentences, however, appear within parenthesis, to suggest that this is what Sasha thinks but does not give away. This is her challenge to the assumed social codes of behaviour, which are formed by complex patterns of inner thoughts and outer behaviour, and are usually at odds with each other.[683]

In the above example, the female protagonist subverts the assumed social code of behaviour by behaving in a way that is contrary to what is expected of her, and which also works to her own advantage. Often, however, Rhys's female characters are caught between what they think and what they say, and they are usually unable to speak their inner thoughts of anger and outrage over a superficial, judgemental society that works against them. Their inner dialogue is articulate and critical, in sharp contrast to their outward behaviour, which often demonstrates awkwardness and victimhood. The identity that is thus performed is that of the victim, masking the inner identity of rebellion. For example, Sasha remembers the humiliation of working in a clothing shop as an assistant:

> Well, let's argue this out, Mr Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray […] So you have the right to […] lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings […] You must be able to despise the people you exploit. But I wish you a lot of trouble, Mr Blank, and just to start off with, your damned shop's going bust. Allelulia! Did I say all this? Of course I didn't. I didn't even think it.[684]

In the above example, Sasha did not actually think these thoughts as a young girl; but recalling the humiliating events is a re-enactment of the past, and in this re-enactment,

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[683] Rhys's writing shows what "he said" and what "she felt" (Nancy Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p 55).
[684] *Midnight*, pp 25-6.

she relives the past. The relived experience is informed by the maturity of a nearly middle-aged woman who thinks about what she would have liked to have said in the past, or even thought, when she was too insecure to defend herself. Sasha in the novel's "present" tense is, by contrast, an older woman who has learned from the mistakes she has made in her youth, and as a result of her insecurity, is able to perform her confidence with the outward embellishment of a new hat and a new hairdo. This confidence allows her to tell the gigolo that she knows he is simply posturing in his smile, as a way to show off his teeth. Nonetheless, Sasha's confidence does not take her very far, and is revealed as a thin mask, beneath which lurks a deeply distressed individual.

> It was then that I had the bright idea of drinking myself to death […] Besides, it isn't my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail. Or shall I place on it a tall hat with a green feather, hang a veil over the lot, and walk about the dark streets so merrily?[685]

Marya, the youngest of the female protagonists, is by contrast inexperienced and unable to perform her identity successfully enough to survive in her superficial society. Sasha, older and more experienced, is able to carry off her performance well, often to the metaphorical sound of applause. But the above and other passages reveal her inner torment: like many of the other characters who posture and perform successfully, she is inwardly unhappy and alienated. Julia, who is not as young as Marya and not as old as Sasha, is able to perform her identity to a degree. Her performances tend to be uncontrolled outbursts, which she finds difficulty sustaining: "She had fits of melancholy when she would lose the self-control necessary to keep up appearances."[686]

The gigolo can be seen as an inversion of Sasha's character when she was younger. He is young, probably of mixed racial origin and has an accent which Sasha cannot place,

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[685] *Midnight*, pp 37-38.
[686] *Mackenzie*, p 21.

and of which she is still not convinced as they continue speaking to each other.[687] His desperation and need for money also parallel Sasha's predicament as a young girl (and that of the other female protagonists in Rhys's early novels), something that Sasha finds comical and ironic:

> I say: 'And you think I can help you to get a passport? I? Me? But who do you think I am?' […] At this moment I find everything so funny that I start laughing loudly […] when I think of my life it seems to me so comical I have to laugh.[688]

In the above scene, it is as if Sasha is watching her past life being enacted to her in the form of the gigolo, a male reflection of the desperate young girl that Sasha once was. No longer financially dependent upon men, she is now able to laugh at what now appears "comical". Although both Sasha and René are outsiders, Sasha holds the upper hand from their first encounter, and does not lose this until the very end of the novel, when he physically abuses her in her hotel room.[689] On their first meeting, however, there is little of what Helen Nebeker refers to as a shared laughter that "bind[s] them in a kind of cleansing comraderie."[690] Rather, Sasha finds it entertaining to watch someone else suffering, as she once suffered, particularly if this person is male. Having been financially dependent upon men while she was young, it appears that Sasha was also emotionally devastated by them, as were all of the female protagonists in Rhys's early novels. Thus the gigolo serves as an inversion of the female suffering and financial dependence that Sasha had previously endured. Being reminded of her past in this comical, ironic way does not make Sasha sympathetic towards the gigolo, but serves as a catalyst for leading him on in an attempt at retribution against her male oppressors:

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[687] "'I don't believe you're a French-Canadian.' 'Then what do you think I am?' 'Spanish? Spanish-American?' (*Midnight*, p 63)
[688] *Midnight*, pp 64-5.
[689] "I get up and blow my nose. There is blood on the handkerchief. I look in the glass and see that my mouth is swollen, and it is still bleeding where he bit it" (*Midnight*, p 155).
[690] Nebeker, *Jean Rhys*, p 99.

> I had meant to get this man to talk to me and tell me all about it, and then be so devastatingly English that perhaps I should manage to hurt him a little in return for all the many times I've been hurt…[691]

Even if Sasha were ethnically English, this only serves to make her an outsider, as the entire novel is set in Paris, where she is spending a fortnight's holiday. For example, when the *patron* questions Sasha about her passport, he judges her by her appearance:

> [H]e gives my hat a gloomy, disapproving look. I don't blame him. It shouts 'Anglaise', my hat. And my dress extinguishes me. And then this damned old fur coat slung on top of everything else – the last idiocy, the last incongruity.[692]

Thus Sasha is "playing" at being English, performing her national identity. Having her hair dyed is also performative in terms of Sasha's ethnic identity. Sasha's feeling of "incongruity" seems logical, considering she is from England and is now staying in France, a country foreign to her. Yet her sense of alienation is not so straightforward: it results from *not* having felt at home in England in the first place, the country from which she seems to have originated. As Andrea Lewis points out in her article, "Immigrants, Prostitutes, and Chorus Girls"[693], Sasha, like the protagonists of all of Rhys' early novels, finds herself "in a country other than that of [her] birth".[694] But added to this level of alienation is yet another level, resulting from the English "clannishness" to which Sasha does not belong, given its "race specific" nature, and the fact that her early history is not made quite clear in the narrative.[695] This double alienation from both England, her "home" and France, the place she visits, contributes to Sasha's loss of identity.

Sasha describes the process of having her hair coloured a *blond cendré* as a difficult

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[691] *Midnight*, p 62.
[692] *Midnight*, p 14.
[693] Lewis, "Immigrants, Prostitutes, and Chorus Girls: National Identity in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys", *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, 6, No. 1, 1999 Spring, p 82-95, p 82.
[694] "Immigrants, Prostitutes, and Chorus Girls", p 82.
[695] p 82. One indication of Sasha's indeterminate racial background occurs when she meets two Russians. "We stop under a lamp-post to guess nationalities […] They tactfully don't guess mine"(p 39).

act to follow, a difficult task to achieve[696]:

> It is very, very rarely, madame, that hair can be successfully dyed blond cendré […] First it must be bleached, that is to say, its own colour must be taken out of it – and then it must be dyed, that is to say, another colour must be imposed on it. (Educated hair…And then, what?)[697]

The above passage uses internal dialogue, perhaps remembered, perhaps imagined, between Sasha and a hairdresser, who explains the procedure of dying the hair a blond cendré. The "difficulty" of the procedure suggests a metaphor for the difficulty of changing one's racial or ethnic identity. The act of taking out the original colour from the hair is a metaphor for the removal of one's ethnic identity and the dying of a new colour, the "imposing" of a new colour onto the original one, denotes assuming a new racial identity for oneself. This removal of the original and imposition of the new colour leads to "educated hair". To be "educated" in the sense of one's identity is to identify with the social signifiers that comprise a particular racial, national or ethnic identity. Sasha's ethnicity, as has been noted, is questionable. Therefore, in order to prevent attention being drawn to her, she wishes to appear to be of one, fixed ethnicity, rather than a combination of ethnicities and/or national identities, which, for example, confuses the *patron*. As Benedict Anderson states, the European imperialist reveals a preference for "'genuine'" races, as opposed to "'half-breeds,' 'semi-educated natives,' 'wogs,' and the like."[698] When she does get her hair done, Sasha's new hair colour is a successful blond cendré[699] This suggests that racial identity itself is subject to change; it is something that can be achieved, although not necessarily easily.

As Joane Nagel states in her paper, "Constructing Ethnicity", ethnic identity is "the

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[696] *Blond cendré* is translated as "ash blonde" (Corréard, & Grundy, eds, The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary, 1997, p 134).
[697] *Midnight*, p 44.
[698] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, New York: Verso, 1983, 1991, p 14.
[699] The hairdresser says: "'Voila', he says…'Yes,' he says, 'a very good blond cendré. A success'" (*Midnight*, p 53).

result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and process, as well as the individual's self-identification and outsiders' ethnic designation". She adds that "as the individual (or group) moves through daily life, ethnicity can change according to variations in the situations and audiences encountered."[700] The word "audience" allows one to see ethnicity as a performance, a role that is played out in front of others.

The doubt that the hairdresser expresses in the above passage reflects the rigid racial classifications imposed by society and the difficulty its members have in accepting new ways of racial or national being. Sasha herself is subject to such a limited view, as has been shown in her reactions to Nicolas and René. Her rhetorical question, "And then, what?" echoes the notion that she has reached an "impasse" in terms of what she would do with her new identity.[701] For example, when she meets the gigolo, her new hairdo and her fur coat fool him into thinking that she is wealthy:

> I want to shout at him, 'I haven't got any money, I tell you. I know what you're judging by. You're judging by my coat. You oughtn't to judge by my coat […] Not by this damned coat, which was a present […]
> Well, there you are – no use arguing. I can see he has it firmly fixed in his head that I'm a rich bitch and that if he goes on long enough I can be persuaded to part.[702]

Sasha plays along to the role of the "rich bitch" to a degree, but as noted previously, challenges this stereotype by initially allowing the gigolo to pay for their drinks. Nonetheless, her behaviour is a reaction against a role that has been "imposed" upon her, in the same sense that her new hair colour was imposed onto the original.[703] Having had her hair dyed, Sasha's new identity will allow her to "blend in" with English society, to some degree; however, its artificiality is significant. The question "[a]nd then what"

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[700] Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity", p 154. See also Bhatt, in *Performativity and Belonging*, 1999, who states that identity emerges through complex social, historical and cultural "processes, institutions, networks, associations", rather than having "ontological status" (pp 65-66).
[701] See Bowlby, "The Impasse", p 45.
[702] *Midnight*, pp 63-4.
[703] Thorunn Londsdale points out that Antoinette's family have aspects of English cultural identity "imposed" upon them when Annette marries Mr Mason (p 64).

suggests not only a cultural impasse in terms of Sasha's identity, but the notion that she will drift aimlessly with this newly imposed identity. It will not lead her anywhere, for although it may give her a look of completeness (along with her new hat and fur coat), it is an image that she has not chosen to convey.[704] The gigolo's persistence is a result of his belief that Sasha is in fact wealthy, a belief brought on solely by her appearance – both her hairdo and her fur coat – which is completely misguided. Although Sasha does say to René, "'Well, I haven't got any money'"[705], he does not believe her, and she does not persist by trying to convince him of the truth. Rather, she *thinks* about what she would like to say but relents, accepting that there is "no use arguing."[706]

This submission indicates Sasha's participation in a society that judges the individual based on his or her appearance, and in which incongruities are regarded as threats or simply ignored. As highlighted earlier, the *patron* stares at Sasha, for he does not approve of the incongruities that mark her appearance – her hat that "shouts Anglaise", her fur coat and, one assumes from his doubt over her nationality, her ethnic appearance. The fur coat is an incongruity because it is expensive and a woman who could afford a coat of that quality would not be staying in a hotel such as the one that Sasha occupies. Thus, both race and class signifiers are incongruous in Sasha's appearance. While being stared at by the *patron*, Sasha is made to be the spectacle of his disgust, an object on which to project his own belief that the world is divided into easily identifiable categories and that anything that challenges these boundaries is a freakish

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[704] The notion of the impasse, and of not arriving at any final destination is further emphasised by the novel's ending in ellipses: "Then I put my arms round him [the *commis*] and pull him down on to the bed, saying: "'Yes – yes – yes. …'" (*Midnight*, p 159). *Voyage in the Dark* also ends in ellipses, with Sasha recovering from a botched abortion: "I […] thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again …" (*Voyage*, p 159). Mellown identifies this narrative device as indicating "pauses found in spoken language, a device picked up from Ford" (Mellown, "Character and Themes", p 111).

[705] *Midnight*, p 63.

[706] p 64. Butler highlights Irigaray's point that the feminine can never be the mark of the subject, because the signifying, phallogentric system that posits her as such is masculine and false, and therefore "an illusion" (Butler, "Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures", p 10).

incongruity.[707] In both her harassment by the *patron* and her being pursued by the gigolo, Sasha does not speak her thoughts. These ring loudly inside her mind, but she does not act upon them. Instead, she conforms to her interrogators' view that people are identifiable by their appearance. Although she may not agree with this outlook, for her own appearance contradicts it, she does play along to the roles given to her.

Said but Not Heard: Doubted Truths, Unspoken Desires

Truth and believability, or the lack thereof, play an important part in the performativity of Rhys's early novels, particularly in relation to the characters' past and their memories of the past, before they arrived in England. For example, Julia tells Horsfield of how, when she was much younger, she had posed for a female artist, Ruth. She occasionally had tea with the artist. On one occasion, after drinking tea and feeling relaxed, Julia confides in her with her life story. But the artist looks at Julia as if she didn't believe anything she was telling her:

> 'And so one day, when we were sitting smoking, and having tea, I started to tell her about myself. I was just going to tell her why I left England…One or two things had happened, and I wanted to go away. Because I was fed up, fed up, fed up.
> […]
> 'I wanted her to understand. I felt that it was awfully important that some human being should know what I had done and why I had done it. I told everything. I went on and on.
> 'And when I had finished I looked at her. She said: "You seem to have had a hectic time." But I knew when she spoke that she didn't believe a word.'[708]

As Leah Rosenberg points out in her article, "Caribbean Models for Modernism", Rhys herself posed nude at the age of twenty-three.[709] In her writing, Rhys draws attention to the artist-model relationship and challenges fixed hierarchies that existed

[707] "The clouds are clouds, trees are trees, people are people, and that's that. Don't mix them up again" (*Midnight*, p 116).
[708] *Mackenzie*, pp 39-40.
[709] Rosenberg, "Caribbean Models", p 219.

between them. There was, for example, the association of the nude model with prostitution, and commodification of the black female other.[710] Within such a hierarchical framework, Rosenberg explains, Modernism strips the nude model of her humanity and individuality, and of her modernity, evident as Rhys became black and sexualised by posing nude.[711] Rhys's writing, however, gave back the humanity once lost by the model.[712] Although the artist Ruth did not believe a word of what Julia had told her, Julia confides in Horsfield about her feelings years later, thereby allowing the model to express herself in her own words, and returning her humanity to her. In relating the fact that Ruth did not believe a word of Julia's testimony, she re-establishes her own identity and affirms her sense of self to Horsfield. This represents three different stages of time: her distant past, as related to Ruth; and her self in the immediate past tense, in which she unfolds to Horsfield her narrative of what happened years before, when she had related her (then past) story to Ruth. These different layers of time culminate, eventually, in Julia's narrative to Horsfield, which is the narrative that forms the novel's text itself: the reader only hears of the episode with Ruth as a recollection, which Julia shares with Horsfield. By narrating the episode in this way – as a spoken passage, rather than an internal memory – Julia does something that Rhys's characters do not always do: she speaks what she feels, rather than thinking it.

Anna's Dark Desires: Blackness and Englishness

In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna's feeling that Walter does not believe her stories about

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[710] For a discussion on the political significance of Modernist primitivism, see Patricia E. Chu, *Race, Nationalism and The State in British and American Modernism*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp 145-161.

[711] Rosenberg explains that although modernist writers and artists privileged Caribbean folk culture and sexuality, they incorporated elements of African cultures into modernism by divorcing African bodies and culture from individuality and from modernity itself, which led to a "brutality of late colonialism" (Rosenberg, "Caribbean Models", p 220).

[712] Rosenberg, "Caribbean Models", p 222. Rosenberg also notes that Rhys wrote and rewrote "the scene of posing nude", in works that include: "Triple Sec" (1924), *Quartet* (1929), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939).

her past is expressed in the narrative as it unfolds, rather than as a memory; and she does not, in this case, speak her thoughts, as does Julia. On her first date with Walter Jeffries, Anna answers his questions and shares what are probably personal and significant stories with him about her childhood in the West Indies:

> We had another bottle of wine and I felt it warm and happy in my stomach. I heard my voice going on and on, answering his questions, and all the time I was talking he kept looking at me in a funny sort of way, as if he didn't believe what I was saying.[713]

When others do not believe the stories that such characters tell about their past, it is as if such a past did not exist. They come to life in the minds of the characters remembering them, whether in sudden flashbacks triggered by current events or in dreamlike reveries and recollections. The dichotomy between Anna's present-day life in the cold, harsh climate of England or Paris becomes even more pronounced against her *memories* of childhood in the hot, brightly coloured and wild West Indies. It is only the memories that make these places "real" in her mind and in the minds of the other female protagonists. The difference is so pronounced that other characters find it difficult to imagine happiness in such an "other" place, one that is characterised by everything that Englishness is not.

For example, Jeffries tells Anna that he would rather live in a "cold" place than a hot one, thereby polarising the two as if they occupy discrete antithetical categories.[714] When Anna tries to explain that the heat is exaggerated and that the place is not "lush", he does not answer. In place of his silence, Anna remembers her past, as if in dialogue with events that existed during her childhood, distant both in terms of time and space:

> 'But it isn't lush,' I said. 'You're quite wrong. It's wild, and a bit sad sometimes. You might as well say the sun's lush.'
> Sometimes the earth trembles, sometimes you can feel it breathe. The

[713] *Voyage*, p 19.
[714] pp 46-7.

> colours are red, purple, blue, gold, all shades of green. The colours here are black, brown, grey, dim-green, pale blue, the white of people's faces – like woodlice.[715]

Anna, like Walter, contrasts the intense colours and heat of her homeland with the dull, drab colours of England and the cold, unwelcoming people that inhabit it. As previously noted, Anna repeatedly says that she always "wanted to be black".[716] The desire to "be black" is not simply an indication of skin colour. Rather, Anna desires to be like the black Creoles she grew up with in the West Indies. She describes them in polarised terms, positing whiteness as "cold and sad" against blackness as "warm and gay".[717] Hester, Anna's white stepmother, is thus the antithesis of Francine, her black servant and friend:

> I wanted to be black. I always wanted to be black. I was happy because Francine was there, and I watched her hand waving the fan backwards and forwards and the beads of sweat that rolled from underneath her handkerchief. Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad.[718]

The simplicity with which Anna remembers Francine is evident in her lack of understanding of the black Creoles who lived on the islands. Her yearning for blackness is a desire for acceptance by those whom she views as somehow primitive: they are "warm and gay", suggesting that they do not have cares or concerns in the way that white people do. Sara Ahmed points out in her article, "Passing through Hybridity":

> [T]he white feminine subject becomes re-created through her *sympathy* for the Other (the Other's warmth). The Other becomes a mechanism which allows her *to know herself* (as black), by providing what is lacking in her self.[719]

Anna's longing for blackness is not satisfied by her white stepmother. Francine

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[715] pp 46-7. See also Mezei, K, "'And it Kept its Secret' […]", 1987: Antoinette [in *WSS*] tells her own story, in an effort to let the truth be known, to "save herself from a lie" (p 196).
[716] *Voyage*, pp 27, 45.
[717] p 27
[718] p 27.
[719] Sara Ahmed, "'She'll Wake Up One of These Days and Find She's Turned into a Nigger': Passing through Hybridity", in Bell, ed., *Performativity and Belonging*, p 100.

replaces the mother figure as one with whom she can feel a close connection. Anna's memories of Francine are represented by warmth and brightness, welcoming colours, heat and a sense of belonging, in marked contrast to the coldness and the lack of heat she feels when in England. These memories are thus stripped down almost to their bare essences, in terms of physical sensations, often comfortable and welcoming, much in the same way that the child feels a strong connection to its mother before it passes through the Oedipal stage, the mirror stage and reaches the symbolic order.[720] In psychoanalytical terms, Anna is at several removes from the mother figure. The narrative suggests that her biological mother has at some point died, and her father later marries Hester.[721] Hester as *step*mother indicates the inability for a close bond to develop between her and Anna. Seeking a return to the mother figure pre-symbolic order, Anna befriends Francine, to whom she feels much closer than to Hester. For example, when Anna has her first menstruation, she turns to Francine:

> [W]hen I was unwell for the first time it was she [Francine] who explained to me, so that it seemed quite all right and I thought it was all in the day's work like eating or drinking. But then she went off and told Hester, and Hester came and jawed away at me, her eyes wandering all over the place[…] I began to feel awfully miserable, as if everything were shutting up around me and I couldn't breathe. I wanted to die.[722]

Anna's feelings for Francine and her desire to be black defy everything that she has been taught, even from her blood relatives.[723] However, her perception of blackness to a large degree idealises the subservient role of the black servant, and ignores the commodification of not just their services, but their emotional support as well. As Sara Ahmed points out, when a white person tries to pass for (or in the case of Anna, desire to

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[720] Kristeva, *Revolution*, p 49.

[721] Anna tells Walter about her stepmother: "'There was a girl at school,' I said, 'at the convent I went to. […] she was a boarder. […] I wasn't a boarder, of course, except once when my father went to England for six months. When he came back he had married again; he brought Hester with him'" (*Voyage*, p 46).

[722] *Voyage*, p 59.

[723] Anna tells Walter Jeffries: '"When I was a kid I wanted to be black, and they used to say, 'Your poor grandfather would turn in his grave if he heard you talking like that'" (*Voyage*, p 45).

be) black, certain assumptions about the other-ness of blackness are assumed. These inform the white person's view of blackness, thereby reaffirming a presupposed inferiority of blackness:

> It puts on display the other within the face of the same in order to manage and contain that other (=the domestication of the other). Through adopting or taking on signifiers of the subordinated other, passing becomes a mechanism for reconstituting or reproducing the other as the 'not-I' *within* rather than *beyond* the structure of the 'I'.[724]

Moreover, Urmila Seshagiri states in her article, "Modernist Ashes, Postcolonial Phoenix", that Anna's desire for blackness "reveals a dangerous desire to *be* the Empire's other, to locate subjectivity in what imperial discourse has relegated to object-status.[725] In the above passage, Anna watches Francine's hand waving a fan, to keep her cool during her fever. This is done out of her duty as a servant. In addition, however, there is also an element of maternal care and love in the act, at least in terms of how it makes Anna feel. There is no indication as to whether or not Francine enjoys such work, no sympathy for her lack of freedom and the servitude that binds her. The "beads of sweat that rolled from underneath her handkerchief" indicates a self sacrifice in terms of her own comfort, which is replaced by her sense of duty and servitude in keeping her masters' children cool and comfortable. This self abnegation is similar to the suffering that the mother endures or is willing to endure when caring for her children, particularly babies or infants, who are unable to take care of themselves. Anna, therefore, assumes the role of a child in relation to Francine, and it is this idealised childhood that she misses when in England. The warmth of the islands represents the warmth of the mother, and being sent to England is a harsh awakening to the cold, logical but functioning world of the symbolic order.

Hester is also described as "old and sad", whereas the black characters live on in

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[724] Ahmed, "Passing through Hybridity", in Bell, ed., *Performativity and Belonging*, p 100 (Ahmed's emphasis).
[725] Seshagiri, "Modernist Ashes", p 494 (Seshagiri's emphasis).

Anna's memory as youthful, if not actually young.[726] Anna's desire to be black is a desire to be culturally black. As indicated, ethnicity and cultural identities do not always have discrete and definite boundaries, but are characterised by borders that can and do change over time and in given circumstances. As discussed, the characters in *Good Morning, Midnight* are often of mixed racial origin and change nationalities based on their actions and circumstances. They often embody more than one nationality and can choose which one to "wear", that is, they can perform any of a number of nationalities at their disposal, whether through behaviour, name changing, service in the Foreign Legion, naturalisation, or the acquisition of false passports. Anna, however, demonstrates a belief in the dichotomy of "black" and "white", where such terms are clearly defined and demarcated from each other. Warmth, happiness, contentedness and a strong connection to a wild, natural landscape is what Anna identifies with blackness, and this is at times a stereotyped portrayal that posits the black Creoles as primitive.[727]

Performing Whiteness, Performing Youth

Sasha's blond cendré

Sasha also has many flashbacks and memories of her past, and it is clear from the narrative that she is no longer a young woman. She is in Paris on a fortnight's holiday,

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[726] Anna's first menstruation is not symbolised as a celebratory coming of age, but of the reality of "growing old", which she equates with being white: "But I knew that of course she [Francine] disliked me too because I was white; and that I would never be able to explain to her that I hated being white. Being white and getting like Hester, and all the things you get – old and sad and everything. I kept thinking, 'No…No…No…' And I knew that day that I'd started to grow old and nothing could stop it'" (*Voyage*, p 62).

[727] A combination of the hostile and the idealised gives an overly simplified representation of the boatman, for example, who is portrayed only in terms of his purpose of serving his white Creole masters: "'Black Pappy was our boatman's name. We have lovely moonlight nights […] Black Pappy used to wear a blue linen suit, the trousers patched behind with sacking. He had very long ears and a round gold earring in one of them. He would bawl out at you that you mustn't trail your hand in the water on account of the barracoutas. Then you would imagine the barracoutas – hundreds of them – swimming by the side of the boat, waiting to snap" (*Voyage*, p 46). Similarly, one of Anna's prevailing memories of Francine is her simplicity and contentedness: "What I liked was watching her eat mangoes. Her teeth would bite into the mango and her lips fasten on either side of it, and while she sucked you saw that she was perfectly happy" (*Voyage*, p 58).

paid for by a somewhat condescending female friend, Sidonie.[728] Sasha stays in a hotel and spends the rest of her time eating and drinking in cafés and restaurants, going for meandering walks and trying to avoid the places of her past, which haunt her. But at every turn, she is reminded of the unhappiness of her youth, characterised by a lack of money, desperation and the inability to be fully contented and settled, whether financially, socially or emotionally. The many flashbacks of Sasha's life in Paris as a young girl only heighten her sense of alienation and isolation as a middle-aged woman. Although now financially independent, she is not rich, nor is she "happy".[729] Her unhappiness over her past is intensified by the reality of growing old alone.

In dying her hair, Sasha is performing on at least two different levels. She is performing her age as well as her racial identity, in that the new hair colour will make her look younger as well as more "white". Sasha is aware that she is growing old: "Yes, I am sad, sad as a circus-lioness, sad as an eagle without wings, sad as a violin with only one string and that one broken, sad as a woman who is growing old".[730]

Two unsettling events occur, reminding Sasha of her age, and contributing to her decision to dye her hair, a procedure she had initially been trying to avoid.[731] The first takes place in a café that Sasha remembers from her youth, and revisits. Two men sitting with a woman spot her. One of the men stares at Sasha, then asks the woman, "'Tu la connais, la vieille?'".[732] The woman replies in the negative, referring to Sasha as "The

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[728] "I lie awake, thinking […] about the money Sidonie lent me and the way she said: 'I can't bear to see you like this.' Half-shutting her eyes and smiling the smile which means: 'She's getting to look old. She drinks'". (*Midnight*, p 11)

[729] "I shall receive a solicitor's letter every Tuesday containing £2 10s. od". (*Midnight*, p 36)

[730] *Midnight*, p 39. In Phyllis Shand Allfrey's dedication to Jean Rhys, she comments on Rhys's newfound fame, with the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*: "And then – in 1966 – Andre Deutsch published *The Wide Sargasso Sea* [sic] […] But as she wrote to us, 'when I was young and lovely I had only one dress and now Dior and Chanel offer me their masterpieces'" ("Jean Rhys: a tribute", *Kunapipi*, Vol. 1.2, 1979, pp 23-25, p 24).

[731] Sasha thinks to herself: "Again I lie awake, trying to resist a great wish to go to a hairdresser in the morning to have my hair dyed" (*Midnight,* p 42).

[732] *Midnight*, p 35. Translation: "You know her, the old woman?"

Englishwoman".[733] Again, Sasha's Englishness and her agedness are strikes against her, indicators of her difference, which make her an object of near-ridicule, rather than an object of admiration, as she and all of Rhys's female protagonists desire to be.[734] Sasha lives in a society where women are valued for their youthful appearance, and to be old, or to appear old, is to lose one's value to society, to become discarded and worthless.[735]

The second unsettling event that contributes to Sasha's decision to dye her hair, takes place in Théodore's restaurant. Sasha hesitates before going in:

> I had meant to avoid Théodore's, because he might recognize me, because he might think I am changed, because he might say so.
> I sit down in a corner, feeling uneasy.[736]

Although the text does not explain exactly what had happened in Théodore's restaurant when Sasha was younger, it is clear that she is embarrassed about her past life, and when the proprietor relates a story to an English customer, looking at Sasha and saying to the girl, "'Ah, those were the days'", the latter replies loudly, "Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, maintenant?"[737] Notably, Sasha's Englishness does not save her from ridicule in this scene, nor does it make any difference to the way in which she is perceived by Théodore or by the English tourists. Rather, it is her age that marks her difference and objectifies her in the eyes of the English tourists, who by contrast are younger and more confident. They are described as "girls", probably about the same age that Sasha was when she first visited Paris. However, unlike Sasha, who as a "girl"

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[733] p 35.

[734] For my analysis of beauty and difference in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, see Chapter 2, "Other Ways of Looking: The Female Gaze in *Wide Sargasso Sea*". For a discussion on desire in the psychoanalytical sense, see Chapter 3, "Echoes of the Other: Mirroring in Jean Rhys's Fiction".

[735] For analyses of ageing in Jean Rhys's fiction, including the commodification of women as objects, valued on the basis of their sexual attraction and youthful appearance, see: Hagley, "Ageing"; Hochstadt, "From Vulnerability to Selfhood"; Port, "'Money, for the Night is Coming'"; Reventós, "The Functions of Clothes"; and Zimring, "The Make-Up of Jean Rhys's Fiction".

[736] *Midnight*, p 42.

[737] p 43. Sasha later translates the remark as: "What the devil (translating it politely) is she doing here [now]?" (p 46). The dictionary translation is: "What the hell's she doing here now?" (Corréard, & Grundy, The Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary, p 381). Later, Sasha puts the two phrases together in her mind as "(Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, la vieille?)" (p 48).

lacked confidence and was unable to confront people when they tried to intimidate her, the girls in Théodore's stare at Sasha and the tall one speaks loudly in French.[738] Her act of speaking loudly is part of a performance, for she is aware that there are others in the café and Sasha also notes that she speaks French very well. Her exclamation, "Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, maintenant?" places Sasha at the centre of attention against her will.

> Now everybody in the room is staring at me; all the eyes in the room are fixed on me. It has happened.
> […] Well, everybody has had a good stare at me and a short, disapproving stare at the two girls, and everybody starts eating again.[739]

Although the other customers in the restaurant look disapprovingly at the English girls, their disdain is minor in comparison with the long stares they give to Sasha.[740] She is made the spectacle, the centre of attention in the "theatre" of the restaurant, most unwillingly. Both of the English girls perform their identities from the moment they walk into the restaurant. Sasha sizes them up immediately as English, with a slightly ironical and self-reflexive inner commentary, using brief sentences, the language pared down to a phrase in the last sentence fragment:

> I light a cigarette and drink the coffee slowly. As I am doing this two girls walk in – a tall, red-haired one and a little, plump, dark one. Sports clothes, no hats, English.[741]

The outward appearance of the girls makes them easily identifiable as English. However, they lack the "incongruity" that Sasha displays in her physical appearance, making her otherness a social disadvantage.[742] The girls, by contrast, perform the identity

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[738] See *Midnight*, pp 21-26, in which Sasha as a young girl feels intimidated by her superiors at work. She wanders in a panicked frenzy through seemingly endless corridors, looking for the "kise", a mispronunciation by Mr Blank of "la caisse" (the cashier). Rather than standing up to Mr Blank and pointing out that he has mispronounced the word, she bursts into tears and quits her job later that day (pp 24-5).

[739] *Midnight*, pp 43-4.

[740] For my analysis on the gaze and its propensity to objectify the gazed-at, see my Chapter 2, "Other Ways of Looking: The Female Gaze in *Wide Sargasso Sea*".

[741] *Midnight*, p 43.

[742] p 43. Sasha is clearly unable to perform her identity as young, and when she was young, this worked against her rather than to her advantage, as indicated in note 58 above. Thus her attempt, as a 38-year-old woman, to perform her identity as someone younger, is farcical, and she appears more like a child than a young girl. While

of Englishness with much greater ease than Sasha. This performance is not limited to their physical appearance in terms of dress, but also includes their confidence, manifested in both staring at Sasha and speaking loudly in fluent French. Shortly after being made the object of amusement in Théodore's, Sasha thinks of a plan to save herself from further ridicule: she decides to get her hair dyed. Therefore, given that Sasha's age is a disadvantage – one enforced by her society and one that she feels personally – her decision to dye her hair is also a decision to appear younger. She performs her identity as someone youthful.

Acting and Looking their Age: Marya, Julia and English Hypocrisy

In *Quartet*, by contrast, the protagonist Marya is a young woman whose youth hinders rather than helps her to "get on" in the superficial world of 1920s Paris.[743] She is inexperienced and lacks self confidence, and many of the characters with whom she interacts are constantly performing their identities, projecting a sense of confidence and control, often in contradiction to their inner state of mind. Part of this superficiality is heightened by the English ex-patriot scene, in which Marya finds herself immersed. For example, Miss De Solla, a Jewish artist, expresses her dislike of the English to Marya:

> She began to argue that there was something unreal about most English people.
> 'They touch life with gloves on. They're pretending about something all the time. Pretending quite nice and decent things, of course. But still…'[744]

The Heidlers are amongst those characters who "touch life with gloves on", and are constantly posturing to impress others.[745] In this novel, Marya's youth is combined with

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the gigolo and Sasha are walking together, René comments, "'Mais c'est complètement fou. It's hallucinating. Walking along here with you, I have the feeling that I'm with a – 'With a *beau*-tiful young girl?' 'No,' he says. 'With a child'" (p 67). For a discussion of the female child in Jean Rhys's fiction, see Londsdale, "The Female Child in the Fiction of Jean Rhys", pp 61-8.

[743] The phrase is used in a letter from Vincent when he informs Anna of the break-up with her lover Walter: "I believe that if you will work hard there is no reason why you should not get on" (*Voyage*, pp 80-1).

[744] *Quartet*, p 9.

[745] The novel was originally published under the title *Postures*, as a result of the publishers' fear of a libel suit

her lack of family connections (which poses uncertainty over her own national identity) and her lack of money.[746] She tells her soon-to-be husband, Stephan Zelli, who is Polish, that she is detached from her family and is penniless:

> 'No money. Nothing at all,' repeated Marya. 'My father and mother are both dead. My aunt…'
> 'I know […]'. He had reflected that they didn't seem to care in the least what became of her and that English ideas of family life were sometimes exceedingly strange.[747]

Stephan's cultural identity may also be a performance, in that Marya recalls him having "told" her "that he was of Polish nationality".[748] The next sentence has him telling her that "he was a *commisionnaire d'objets d'art*." She replies, "'Oh, you sell pictures,'" to which he responds, "'Pictures and other things.'"[749] This last line ends the conversation and the section of the narrative, which is punctuated by an asterisk in the middle of the page. This device has the function of intensifying the phrase, "'Pictures and other things'", adding to the uncertainty of Stephan's identity. Rather than stating that he was Polish, Marya tells the reader that he had "told" her that he was of Polish nationality, again casting uncertainty as to his identity. This uncertainty over Stephan's identity is evident both in terms of his ambiguous nationality and his occupation, the

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from Ford Madox Ford and/or his common-law wife, Stella Bowen. The four main characters who form the "quartet" are Rhys, her husband Jean Lenglet, Ford Madox Ford, with whom she was having an affair, and Stella Bowen. Unlike Lois Heidler, however (who accepted and encouraged the affair between her husband and Marya), Stella wrote later that she was unaware of it for some time: "She lived with us for many weeks whilst we tried to set her on her feet. Ford gave her invaluable help with her writing, and I tried to help her with her clothes. I was singularly slow in discovering that she and Ford were in love" (Introduction to *Quartet*, Katie Owen, 2000, p xi). For more information on the real-life affair between Rhys and Ford, see Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Rhys Recalls Ford: *Quartet* and *The Good Soldier*", pp 67-81; Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys*: *Life and Work*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990**;** Annette Gilson, "Internalizing Mastery: Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, and the Fiction of Autobiography", *Modern Fiction Studies*, (Dept of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN), (Baltimore, MD), Vol. 50.3, Fall 2004, pp 632-656; Savory, *Jean Rhys*, pp 39, 49-50, 266.

[746] Heidler, upon meeting Marya for the first time, asks, "'But you are English – or aren't you?' […] Marya assured him that she was. 'But I left England four years ago'" (Rhys, *Quartet*, p 12). See also Nancy Hemond Brown, "England and the English in the Works of Jean Rhys", *Jean Rhys Review*, Vol. 1.2, 1987, pp 8-20, pp 9-10.

[747] *Quartet*, p 17.

[748] *Midnight*, p 16.

[749] p 16.

latter of which turns out to be deceptive, as he is arrested for dealing in stolen goods.[750]

In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia's lover George Horsfield is struck by how old she looks when he meets her in London. He thinks,

> She looked older and less pretty than she had done in Paris […] It was curious to speculate about the life of a woman like that and to wonder what she appeared to herself to be – when she looked in the glass, for instance. Because, of course, she must have some pathetic illusions about herself or she would not be able to go on living. Did she still see herself young and slim, capable of anything, believing that, though every one around her grew older, she – by some miracle – remained the same? Or perhaps she was just heavily indifferent…
> […] People ought not to look obvious; people ought to take the trouble to look and behave like all other people. And if they didn't it was their own funeral.[751]

In the above passage, old age and/or an old appearance are represented as antithetical to beauty, which is synonymous with youth, or a youthful appearance. In Julia's society (both in Paris and London), beauty was what increased women's "commodity" value; therefore, a woman without beauty was considered worthless.[752] Closely connected to this notion of beauty as the key to a woman's happiness and success – that which would win her the love and protection of a man in a patriarchal world where women are dependent upon men for their own survival – is the importance of youth.[753] In the above passage, it is not Julia's actual age that concerns Horsfield, (although at one point he does speculate that she must be in her thirties).[754] Rather, it is her *appearance* as an older woman that he finds unsettling and disturbing. This incongruity has jarred him and his notions of beauty and youth: when he first met Julia, his attraction to her was based mostly on sympathy: "Her eyes were very sad; they seemed to be asking a perpetual

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[750] "'Monsieur,' said the *patronne*, 'has been arrested. Yes, Madame, arrested. About an hour ago […] An inspector and an agent came here'". (*Quartet*, p 21)
[751] *Mackenzie*, pp 65-66.
[752] Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 177.
[753] Hagley, "Ageing", p 116.
[754] "Mr Horsfield thought, 'She must be thirty-four or thirty-five if she's a day – probably older'". (*Mackenzie*, p 31)

question. 'What?' thought Mr Horsfield. A deep black shadow painted on the outside of the corners accentuated their length".[755]

Now, upon meeting her in London, he finds her "less pretty", a direct result, as far as he can see, of the fact that she "looked older". Horsfield then goes on to reason out Julia's situation in his mind: a woman must do her best to *look* young, even if she is not young in age, he thinks. To have let herself appear her actual age (or perhaps older than her age) is, to Horsfield, self destructive: if people did not take the trouble to conform and to look like everyone else, that is, to *look* young (regardless of their actual age) then, ironically, "it was their own funeral". Horsfield suggests that if Julia knew the truth about her appearance and faced up to the fact that she "looked older", this would destroy her. This view indicates a clear correlation between illusion and performance on the one hand and death and personal destruction on the other. Horsfield's reasoning indicates that if Julia were to make the effort to appear younger, she would have a much better chance of surviving in a society that values youthful appearance in women. The illusion of youth is something that she no longer enacts or performs, and Horsfield regards this as self destructive. Although Horsfield initially felt pity for Julia, his reasoning in the above passage is one of near repulsion, exposing him as a victim of his society, in which physical appearance is valued more than age and wisdom. Julia, as with all of Rhys's female protagonists, is aware of this tenet dictated by society. Her inability to conform to such a society does not reveal a distinct status as victim; rather, it exposes the destructiveness of such a society.[756] (Horsfield, on the other hand, conforms comfortably to English society, and although he may question its harshness on occasion, he is at

[755] *Mackenzie*, p 31. See also my first chapter for a discussion on Rochester's description of Antoinette's eyes as "[l]ong, sad, dark alien eyes" (*Sargasso Sea*, p 56).

[756] See Zimring, Rishona, "The Make-up of Jean Rhys's Fiction", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (Brown University Providence, RI), Vol. 33.2, (Spring), 2000, pp 212-234: "*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* […] play[s] on surface-depth dichotomies, ultimately to shift into a register of ironic detachment" (p 216). Also see this article for a detailed discussion on fragmented narrative voice in Rhys's early novels and its function as a foil to the (false) image of "wholeness" created by physical beauty.

leisure to do so. His financial self sufficiency gives him this privilege.)[757]

Moreover, Horsfield is confronted by the accusation that the performance and posturing that he upholds (as above, later in the narrative) is a type of hypocrisy. Shortly after entering a restaurant on the suspicion that he might find Julia there, he overhears people berating the English:

> An old chap at the next table was holding forth about Anglo-Saxons, and the phrase '*cette hypocrisie froide*' [this cold hypocrisy] came back and back into what he was saying. The word 'froide' [cold] sounded vicious and contemptuous. Mr Horsfield wanted to join in the argument, and say, 'Look here, you're quite wrong. Anyway, you're not altogether right. What you take to be hypocrisy is sometimes a certain caution, sometimes genuine – though ponderous – childishness, sometimes a mixture of both.'"[758]

The above takes place just before Horsfield meets Julia for the first time, establishing his own status as English and the way in which Julia identifies hypocrisy with Englishness. Horsfield's first observation of Julia, now that he has met her, is that "[s]he was not so young as he had thought."[759] Another English character who is categorised as a hypocrite is the eponymous Mr Mackenzie. As the title suggests, it is Julia who breaks off the affair. This takes place in public, in a restaurant. Her performance is, by contrast to Marya's and Anna's victimised behaviour, one of triumph. Julia confronts him while he is eating alone in a restaurant: "He was thinking, 'O God, oh Lord, she's come here to make a scene…Oh God, oh Lord, she's come here to make a scene".[760]

The repetition of these lines contributes to Mackenzie's anxiety about Julia, and acts

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[757] Horsfield works for a living and owns a comfortable house, from which Julia is held at a distance: "Then he drove back to his house, which was in a small, dark street in the neighbourhood of Holland Park. Five rooms over a stable, which had been converted into a garage" (*Mackenzie*, p 68).

[758] *Mackenzie*, p 30.

[759] p 30. Horsfield first sees Julia (unbeknownst to her) in the restaurant where she makes a scene by walking out on Mr *Mackenzie*: "He had been sitting in such a way that, every time he looked up, he was bound to see the reflection of the back of Mr Mackenzie's head […] and the face of the young woman, who looked rather under the weather" (p 28).

[760] p 22.

almost as an incantation. He is not actually praying to God, but using the words "God" and "Lord" as expletives. These are words he thinks, rather than speaks, indicating that even in his thoughts, he is performing. Used in this context, the words "God" and "Lord" have the effect of emphasising Mackenzie's despair, something he is doing inwardly to himself. Outwardly, he tries to maintain a sense of decorum and calm:

> He said in rather a high-pitched voice, 'I'd forgotten that I had invited you, certainly. However, as you are here, won't you have something to eat?'[761]

This tension between inward thoughts and outward behaviour draws attention to Julia's and Mackenzie's observations about hypocrisy:

> 'I hate hypocrites.' She had said that once. Quite casually.
> He agreed. 'So do I,' he had said.
> But he disliked the word 'hypocrite'. It was a word which he himself never used – which he avoided as if it had been an indecency. Too many senseless things were said by idiotic people about hypocrisy and hypocrites.[762]

Notably, the word "hypocrite" derives from the Greek word for "actor", originally defined as "an actor on the stage, pretender, dissembler"[763] This further emphasises the performance and posturing undertaken by both Mackenzie and Horsfield. Both characters are confronted with the accusation that they may be living as hypocrites, but they become inwardly defensive. Mackenzie reasons inwardly that talk of hypocrisy is often "senseless" and "idiotic", thereby allowing himself to justify his cruel treatment of Julia. Horsfield, by contrast, is represented as a more sensitive character than Mackenzie, and is hurt by such an accusation, finding it "vicious" and "contemptuous".[764]

The notion of old age, or perceived old age and death is made manifest in the form of Julia's dying mother, and of her sister Norah, who fears she is growing old. The nurse,

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[761] *Mackenzie*, p 22.
[762] p 19.
[763] *Oxford English Dictionary*. See also Lorna Sage's Introduction to *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, 2000, p x.
[764] *Mackenzie*, p 30.

Miss Wyatt, says to Julia that Norah is "young yet", an assurance that she will manage financially because of her age, and a sentiment that Norah remembers later, imagines hearing in the ticking clock.[765] As indicated, Norah is to inherit money from her mother, which Julia will not have a share in, as she had turned away from her family in the past.[766] Norah, who has stayed devoted to her mother during her illness, is also trapped by the illness. The death of her mother symbolises her own breaking away from the maternal bond, which is replaced by an inheritance that will allow her to live her life independently. But before the death, Norah struggles with the constant care she must give her mother. It ages her, as it marks a role reversal between mother and child. She thinks to herself: "'If this goes on for another year I'm finished. I'll be old and finished, and that's that'".[767]

Clothed in all her Finery: Ladylike "swanking"

In the same sense that Horsfield believes that a single woman growing old might as well attend her "own funeral", Norah equates growing old with a lamentable death for herself, and the death of desire. This is not death in the literal sense, but the death of youth and beauty, which are often described in synonymous terms throughout the novel. The importance of financial independence is closely linked to beauty and youth, as it is these qualities that would allow a woman living in a patriarchal society to be able to "swank" and attract men who will support her.[768] Maudie, Anna's chorus girl friend, advises her: "'The more you swank the better […] If he's a rich man and he's keeping you, you ought to make him get you a nice flat up West somewhere and furnish it for you.

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[765] "The clock ticked: 'You're young yet – young yet – young yet'" (*Mackenzie*, p 101). Miss Wyatt, the nurse, says to Julia of her sister: "'Norah's a good kid' […] And she'll be all right. She'll be all right. She's young yet'" (*Mackenzie*, p 73).

[766] *Mackenzie*, p 76. Out of pity and with a tone of condescension, Norah gives Julia a ring belonging to their now-deceased mother: "'And look here; don't ever pawn that ring. If you're on the verge of pawning it, send it back to me and I'll always give you a pound for it'" (p 97).

[767] *Mackenzie*, p 75.

[768] *Voyage*, p 39.

Then you'd have something'".[769]

To Maudie, "swanking" is playing the part of a "lady", posing as a woman with money, one attractive enough to have expensive clothes bought for her by men: "She looked at my dresses and kept saying, 'Very ladylike. I call that one very ladylike indeed. […] Well, if a girl has a lot of good clothes and a fur coat, she has something, there's no getting away from that'".[770] In the above passages, both accommodation and clothes are put on an equal plane of importance, in terms of the security they would offer a single young woman. If Anna persuades Jeffries to buy her a flat, Maudie insists, she would "have something".[771] But the clothes Anna already possesses are a good start: "'[S]he has something […].'" Similar to Marya, Anna's youth and inexperience make it difficult for her to perform her identity successfully. *Voyage in the Dark* deals in great detail with clothes, more so than any of Rhys's other novels.[772] As Reventós points out, clothes symbolise the "masquerading of femininity, which is represented as often unsuccessful and physically painful, disturbing or based on self-division"; as well as functioning as "self concealment: the masks of 'normal' femininity function as camouflage, hiding feelings of gender inferiority."[773]

Significantly, Anna is a chorus girl, an occupation of performance, the worth of which is entirely defined by the male gaze. Her encounters with men, including Jeffries, to whom she loses her virginity, are described with close attention to detail of setting. It is as if these events are staged, the people within them actors performing a given role, but Anna is uncertain as to what her role is within the many metaphorical stage sets into

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[769] p 39.
[770] *Voyage*, p 39.
[771] Anna's landlady, Ethel, in an outburst against her exclaims, "'D'you know how old I am?' she said. 'If I can't get hold of some money in the next few years, what's going to become of me? Will you tell me that? You wait a bit and you'll see. It'll happen to you too'" (*Voyage*, p 125).
[772] Bowlby, "The Impasse", pp 42-43.
[773] Reventós, "The Functions of Clothes", p 397.

which she finds herself thrown. For example, when she has her first date with Jeffries, he complains to the waiter that the wine has been corked. The two of them are described as belonging to what Anna sees as a sneering society:

> 'Corked, sir?' the waiter said in a soft, incredulous and horror-stricken voice. […]
> 'Yes, corked. Smell that.'
>
> The waiter sniffed. Then Mr Jeffries sniffed. Their noses were exactly alike, their faces very solemn. The Brothers Slick and Slack, the Brothers Pushmeofftheearth. I thought, 'Now then, you mustn't laugh.'[774]

The corked wine is taken completely seriously by Jeffries and by the waiter, who is "horror-stricken". Anna, by contrast, finds the event hilarious, not playing according to the same social codes. This indicates both her advantage and disadvantage at not belonging to Jeffries' realm of Englishness. In finding the whole situation funny, she does not bother to try to "swank", as her friend Maudie repeatedly advises her. At the same time, however, Anna is able to see beyond the social codes that fabricate the superficial society in which she lives, but to which she can never wholly belong.

In another scene, Anna tries on a new dress that she is about to buy with money that Jeffries has sent to her.[775] Upon entering the dress shop, she thinks to herself "*This is a beginning. Out of this warm room that smells of fur I'll go to all the lovely places I've ever dreamt of. This is the beginning*".[776] But when she tries on the dress, she feels uncomfortable: "I said, 'Yes, I like this. I'll keep it on.' But my face in the glass looked small and frightened".[777]

In the above passage, Anna believes that clothes will make her happy, basing her

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[774] *Voyage*, pp 17-18.
[775] Anna receives the money in a letter upon waking, one morning: "I opened the letter and there were five five-pound notes inside […] 'My dear Anna […] I'm worried about you. Will you buy yourself some stockings with this? […] Always yours, Walter Jeffries'" (p 23).
[776] *Voyage*, p 25 (Rhys's emphasis).
[777] p 25.

belief on one of the major facets of the male gaze: women must look attractive in order to feel a sense of self worth. This belief is like a fantasy that Anna has when she enters the shop. Now armed with money given to her by Walter Jeffries, she enters a new world, one where she can afford to buy "ladylike" clothes. Anna enters what appears to be a stage set, when she enters the shop. The two women who own the dress shop, Cohen's, are described comically: "The two Miss Cohens stared – one small and round, the other thin with a yellow face".[778] They help her "get on with the transformation act", as Sasha would say.[779] In wearing the new dress, she is donning a new personality, and although the dress is described as "lovely" and "beautiful", it turns Anna into a different person, one she is not comfortable being. Thus, she notes, "my face in the glass looked small and frightened." Seeing her reflection in the mirror, Anna sees herself as men would see her, as an object of the male gaze, a part which she is not yet accustomed to playing.

This dress serves as "camouflage" for a feeling of inferiority based on gender.[780] Although it symbolises her new ability to use sex to tip the balance of power between men and women, it also perpetuates the view that women are commodities. As Pearl Hochstadt states, this was "for some women their only bargaining chip in the power game."[781] The link between money, sex, and clothes is made in all of Rhys's early novels, and most prominently in *Voyage in the Dark*. As Port states, the word "investment" also means the act of putting on clothes.[782] Notably, the "act" indicates a performance, with the clothes worn akin to costumes donned by actors in a play. Anna must play the role of the "tart" in order to survive, and is encouraged to do so by her chorus girl friends Maudie and Laurie. In the opening pages of the novel, Anna is reading

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[778] *Voyage*, p 24.
[779] *Midnight*, p 53.
[780] Reventós, 1996, p 397.
[781] Hochstadt, 1987, p 3.
[782] Port, "'Money, for the Night is Coming'", p 208.

Nana by Emile Zola. Maudie says to her:

> 'That's a dirty book, isn't it?'
> […]
> 'I know; it's about a tart. I think it's disgusting. I bet you a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another. Besides, all books are like that – just somebody stuffing you up.' [783]

The reference to "all books" as "just somebody stuffing you up" is also a foreshadowing of Vincent's love of books over sexual love, and the fact that Walter asks him to write a letter to Anna, breaking off the relationship.[784]

In Carole Angier's introduction to *Voyage in the Dark*, she states that Rhys's writing attempts to convey feeling and emotion using:

> the fewest and shortest [words] she could, as though she were trying not to use words at all […] Jean also tells us that that is how we should read it […] through images of meaning. The first comes right at the start, in the first thing we see Anna do: she is reading a book 'about a tart', as Maudie says – which is, in cold external words, what we are doing too.[785]

Similarly, Veronica Marie Gregg states that the "monosyllabic language" in *Voyage in the Dark* "represents a form of rewriting of the dominant to make it bear the burden of 'difference'".[786] She cites Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the deterritorialization of language, which "makes it take flight along creative lines of escape".[787] Thus the narrative "writes back" to the dominant discourse of male patriarchy by subverting one of its devices, that of prostitution. Moreover, Peter Wolfe states that

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[783] *Voyage*, p 9. For discussions on the significance of "Nana" as an anagram of "Anna", see: Le Gallez, *The Rhys Woman*, pp 83-84; Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, pp 116-118, Savory, *Jean Rhys*, pp 71, 92-6; Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text*, p 73; Nebeker, *Jean Rhys*. Although there are similarities between *Voyage in the Dark* and *Nana*, they are not as comprehensive as those between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*: Rhys made her intentions about her last novel clear in letters and interviews, whereas the comparisons between *Voyage in the Dark* and the Zola text are elicited by critics. When Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* wakes up with her make-up still on, "The maid thought: 'Tart'". (p 85)

[784] *Voyage*, pp 79-81.

[785] Angier, Introduction to *Voyage in the Dark*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2000, p ix.

[786] Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 115. Rhys writes about the language of *Voyage in the Dark* in a letter to Evelyn Scott: "It's written almost entirely in words of one syllable. Like a kitten mewing perhaps" (Wyndham, Melly, eds., *Letters*, p 24).

[787] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, pp 23-26, in Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 115.

Rhys's pared down writing demonstrates her "art of the unstated and the implied".[788]

Anna and Maudie do not use the word "tart" to describe themselves, but use it to describe others in their situation, (for example, the character of Nana). Instead, they play the role by calling themselves "ladies".[789] Thus "tart" and "lady", two antithetical descriptors, become conflated. As indicated, Maudie believes that playing the part of the lady by "swanking" in new clothes, will somehow improve one's situation. The reality that she chooses to ignore, however, is that it is inextricably linked to prostitution, rather than a means of becoming independent. The act of swanking is the role that a "tart" must play in order to attract a man who will buy expensive clothes for her. The cycle is perpetuated: the expensive clothes reveal her status as a "lady", but in order to maintain this lifestyle, she must continue to play the part of a prostitute in order to *appear* like a "lady". Thus the performance of swanking reveals itself as the performance necessary for prostitution to occur.

Another example of this performance that is bound up in prostitution is when Anna puts her gloves on before going out. Her landlady says:

> 'You'll be well enough to leave tomorrow, won't you, Miss Morgan?'
> 'Yes,' I said…I went outside and finished putting on my gloves standing on the doorstep. (A lady always puts on her gloves before going into the street.)[790]

At this early stage of the novel, Anna's behaviour foreshadows her future role as not only a tart (who accepts money from her first lover, Walter Jeffries), but as a prostitute, who sleeps with a string of mostly unknown men, in exchange for money. The statement "(A lady always puts on her gloves before going into the street)" is self-reflexive and ironic. By placing it in brackets, Rhys draws attention to the dichotomy between inner

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[788] Wolfe, *Jean Rhys*, p 19.
[789] For further discussions on prostitution in Rhys's novels, see Lewis "Immigrants, Prostitutes, and Chorus Girls", pp 82-95.
[790] *Voyage*, p 30.

thoughts and outer behaviour. The dialogue and outward act of putting on gloves represents Anna's appearance to the outside world, here represented by the landlady. The inner thought that reflects on the act of putting on gloves, however, indicates an awareness of a performance that Anna plays, in order to *appear* like a lady. The act is something that Anna seems to have learned, and is acutely aware of, rather than a form of behaviour that comes naturally to her, hence her reflection upon the act.[791]

Moreover, the word "street" suggests a woman who "works the streets", that is, a prostitute. The putting on of gloves indicates perhaps the unpleasantness of what Anna must participate in, in order to survive, and can be read as a metaphor for the use of prophylactics. Like the English characters in Marya's world, who "touch life with gloves on", Anna tries to perform a role that will help her to conform to the English society in which she is living. The act of putting on the gloves is hence a foreshadowing of her future role as prostitute, in which she does not allow her emotions to interfere with the job of sleeping with men whom she does not love or even know. This final act of prostitution marks the death of Anna's self, through the repetition of a performance that she does not enjoy, nor feel anything much towards. Like Sasha, she no longer wishes to be loved. However, Anna, unlike Sasha, is not financially independent. As a result, she continues to play the role of prostitute, rather than opting out of society altogether, as Sasha tries to do.

In conclusion, the female protagonists in Rhys's early novels perform their identities in an attempt to fit into English society, whilst at the same time being critical and aware of certain exploitative and hypocritical aspects of such a society. Their ambivalence towards Englishness and blackness is characterised by a belief in fixed

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[791] Similarly, when Hester meets Anna in England, she says to her: 'I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and *behave* like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn't do it. Impossible to get you away from the servants. That awful sing-song voice you had!' (*Voyage*, p 56; my emphasis).

ethnic and cultural identities, and the desire to be black as well as the desire to belong to English society. The latter desire is accompanied by the desire to be ladylike, an objective that they are unable to achieve, based on their lack of family connections and their status as chorus girls. This status, however, allows them to perform their identities and, to some degree, to "get on" in such a society. However, their ambivalence and hatred of certain aspects of Englishness, particularly its "cold hypocrisy", leads to these characters acting out their designated role. As these characters often see through the constructed nature of their societies, they perform their identities in order to appear to be what they are not, indicated by words such as "ladylike" and "tart", which, when juxtaposed, reveal similarities in such seemingly antithetical designators.

The performance of race as well as gender is enacted by Rhys's early female protagonists, particularly Sasha, whose ethnicity and nationality are both called into question. *Good Morning, Midnight*'s characters – in addition to Sasha herself – are all prone to performance based on race, class, professional status or nationality. The inability of these characters to fit neatly into fixed racial, national or ethnic categories marks the changeability of these states of identity, revealing them as not only constructed but changeable and performable.

The performativity of age is also significant in shaping the early female characters' identities. Both Sasha and Julia are no longer young, and are therefore losing their commodification value as women. Sasha performs her identity as someone younger than her age by having her hair dyed. By contrast, Horsfield observes Julia as losing her looks on the basis of her age and the fact that she does not attempt to appear younger. Thus age is performed in terms of looking, if not being, younger than one's years. Race is similarly performed when Sasha dyes her hair, as well as when Julia's sister Norah embraces Englishness, showing little interest in her mother's Brazilian heritage.

The ambivalence that these characters feel towards Englishness and their own cultural and/or racial otherness reflects their mixed, and in the case of Anna, Creole backgrounds. Their ironic self-awareness demonstrates an ability to see through social conventions, as well as to use them to their advantage.

5. Memory, Nostalgia, and the Zombie in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1930) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939)

> Zombies were black shapeless things. They could get through a locked door and you heard them walking up to your bed. You didn't see them, you felt their hairy hands round your throat. – *Smile, Please*[792]

A zombie, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is "In the West Indies and southern states of America, a soulless corpse said to have been revived by witchcraft; formerly, the name of a snake-deity in voodoo cults of or deriving from West Africa and Haiti." To be "zombie-like" is to be "characteristic of or resembling a zombie; lifeless, unfeeling". The first definition is based on African and Caribbean folklore.[793] The second definition can apply to anyone. This chapter will highlight the use of the zombie motif in three of Rhys's early novels. The analysis will draw attention to the multiplicity inherent in Julia Martin, Anna Morgan, and Sasha Jensen, in terms of memory and dreams. It will explore these states of consciousness and their relationships with time. Death as a state of being will also be highlighted in these texts, with reference to the Modernist concern with the machine, the death of humanity and the death of the self. This analysis will explore the idea of death's lack of finality, and the paradox of the simultaneous resurrection of the self and death of the self that is evident in the characters' vivid, life-like memories. In addition, clinical studies of zombies will be drawn upon to highlight the zombie-like behaviour of Rhys's female protagonists in the selected

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[792] Rhys, *Smile, Please*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1984; first published by André Deutsch Ltd., 1979, p 30.

[793] Hans W Ackermann, and Jeanine Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi", p 466, in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 104.414, Autumn, 1991, p 466-494. The article spells the word as "zombi", and I will spell it as "zombie" unless quoting from Ackermann and Gauthier, when it will be spelt as "zombi".

novels.[794]

Further explication of the phenomenon of zombification will help to illuminate the use of the zombie motif in Rhys's novels. According to a study conducted by Hans W Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier, there are two types of zombie, "the zombi of the body, or living dead" and "the zombi of the soul".[795] The latter has not been the subject of great study, whereas the former is the most commonly understood form of zombie – a body without a soul.[796] In all cases studied, a zombie is "a body buried in sight of all and resurrected by unknown means".[797] Thus the zombie incorporates life and death, a duality that separates soul from body, the soul usually having been stolen while the person is still alive.[798] Similarly, Douyon and Littlewood define a zombie as a young person who is poisoned by a *boko* (sorcerer), suddenly falls ill, apparently dies and is buried. The body of the young person is still alive, but appears in every way to be dead. After burial, it is "secretly returned to life and activity, but not to full awareness and agency."[799] Historically, it is believed that zombies were used in this way as slaves who worked

[794] For analyses of the zombie motif in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, see: Elaine Campbell, "The Theme of Madness in Four African and Caribbean Novels by Women", *Commonwealth Novel in English*, Vol. 1-2 (Spring), 1993, pp 133-141; Judie Newman, ed., "I Walked with a Zombie: *Wide Sargasso Sea*", in *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions*, London, New York, Sydney, Auckland: Arnold, 1995, pp 13-28; Barbara Lalla, "Discourse of Dispossession: Ex-centric Journeys of the Un-living in 'Wide Sargasso Sea' and the Old English 'The Wife's Lament'", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 24.3, July 1993, pp 55-72; Marie Josephine Diamond, "Remembering Differently: The Madwoman, The Hysteric and the Witch in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Helene Cixous' *Portrait de Dora* and Maryse Conde's *Moi, Tituba sorciere…noire de* Salem", in John Neubauer and Helga Geyer-Ryan, eds., *Gendered Memories*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2000, pp 9-20; Trenton Hickman, "The Colonized Woman as Monster in *Jane Eyre, Wide Sargasso Sea*, and *Annie John*", *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 14.3, 2000, pp 181-98; Mona Fayad, "Unquiet Ghosts: The Struggle for Representation in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Modern Fictions Studies*, Vol. 34.3, Autumn 1988, pp 437-452; Stephanie Branson, "Magicked by the Place: Shadow and Substance in *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Jean Rhys Review*, Vol. 3.2, 1989, pp 19-28; Romita Choudhury, "'Is there a ghost, a zombie there?' Postcolonial intertextuality and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *Textual Practice*, Vol. 10.2, 1996, pp 315-327; Desmond Kavanagh, "Jean Rhys and God", *Durham University Journal*, 1989, pp 275-280; Kathleen J Renk, "Genesis of the Gods: The Cosmic Visions of Jean Rhys and Wilson Harris", *Southern Review*, Vol. 27, December 1994, pp 475-487; Thomas Loe, "Patterns of the Zombie in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *World Literature Written in English*, Vol. 31.1, 1991, pp 34-42; Derrilyn E. Morrison, "Reading the Zombi in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*", *MaComère*, Harrisonburg, Virginia, Vol. 6, 2004, pp 63-69.

[795] "Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi"", p 467.

[796] p 467.

[797] p 474.

[798] p 474.

[799] Roland Littlewood and Chavannes Douyon, "Clinical findings", p 1094. Both articles ("The Ways and Nature of the Zombi" and "Clinical findings") base their studies on Haitian zombies. The latter attribute the phenomenon partly to an imperialist cause, namely the U.S occupation of Haiti in the 1950s.

through the night on plantations.[800] Similarly, Ackermann and Gauthier point out that the zombie "may be captured and sold".[801] They describe the zombie as a "victim" who "becomes a slave of the sorcerer who zombified it".[802] Such a victim is "deprived of will, memory, and consciousness".[803] A master-slave relationship emerges between the zombie and the witchdoctor who controls it. The zombie can thus serve many practical uses, including performing simple chores such as drawing water, gathering firewood or hoeing its master's garden.[804]

Although cultures that purport some kind of belief in zombies recognise a distinction between body and soul, they have yet another kind of duality in mind, according to Ackermann and Gauthier – a duality of the soul itself. The Haitian notion of the zombie divides the soul into two parts, the *Gros Bon Ange* and the *Ti Bon Ange*, or "big good angel" and "little good angel" respectively, the former resembling the Christian notion of a soul and the latter corresponding to the Western notion of "spirit".[805] Similarly, Douyon and Littlewood make reference to the "*gwo-bon anj*" (animating principle) and the "*ti-bon anj*" (agency, awareness and memory).[806] Whether one wants to think of a zombie as simply a body without a soul, or as a body with an incomplete soul (lacking either the *Gros Bon Ange* or the *Ti Bon Ange*), duality is clearly a defining feature. Significantly, the zombie is not in touch with reality, but is controlled by someone else, and thereby lacks a will of its own[807].

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[800] "The animated body remains without will or agency as the *zombie cadavre*, which becomes the slave of the *boko* and works secretly on his land or is sold to another *boko* for the same purpose". (Littlewood and Douyon, "Clinical findings", p 1094)
[801] "Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi"", p 471.
[802] p 474.
[803] p 474.
[804] p 479.
[805] p 469.
[806] Douyon, and Littlewood, "Clinical findings", p 1094. For the purpose of this analysis, I will use Ackermann and Gauthier's terminology and Douyon and Littlewood's definitions.
[807] Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi", p 474; Douyon and Littlewood, "Clinical findings", p 1094.

Sorcerer-Zombie, Master-Slave

Hester and Anna

As noted, one characteristic of the zombie is that the person has been poisoned and made to seem dead, then secretly brought back to life. This is evident for both Anna and Sasha. While still at home in the West Indies, Anna's English stepmother, Hester tries to "poison" Anna's mind by convincing her that she will enjoy England and prefer living there, rather than her childhood home in the West Indies:

> At half-past twelve we had breakfast and Hester started talking about Cambridge. She was always talking about Cambridge.
> She said she was sure I should like England very much and that it would be a very good thing for me if I were to go to England.
> […]
> 'I hate dogs,' I said.
> 'Well, really!' she said.
> 'Well, I do,' I said.
> 'I don't know what'll become of you if you go on like that,' Hester said. 'Let me tell you that you'll have a very unhappy life if you go on like that. People won't like you. People in England will dislike you very much if you say things like that.'
> 'I don't care,' I said. But I began to repeat the multiplication-table because I was afraid I was going to cry.[808]

The above scene reveals that Anna feels at home in the West Indies, and the thought of moving to a far-away, unknown place is terrifying to her. Anna's ambivalent attitude towards England and Englishness is evident in the phrase, "I was afraid I was going to cry." Already, Anna is trying to suppress her emotions, and like the zombie, is unable to express them. In Anna's case, her stepmother acts as a master to her slave in the sense that Anna cannot freely cry in front of Hester. Anna cannot, therefore, fully be herself, although she does assert herself by saying, "'I don't care,'" in response to Hester's

[808] *Voyage*, pp 59-61.

warning about being disliked in England.

Anna is metaphorically killed when sent to England against her will, as a youth. She is then resurrected when living in England. However, her life there is not one of her choosing, and like the zombie, she is forced to live it against her own will, going through the daily motions, not always in control of what she does, and always at somewhat of a remove from what is happening around her. As an adult, she recalls the traumatic experience of being torn away from her home and her family, marking a type of death, as analogous to that of the zombie:

> – It was when I looked back from the boat and saw the lights of the town bobbing up and down that was the first time I really knew I was going. Uncle Bob said well you're off now and I turned my head so that nobody would see my crying…Adieu sweetheart […]. [809]

The shock of leaving the security of her home and being sent alone to the coldness of England is a trauma that changes Anna's perceptual framework, so that in some ways she resembles the automaton-like zombie. Through much of the narrative, Anna sees her daily life in England through a haze, as if she is not completely present within it, going through the motions of eating, performing, talking and having sex. The change is definite and distinct, and occurs when she moves to England from the West Indies. The opening lines of the novel make this sense of loss clear:

> It was as if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again. The colours were different, the smells different, the feeling things gave you right down inside yourself was different. Not just the difference between heat, cold; light, darkness;

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[809] *Voyage*, p 28 (Rhys's ellipses). "Uncle Bob" is probably a misprint of Uncle Bo, a character referred to several time in the novel. He is introduced when Anna tells Walter Jeffries about her family background: "'It's in my blood,' I said. 'All my family drink too much. You should see my Uncle Ramsay – Uncle Bo. He can drink if you like. […] …Here's the punch Uncle Bo said welcome Hebe – this child certainly can mix a good punch Father said something to warm the cockles of your heart […] 'Yes, Uncle Bo can drink if you like,' I said […]" (pp 44-5). Later, when Hester visits Anna in England, she begins to read a letter from her uncle: "'And that's what Uncle Bo wrote back, is it?' I said. 'Uncle Bo!' she said. 'Uncle Bo! Uncle Boozy would be a better name for him. Yes, this is what Uncle Bo wrote back'" (pp 51-2). He is mentioned again towards the end of the narrative, during feverish flashbacks experienced by Anna while recovering from her abortion: "*I was watching them from between the slats of the jalousies* […] *you can't expect niggers to behave like white people all the time Uncle Bo said* […] *look at that fat old woman Hester said just look at her – oh yes she's having a go too Uncle Bo said they all have a go they don't mind* […]" (*Voyage*, p 157; Rhys's italics).

> purple, grey. But a difference in the way I was frightened and the way I was happy. I didn't like England at first. I couldn't get used to the cold.[810]

The above passage shows Anna as a zombie who experiences perceptual stimuli, but in a detached way. For Anna, "being born again" is analogous to a zombie who has been brought back to life, against its will. Her "death" comes to her when she is sent away, and the "resurrection" occurs when she must face her daily life in England. The echo of Christianity is an ironic comment on Anna's experience, which is quite the opposite of a resurrection that promises eternal life. As noted, Anna and Walter's relationship is destined to end in tragedy for Anna, given the cultural differences between the two.[811]

Another way in which Hester is like a master to Anna is that Hester tries to control Anna's destiny and outlook on life. Hester believes strongly in England and its values, and often looks upon West Indian culture with disdain. When Anna is in the English countryside with Walter, his cousin Vincent and Vincent's girlfriend Germaine, she fondly remembers the West Indian climate at night time:

> I used to try to imagine a night […] with the crac-cracs going. The verandah long and ghostly – the hammock and three chairs and a table with the telescope on it – and the crac-cracs going all the time. The moon and the darkness and the sound of the trees, and not far away the forest where nobody had ever been – virgin forest. We used to sit on the verandah with the night coming in, huge. And the way it smelt of all flowers. ('This place gives me the creeps at night,' Hester would say).[812]

The memory of the setting of Anna's childhood, evoked in the wildness of a typical West Indian night, is somewhat deflated at the end by Hester's cutting comment, which is bracketed and placed in inverted commas. This marks Hester's tendency to undermine the beauty of the West Indies, a place she finds alien and hostile, (much in the same way that Rochester does in *Wide Sargasso Sea*), and which she polarises as savage against

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[810] *Voyage*, p 7.
[811] Lewis "Immigrants, Prostitutes, and Chorus Girls", p 82.
[812] *Voyage*, p 71.

"civilised" England. However, placing Hester's comments within parentheses also indicates Anna's subordination of her stepmother's disdainful comments. As noted in Chapter Three, Rochester's speech is parenthesised (and italicised), indicating Antoinette's and Christophine's disruptive pulsional pressures against his narrative. Hester's parenthesised statement, by contrast, marks a subordination of her voice against Anna's memory. Although Hester's statement comes at the end of Anna's memory, punctuating it as a final say, its authority is undermined by the parentheses. Anna is aware of her stepmother's influence, and cannot altogether drown out her voice; however, she does, to some degree, contain it. If analysed in terms of the zombie motif, Hester's parenthesised statement demonstrates the control that she has over Anna's thoughts. Even Anna's reminiscences are not entirely her own: they are disrupted by her stepmother's persistent voice.

Norah

In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia's sister Norah is on at least two occasions analogous to a zombie. The first instance is when she starts reading *Almayer's Folly*, when an extract of the book is given: "The slave had not hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky […] She had no wish, no hope, no love….".[813] As discussed, both Norah and Julia are alienated from where they live, yet have no knowledge of any place that they might call "home". Norah's slavery also stems from her devotion to her mother, whose health had been deteriorating for nearly a decade.[814] While tending to her mother, she feels neglected by family and friends, "watching her youth die, and her beauty die, and her soft heart grow hard and bitter".[815] Norah is like the slave, forced to live a life that is not of her own choosing, in addition to feeling alienated from her

[813] *Mackenzie*, p 75.
[814] p 76.
[815] p 76.

environment and not having a sense of home, which can be read as a sense of identity or selfhood.

Later in the narrative, when Julia and Norah argue violently, Julia notices her sister's face as "so white – white, with bluish lips."[816] Julia compares whiteness with death, suggesting that becoming white marks a death of the self. It echoes other instances in Rhys's novels in which the female protagonist desires to be black. This desire is a desire for self-annihilation, particularly prevalent for the white Creole characters who as previously discussed, lack a sense of identity that is fixed to one location, that is, they lack a sense of "home." As discussed, Julia more strongly desires a connection to her mother's homeland than Norah does. This represents Julia's feeling of abandonment from her mother, the trauma of which is too strong to resurrect a desire for her attention and affection.[817] Even at her mother's deathbed, she feels distant from her: "Julia touched her mother's hand, which was lying outside the bedclothes. Then she whispered very softly: 'Darling.' She said 'darling' with her lips, but her heart was dead".[818]

Living Death in London

"Two Things that I Couldn't Fit Together": Anna's West Indian memories

Anna has lost control of her *Gros Bon Ange*, in that she often finds it difficult to function fully in her daily life in England, and loses touch with the reality of that daily existence. However, she retains control of her *Ti Bon Ange*, which controls mental faculties, including memories and dreams. As Judith Raiskin illustrates in *Snow on the Cane Fields*, Rhys's use of the *obeah* in her fiction reflects a "disruption and reversal" of

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[816] *Mackenzie*, p 99.
[817] "You loved to watch her brushing her long hair […] And then her mother – entirely wrapped up in the new baby – had said […] 'Don't be a cry-baby […] You're a great big girl of six'". (*Mackenzie*, p 77)
[818] *Mackenzie*, p 70.

"powerful political significance" that was also evident in Haitian folklore and history.[819] This problematises any straightforward notion of the "zombi-sorcerer relationship".[820]

Anna's control over her *Ti Bon Ange* is evident in her ability to use comforting memories of her past in order to deal with her current anxieties and problems in England. These are not memories that come to her against her will. Rather, she channels them as a means of alleviating suffering and pain. As Thorunn Lonsdale states in "The Female Child in the Fiction of Jean Rhys", "Each time Anna suffers loss or humiliation, she returns to thoughts of the island as an unconscious way of deflecting despair".[821]

As Freud states, incorporation is the phenomenon whereby an individual internalises a lost or dead person as a way of coping with separation or bereavement.[822] Anna internalises the loss of her past, her "home", analogous to her loss of innocence, as represented in her separation from the "mother"-land and in the losing of her virginity to Walter Jeffries. Later in the narrative, when Anna receives a letter from Vincent, asking her to break off her affair with Walter, her initial reaction is one of escape into her past. She wonders what the memory of something that happened probably twelve years previously, has to do with the letter she has just received:

> It was lying on the table, and right across the room I thought, 'Who on earth's that from?' because of the handwriting.
> …I was walking along the passage to the long upper verandah which ran the length of the house in town […] I got up to the table where the magazine was and Uncle Bo moved and sighed and long yellow tusks like fangs came out of his mouth and protruded down to his chin – you don't scream when you are frightened because you can't and you don't move either because you can't – after a long time he sighed and opened his eyes and clicked his teeth back into place and said what on earth do

[819] Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, pp 132-3.
[820] Patrick Taylor, *The Narrative of Liberation: Perspectives on Afro-Caribbean Literature, Popular Culture, and Politics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989, p 102. Emery echoes Raiskin's observation about Anna, in her point that "Julia as zombie can subvert definitive identities like gender conventions or the restrictions of time" (Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p 143).
[821] Lonsdale, "The Female Child", p 61. See also: Minogue and Palmer, "Confronting the Abject", p 107; and Emery, who states that Anna draws on her memories in order to "shield her[self] from what is happening in the present", (*Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p 75).
[822] Hawthorn, *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, p 172.

> you want child – it was the magazine I said – he turned over and went to sleep again – I went out very softly – I had never seen false teeth before […] I shut the door and went away very softly down the passage…
> I thought, 'But what's the matter with me? That was years and years ago, ages and ages ago. Twelve years ago or something like that. What's this letter got to do with false teeth?
> I read it again[823]

The ellipses before "I was walking along the passage", which appear at the opening of Chapter 8, indicate Anna's drifting into a memory of her distant past, and away from her present-day situation. The line, "I read it again" informs the reader that Anna has already read the letter before her flashback. The flashback itself is not a nostalgic memory. Rather, it is a memory in which the stability and comfort of the familiar are suddenly replaced by the alien and the terrifying. Uncle Bo, a recurring character, represents Anna's home and the security of her childhood in the West Indies. When she sees his false teeth, fear paralyses her. She is unable to scream, unable to move, and therefore unable to express herself. Much in the same way that the zombie suffers trauma and loss of the soul and therefore becomes an automaton, Anna in this incident of the past, momentarily takes on these characteristics of the zombie.[824]

The memory is mirrored by the present experience of suddenly being abandoned by Jeffries, as her lover. At first, Anna does not know why the memory comes to her, indicating her likeness to the zombie in that she is unable to fully control her actions, that is, the act of remembering in detail a long-ago incident: "I thought, 'But what's the matter with me? That was years and years ago, ages and ages ago […] What's this letter got to do with false teeth?'".[825]

However, after reading the letter again, Anna uses the memory of the false teeth to escape from her present state of shock:

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[823] *Voyage*, pp 78-79.
[824] For a psychoanalytic analysis of the above scene, see Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment*, pp 50-52.
[825] *Voyage*, p 79.

> I thought, 'What the hell's the matter with me? I must be crazy. This letter has nothing to do with false teeth.'
>
> But I went on thinking about false teeth, and then about piano-keys and about that time the blind man from Martinique came to tune the piano and then he played and we listened to him sitting in the dark with the jalousies shut because it was pouring with rain and my father said, 'You are a real musician.' He had a red moustache, my father […] That was the time when he said, 'The Welsh word for grief is hiraeth.' Hiraeth. And that time when I was crying about nothing […] He hugged me up and then he said, 'I believe you're going to be like me, you poor little devil.' And that time when Mr Crowe said, 'You don't mean to say you're backing up that damned French monkey?' meaning the Governor, 'I've met some Englishmen,' he said, 'who were monkeys too.'
>
> When I looked at the clock it was quarter past five.[826]

The above passage combines a myriad of memories from Anna's childhood, all of which give her a sense of identity and belonging: her father's red moustache and Welsh heritage; the Welsh word for grief; the blind man from Martinique who tunes the family piano; the jalousies, closed to keep out the rain; and the status of her father in the West Indies, understood in his language and interest in politics.[827] All of these remain in Anna's past. Having lost her identity and innocence after being sent away from the West Indies, Anna had, for a time, regained a sense of self in her relationship with Walter. However, now that Walter has broken off the affair, she clings desperately to her past memories as a means of reaffirming her former self, which existed long before she had met Walter, and before she had moved to England.

The reality of Walter ending their affair, and the resulting sense of alienation and abandonment, is marked by Anna's vision of drowning, a few pages later:

> It was like letting go and falling back into water and seeing yourself grinning up through the water, your face like a mask, and seeing the bubbles coming up as if you were trying to speak from under the water. And how do you know what it's like to try to speak from under water when you're drowned? 'And I've met a lot of them who were monkeys too,' he said…[828]

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[826] *Voyage*, p 81.
[827] Notably, Rhys's father was a Welsh doctor (Nebeker, *Jean Rhys*, p i).
[828] *Voyage*, p 84.

The last line of this spiral into near-oblivion is Anna's attempt to reaffirm her identity. The line is a slightly rephrased repetition of Anna's flashback, a few pages earlier, and occurs after she has read the letter the second time, and has met with Walter. She repositions herself with her past as a woman from the West Indies, and in defiance against Walter, an Englishman, by remembering her father speaking derogatorily about the English. Hence, the line: "'And I've met a lot of them who were monkeys too,' he said…" is addressed directly at Walter, in Anna's mind.[829]

When Anna is experiencing illness at the early stage of her pregnancy, her mind immerses itself into various childhood memories, including the road leading to her childhood home, Constance Estate:

> When I put the light out again the room was dark, and warm so long as I kept my hands under the blankets. I hadn't got a headache. I was all right really – only damned tired, worse than usual […]
>
> And then I tried to remember the road that leads to Constance Estate. It's funny how well you can remember when you lie in the dark with your arm over your forehead. Two eyes open inside your head. The sandbox tree outside the door at home and the horse waiting […] You ride in a sort of dream, the saddle creaks sometimes, and you smell the sea and the good smell of the horse […] The feeling of the hills comes to you – cool and hot at the same time. Everything is green, everywhere things are growing. There is never one moment of stillness – always something buzzing.[830]

When the memories come to Anna, it is as if she becomes another person. Her current-day zombie-like existence is replaced by an internal world of warmth, colour and vivid sensory experiences, all remembered as details of her childhood in the West Indies. Thus Anna's memories resurrect her past in a way that helps her in dealing with the pain and trauma of her current life in England; they bring to life her past while ignoring her already-dead present.

As Fortier states, a sense of racial belonging emerges not only through the

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[829] *Voyage*, p 84.
[830] pp 128-29. For a Jungian/psychoanalytical reading of this passage, see Nebeker, pp 69-70.

"reiteration of social norms"[831], but through "'memory work' that is rich with images of duration".[832] This involves more than simply juxtaposing the past onto the present, but partly a "creative process that constructs and locates an historical environment, adding substance to the immediate, lived experience of the present."[833] It is a case of "conjur[ing] up lives of the past to create a habitable space for [one's] contemporaries."[834] Anna conjures up the past, making connections with it, in an attempt to better understand and deal with her present-day life. As Keith Abbott states, Rhys's narratives are "constantly interrupted by daydreams. Daydreams are the oil with which so many lives are relieved of their visible, felt attritions."[835]

Both Sasha and Anna have a degree of detachment from their current lives in England. For Sasha, that reality is obscured by alcohol, lumninal and strange dreams, as well as the propensity to slip into memories of her past. For Anna, both the past and present at times seem like dreams. For example, while staying with Jeffries, Vincent and Germaine, Anna notices that the English countryside has a "cool smell, that wasn't the dead smell of London".[836] She also notices that there is something missing from this beauty:

> 'I like it here,' I said. 'I didn't know England could be so beautiful.'
> But something had happened to it. It was as if the wildness had gone out of it.[837]

When Walter asks Anna if the flowers are similar to the ones she had at home, her response reflects her longing for home, as well as the apparent unreality of the place of her childhood:

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[831] Fortier, "Re-Membering Places", p 43.
[832] "Re-Membering Places" p 46.
[833] p 47.
[834] p 47.
[835] Keith Abbott, "Some Thoughts on Jean Rhys's Fiction", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 5.2, 1985, pp 112-114, p 112.
[836] *Voyage*, p 66.
[837] p 67.

> I said, 'Not quite like these.' But when I began to talk about the flowers out there I got that feeling of a dream, of two things that I couldn't fit together, and it was as if I were making up the names. Stephanotis, hibiscus, yellow-bell, jasmine, frangipanni, corolita.[838]

In the same sense that Ruth did not believe Julia's life story, and similar to the disbelief that Walter expresses in the way he looks at Anna, Anna herself begins to wonder how true her West Indian past was. She no longer has any family connections to affirm her previous identity, and she is developing into a lost, nameless individual whose life is not entirely under her control.

"Cold as Ice"

Another way in which Anna's character is analogous to the zombie is that she is often cold and often ill. This is evident, for example, when Anna and Maudie meet Jeffries and his friend Mr Jones, and have them over for tea:

> He [Walter's friend, Mr Jones] brought the bottle of port over and filled my glass again. When he touched my hand he pretended to shiver. He said, 'Oh God, cold as ice. Cold and rather clammy.'
> 'She's always cold,' Maudie said. 'She can't help it. She was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies or somewhere, weren't you, kid?'[839]

In the above scene, Anna's life-in-death state, akin to the zombie, is evident in her cold hands. Her coldness signifies that she is not completely alive while living in England. She is disconnected from the place in which she now lives, as an adult, and her cold hands, for example, as well as the general feeling of physical coldness, signify her deadness while existing in this new environment, which she has not chosen to inhabit. The coldness also represents her detachment from her place of abode, to which she has no strong or passionate attachment, unlike her home in the West Indies. The latter is remembered through vivid, colourful memories that are also characterised by music,

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[838] *Voyage*, p 67.
[839] p 12.

smells and other physical sensations, which revive her momentarily.

Another example of Anna's physical coldness occurs when Ethel, her landlady, gets angry with her:

> '[D]o you know what it cost me to put in the gas-fire because you said you couldn't stand your bedroom without it, of all the damned nonsense? And always going on about being tired and it's being dark and cold and this, that and the other'.[840]

This tirade occurs immediately after Ethel has accidentally spilled boiling hot water on one of her male clients, who was being treated with a massage. The contrast of the boiling hot water and the coldness indicates that the memories Anna has of her past are dangerous and liable to injure. The coldness, on the other hand, is something that Anna feels but does not quite feel; it is something that numbs her from her daily experiences. Feeling cold, therefore, forms a shield between Anna and her environment, so that she is not completely connected to it, but experiences it with a sense of detachment.[841]

For example, on Anna and Walter's first date, Walter makes sexual advances towards her, against her will:

> He kissed me again, and his mouth was hard, and I remembered him smelling the glass of wine and I couldn't think of anything but that, and I hated him.
> 'Look here, let me go,' I said […] I pushed him away as hard as I could […] Damn you, let me go, damn you. Or I'll make a hell of a row.' But as soon as he let me go I stopped hating him.
> 'I'm very sorry,' he said. […]
> I took up my coat and hat and went into the bedroom. I pushed the door shut after me. […]
> I sat down on the bed and listened, then I lay down. The bed was soft; the pillow was as cold as ice. I felt as if I had gone out of myself, as if I were in a dream.[842]

The above scene marks yet another traumatic event for Anna: Walter makes a

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[840] *Voyage*, p 124.
[841] Like Anna, Sasha feels cold, but it is a coldness that she does not find distressing, and suggests that she has tried to make herself immune to the influences around her: "I'm a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely – dry, cold and sane" (*Midnight*, p 10).
[842] *Voyage*, pp 20-1.

sexual advance towards her against her will. The event itself is not clearly defined as assault, in that she "stopped hating him" as soon as he relented, and it is clear that she is in love with him. However, the trauma of the act – made all the more intense for Anna because she is in love with Walter – affects her perceptual framework. As she sits waiting in the adjoining bedroom, she feels detached from her immediate physical environment. The pillow, like death, is "as cold as ice". Anna feels detached from her body, "as if I had gone out of myself". She feels unconnected, "as if I were in a dream." To feel as if in a dream state is a way of protecting herself from the reality of the traumatic event she has just experienced.

Early in her relationship with Walter, Anna has the flu. As a result, her feelings of detachment from her surroundings are more pronounced than usual:

> He came in again with a lot of parcels – an eiderdown and a bottle of burgundy and some grapes and Brand's essence of beef and a cold chicken.
> He kissed me and his face felt cool and smooth against mine. But the heat and the cold of the fever were running up and down my back. When you have fever you are heavy and light, you are small and swollen, you climb endlessly a ladder which turns like a wheel.[843]

The eiderdown and the parcels of food that Walter brings are an attempt to revive Anna. The act represents not only Walter's desire to restore Anna back to normal health, but his ability to revive her emotionally. At first, this attempt is unsuccessful against the power of Anna's fever. He kisses her, "But the heat and cold of the fever were running up and down [her] back." Anna embodies both heat and cold, feels heavy and light, small and swollen. This marks her ambivalence as a white Creole, and one who occupies a loyalty to two places (England and the West Indies) simultaneously, hence identifying her duality. As Seshagiri states, Anna's ambivalence is evident in her desire to be black,

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[843] *Voyage*, p 29.

combined with her desire for English whiteness.[844] The perpetually turning ladder-cum-wheel represents the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth, where rebirth is merely another form of death, perpetuated as a living death, the death-in-life state of the zombie.

Julia also has a life that repeats itself in terms of its cycle of past and present. As Henrik Mossin points out in "The Existentialist Dimension in the Novels of Jean Rhys", Julia obsesses over memories of the past, with a strong focus on "something lost, the way it was lost", leading to a "circularity of the present".[845] These stages are characterised by guilt, childhood memories and "the unavoidable existential alienation from nature". Mossin assesses the novel as an allegory of the Fall in the Bible.[846] This circularity is a cycle evident in the life of the zombie, who experiences a "fall" when first zombified, and is forced to live a half-life, of which it is not fully in control. For example, in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*:

> [Julia] felt that her life had moved in a circle. Predestined, she had returned to her starting-point, in this little Bloomsbury bedroom that was so exactly like the little Bloomsbury bedroom she had left nearly ten years before. […]
>
> Perhaps the last ten years had been a dream; perhaps life, moving on for the rest of the world, had miraculously stood still for her.[847]

Anna tries to assert her West Indian heritage by repeatedly and drunkenly telling Walter: "'I'm a real West Indian,' I kept saying. 'I'm the fifth generation on my mother's side'".[848] Seshagiri points out that this assertion:

> points only to her troubled status within the 'paradox of history'; it does not affix her place within the mosaic of contradictory identities that comprises the Caribbean. In other words, Anna's ambivalence towards colonial discourses […] expels her from private as well as public imperial histories.[849]

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[844] Seshagiri, "Modernist Ashes", p 494.
[845] Mossin, "The Existentialist Dimension" p 145.
[846] "The Existentialist Dimension", p 145.
[847] *Mackenzie*, p 48.
[848] *Voyage*, p 47.
[849] Seshagiri, "Modernist Ashes", p 495.

Seshagiri argues that the narrative of *Voyage in the Dark* does not allow Anna any "meaningful self-expression", nor does it allow for the "experimental possibilities of high modernism".[850] She adds that unlike Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, the juxtaposition of past and present, and their flow one into the other are not, in *Voyage in the Dark*, "enabling or enlightening".[851] The refusal to conform to the Victorian narrative convention of the Bildungsroman only serves to reflect Anna's "rudderless" position in the narrative.[852] In this sense, Anna is detached from her external world, and, as previously noted, is zombie-like. The zombie state of death-in-life is evident in Anna's sense of being trapped into performing the same role, perpetually. Her journey is a "voyage in the dark", with no point of arrival, an "uncertain starting point and indefinite destination".[853] Anna tells her friend, Laurie: "'There was a man I was mad about. He got sick of me and chucked me. I wish I were dead'".[854] Although Anna is spiritually and emotionally "dead" after being "chucked" by Walter, she will, at the very end of the narrative, "start all over again".[855] She will continue to engage in a soulless, "tart"-like existence, in pursuit of clothes, money and happiness, all of which she knows she will not attain. All houses look "exactly alike"[856] to Anna in London, where the streets run "north, south, east west, all exactly alike".[857]

Pass the Salt

After Walter has partially revived Anna, she starts to feel detached from her surroundings once again, when the two go out for dinner and to a concert:

I didn't taste anything I ate. The orchestra played Puccini and the sort of

[850] Seshagiri, "Modernist Ashes", p 495.
[851] p 496.
[852] p 496.
[853] *Voyage*, p 497.
[854] p 99.
[855] p 159.
[856] p 82.
[857] pp 89, 152. Julia makes the same observation: "These streets near her boarding-house on Notting Hill seemed strangely empty, like the streets of a grey dream – a labyrinth of streets, all exactly alike" (*Mackenzie*, p 84).

> music that you always know what's going to come next, that you can listen to ahead, as it were; and I could still feel it on my face where his hand had touched me. I kept trying to imagine his life.[858]

In the above scene, Anna does not enjoy the food or the music to which she is treated by Walter, and cannot feel part of his life, thereby marking the social rift that divides them. She finds the music predictable, and in "know[ing] what's going to come next", anticipates her inability to be part of Walter's social sphere. Moreover, her inability to taste anything she eats is indicative of the zombie's inability to enjoy food. Ackermann and Gauthier state that the zombie's diet consists of "saltless food only", adding that "the dead can be given anything but meat and salt".[859] Hester and Anna have lunch together at the boarding house in which Hester is staying in London.[860] Anna cannot taste the food, and notices other guests suffering the same experience:

> The stew tasted of nothing at all. Everybody took one mouthful and then showered salt and sauce out of a bottle on to it. Everybody did this mechanically, without a change of expression, so that you saw that they knew it would taste of nothing. If it had tasted of anything they would have suspected it.
>
> There was an advertisement at the back of the newspaper: 'What is Purity? For Thirty-five Years the Answer has been Bourne's Cocoa'.[861]

The above scene indicates Anna's perception of Englishness as bland, hostile and alien. The boarding-house guests are like zombies: knowing in advance that their food will be tasteless they mechanically pour salt and sauce over it before eating. Anna, however, tastes her food first, expecting it to taste of something. Thus she is able to observe that "[t]he stew tasted of nothing at all", indicating that she is not yet completely zombified. The juxtaposition of the guests suspecting food that "tasted of anything" and Anna's observation of the advertisement about "Purity" indicates her perception of

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[858] *Voyage*, p 31.
[859] "Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi"", pp 474 and 479.
[860] *Voyage*, p 49.
[861] *Voyage*, p 50. For an analysis of Rhys's use of advertising imagery, see Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields*, pp 144-146.

English people as dead or zombie-like: their notion of purity makes them suspicious of otherness, which in this case suggests the more varied and flavourful diet of Anna's childhood in the West Indies. When remembering Francine, she recalls a song she used to sing, which incorporates details of her childhood diet:

> Adieu, sweetheart, adieu,
> Salt beef and sardines too,
> And all good times I leave behind,
> Adieu, sweetheart, adieu.[862]

After the stew, Anna and her stepmother eat "tinned pears", again indicating an unnatural quality to their food.[863] It is tinned, rather than fresh, and has been mass-produced, emphasising the mechanical nature of eating for consumption and out of necessity, rather than for pleasure.

Sasha's Invisibility

Death by Drowning

As Douyon and Littlewood state, the zombie is alienated as a result of the trauma of being poisoned, falling ill, appearing to be dead, buried and then "resurrected" to live a half-life. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha's mind is poisoned when she is disowned by her family, a traumatic experience that, unlike Anna's, involves complete rejection by the family, rather than forced separation from loved ones. This rejection signifies the death of Sasha's soul. Sasha has lost a sense of who she is and where she belongs. According to the folklore of the Barotse of Zambia, once a soul has been stolen from a victim, the victim "apparently becomes invisible, attends his own funeral, and is led away as a slave".[864] Sasha recalls having felt this sense of alienation and invisibility when, as a young woman, she worked in a boutique in Paris:

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[862] *Voyage*, p 28.
[863] p 50.
[864] "Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi"", p 478.

> Isn't there something you can do so that nobody looks at you or sees you? Of course, you must make your mind vacant, neutral, then your face also becomes vacant, neutral – you are invisible.[865]

Sasha remembers the time when her old identity died, marking another parallel with the zombie – the death of the soul: "Well, that was the end of me, the real end", she thinks, noting the time when she was cut off from her family in England.[866] A relative had cruelly said to her, "'Why didn't you drown yourself in the Seine?'"[867] The same family member went on to say, "'We consider you as dead. Why didn't you make a hole in the water?'"[868]. But the "jam after the medicine" as Sasha recalls, was a weekly allowance that a deceased relative left to her.[869] Sasha is "saved, rescued and with [her] little place to hide in".[870] Sasha experiences a metaphorical death, as she puts it, "the end of me", as her life, becomes one of mere emotional survival, rather than being characterised by love and companionship. The family member who speaks on behalf of the entire family ("*We* consider you as dead") is referred to as "the old devil".[871] He would have preferred if Sasha had killed herself, the implication being that she is a disgrace to the family, although the text does not clarify as to exactly why this may have been the case. Nonetheless, it is clear that Sasha's family are cold and unfeeling towards her, and it is a seemingly distant relative who leaves her enough money to survive. But this act is not one of benevolence; rather, it was done "to annoy the rest of the family", making Sasha a mere pawn within the family structure, an object upon which its members release frustrations.[872]

Sasha is unable to act of her own volition, but is resurrected, "Saved, rescued,

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[865] *Midnight*, p 17.
[866] p 37.
[867] p 36.
[868] p 36.
[869] p 36.
[870] p 37.
[871] p 36.
[872] p 36.

fished-up, half-drowned, out of the deep, dark river, dry clothes, hair shampooed and set."[873] Sasha has been physically rescued, but her family have emotionally destroyed her. She has become numb and zombie-like:

> The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang. Now I no longer wish to be loved […] I want one thing and one thing only – to be left alone.[874]

In the above passage, Sasha no longer possesses the desire to nurture herself, nor does she wish others to nurture or love her. Her desire is for her own destruction, rather than to live and to thrive in self agency. Sasha lacks the desire for affection and passion, for worry or care. In this sense, death is not defined in its literal sense, but can be seen as a state of existence whereby the individual is numb to outer stimuli and indifferent to that which constitutes humanity.

The phrase "make a hole in the water" is used in both *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*. In *Voyage in the Dark*, it is written as a prophecy of the way in which Anna's family would react to her having a baby out of wedlock:

> The inevitable, the obvious, the expected…They watch you, their faces like masks, set in the eternal grimace of disapproval. I always knew that girl was…Why didn't you do this? Why didn't you do that? Why didn't you bloody well make a hole in the water?[875]

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, the phrase is a memory of what a family member had actually said, five years previously.[876] In both cases, the family members are disapproving and wish for the death of the protagonist. Sasha's death is indicated by her being cut off from her family, a final disconnection from the kind of love that family brings – a sense of identification with a group of people, and of belonging.[877] Sasha

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[873] *Midnight*, p 10.
[874] p 37.
[875] *Voyage*, p 140.
[876] *Midnight*, p 36. The word "well", in this context also suggest a connection with drowning oneself in a well as an act of suicide. The usage also has echoes of the Narcissistic pool, discussed previously.
[877] "If you are quite secure and your roots are well struck in, they know. They stand back respectfully, waiting for the poor devil without any friends and without any money. Then they step forward, the waiting houses, to frown and crush. No hospitable doors, no lit windows, just frowning darkness" .(*Midnight*, p 28)

realises the power that her family have over her in destroying her identity: "They can't kill you, can they? Oh, can't they, though, can't they?"[878] Yet at the same time, the weekly legacy serves as a bitter reminder that she is financially dependent upon people who do not truly care about her. Thus Sasha's *life*, quite literally, is not in her own hands. Her family are keeping her alive by financially supporting her. She can therefore never be free from their memory, the cruelty of their disowning her, and the loneliness that results. Ironically, however, Sasha is being kept alive by a relative who has died. This dependence parallels the parasitic nature of the zombi, the word in Haitian Creole also referring to an individual of "no fixed abode" who "lives at the expense of others as a human parasite".[879]

"A Bit of an Automaton"

Sasha does not seem to enjoy anything that she does. It is as if her body is a passive receptor, dead to stimulus and emotion.[880] Given that Sasha has experienced a kind of death of the self, she at times seems unable to connect with her environment. For example, she remembers her husband, Enno, saying: "'You don't know how to make love […] You're too passive, you're lazy, you bore me. I've had enough of this. Good-bye'".[881]

But when Enno returns a few days later, Sasha is unable to express her anger, and passively obeys his command:

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[878] *Midnight*, p 42.

[879] "Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi"", p 485.

[880] In Rhys's autobiography, she recalls having told someone, "I can abstract myself from my body", to which the reply is "'*Oh non, mais . . . c'est horrible*'" (*Smile, Please*, p 118). However, Sasha is not entirely passive. As noted, many early critics berated Rhys's first four novels as dreary depictions of prostitution and female passivity. The novels, however, by using outwardly passive female characters, draw attention to the societies in which they are victims. Dell'Amico, for example, argues that Rhys's "masochistic protagonists (who are both morose dreamers and fantasists) […] are significant components of the texts' anti-imperial contents" (Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment*, p 4). For further analysis on the use of masochism in Rhys's novel as an anti-imperialist stance, see Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment*, pp 57-95.

[881] *Midnight*, p 107.

> ‘I’m very thirsty,’ he says. ‘Peel me an orange.’
> Now is the time to say ‘Peel it yourself’, now is the time to say ‘Go to hell’, now is the time to say ‘I won’t be treated like this.’ But much too strong – the room, the street, the thing in myself, oh, much too strong. … I peel the orange, put it on a plate and give it to him.[882]

Sasha’s invisibility stems not only from her inability to fit into any one culture, but from her alienation from other individuals. It seems that no one really cares about her, and that she can trust no one. Apart from the friend who paid for her trip to Paris, she does not seem to have a great many friends, and there is the sense that any friends she does have are not close ones. She does, however, keep up the pretence that she is popular:

> ‘The usual conversation…I say that I am not sad. I tell them that I am very happy…I am over here…to buy a lot of clothes to startle my friends – my many friends’.[883]

Sasha’s two-week stay in Paris is uncharacteristic of a conventional holiday for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is a gift from a friend, Sidonie, who lends Sasha the money. This gift, however, is not one that Sasha seems to welcome; rather, it is thrust upon her:

> ‘I think you need a change. Why don’t you go back to Paris for a bit? … You could get yourself some new clothes – you certainly need them. … I’ll lend you the money,’ she said. ‘I’ll be over there next week and I could find a room for you if you like.’ Etcetera, etcetera.
> I had not seen this woman for months and then she swooped down on me. … Well, here I am. When you’ve been made very cold and very sane you’ve also been made very passive. (Why worry, why worry?)[884]

Sasha’s friend Sidonie is generous in her offer to lend her the money for a holiday. However, her intentions do not seem to be based on friendship and genuine concern for Sasha, but on a self-righteousness that posits Sasha as the disadvantaged friend who needs to be “rescued”.

Resurrection by Naming

Sasha often behaves in a way that is contradictory to what she desires, thereby

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[882] *Midnight*, p 108.
[883] p 40.
[884] p 11.

indicating the existence of a will, combined with the inability to act upon or realise it. For example, Sasha is humiliated in Theodore's, a restaurant she used to frequent years ago when she lived in Paris.[885] When one of the women customers asks Théodore loudly, "Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout içi, maintenant?" Sasha feels angry, but is helpless, and does nothing to defend herself.[886] Later, she thinks: "I would give all the rest of my life to be able even to stare coldly at her. As it is, I can't speak to her, I can't even look at her. I just walk out".[887]

The pattern that Sasha experiences here is similar to that of the zombie according to the Cewa people of Zambia.[888] In that particular folklore, the corpse can be revived to a "semiconscious, paralysed state", insulted and then killed again.[889] Similarly, the old or the "real" Sasha dies when she loses her identity through disconnection from the family. She is then revived when she gives herself a new name and a new hair colour, and she is then insulted by the woman in Théodore's, the insult acting as a kind of death.[890]

Sasha is brought back to life again, and again against her will in a kind of reverse prostitution, by the gigolo: "I feel his hard knee between my knees. My mouth hurts, my breasts hurt, because it hurts, when you have been dead, to come alive…".[891] Sasha's zombie-like state is also evident in her indifference. Her only desire is to be dead to the world, to be "left alone".[892] She wishes to be unaffected by desires (apart from being left alone) and passions, and whether or not people will love her. However, even this is impossible to achieve, given that Sasha is not fully in control of her actions:

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[885] *Midnight*, p 42.
[886] p 43.
[887] p 45.
[888] "Ackermann and Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi"", p 478.
[889] p 479.
[890] As previously noted, Sasha receives another verbal insult in public before the aforementioned one: A man in a bar, indicating Sasha, asks one of his friends, "Tu la connais, la vieille?" Translation: Do you know her, the old one?" (*Midnight*, p 35)
[891] *Midnight*, p 153.
[892] p 37.

> As soon as you have reached this heaven of indifference, you are pulled out of it. From your heaven you have to go back to hell. When you are dead to the world, the world often rescues you, if only to make a figure of fun out of you.[893]

Like the zombie, she cannot control her will, regardless of how strong it is. The narrative is littered with instances where Sasha acts against her will, proving that she is not master of it. Some do not bear heavy consequences for her, including her decision not to meet up with a Russian man she had met the day before.[894] Another such incident is her decision, against her will, to have a drink at the Dôme (a place laden with memories of her past, with which she would rather not engage). She thinks to herself: "Not the Dôme. I'll avoid the damned Dôme. And, of course, it's the Dôme I go to."[895]

Sasha's Routine of Repetition

In spending a lot of her time drunk, Sasha resembles the zombie: she hovers over the fine edge that falls between life and death. Unlike Anna, who is not always in control of her actions but uses her thoughts and memories to her own advantage, Sasha is neither in control of her actions nor is she able to control her own thoughts. She has lost control of her *Ti Bon Ange*. Sasha thinks: "The light in my sale cerveau has gone out".[896]. In other words, the agency in Sasha's "dirty brain" that controls her ability to use memory to her advantage – the *Ti Bon Ange* has died. This is also the part of her soul that controls the desire for happiness and for love. She does not desire companionship, but has reached a "heaven of indifference".[897] Sasha tries to shield herself from the cruelty of her society by believing that she is not affected by it. Towards the end of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia's mind is "like an empty room" through which "vague memories stalked

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[893] *Midnight*, p 76.
[894] pp 47-48.
[895] p 60.
[896] p 158.
[897] p 76.

like ghosts".[898]

Sasha's thoughts are triggered by memories, which are triggered by outer stimuli she experiences in her daily existence while holidaying in Paris. The memories of her past are thrust upon her, and she goes wandering into them without desiring to do so. The dreams she has are also disturbing. For example, Sasha takes luminal to try to induce sleep. She wants to sleep without dreams, but within the first few pages of the narrative, she dreams about being led down a corridor and directed to a place to which she does not wish to go:

> I am in the passage of a tube station in London. Many people are in front of me; many people are behind me. Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition, This Way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the exhibition – I want the way out. There are passages to the right and passages to the left, but no exit sign. Everywhere the fingers point and the placards read: This Way to the Exhibition…[899]

The above dream sequence indicates that Sasha is being led by other forces. The masses of people surrounding her are faceless and devoid of their humanity, for they are walking along the narrow corridors, as Sasha is, but they presumably are willing to be led to the Exhibition. Sasha's desire runs against the possibilities available to her: she wants the way out, but all paths lead to the Exhibition.[900] Later in the narrative, Sasha tries to move to a better room, but finds that with her budget, all rooms are the same.[901] All of her corridors, both past and present, lead her to the same destination: loneliness and alienation. Whether she is physically alone in her room or out in a café being insulted, Sasha is an outsider. Like the zombie, she serves a purpose to society, either as an

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[898] *Mackenzie*, p 157. See Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 74.
[899] *Midnight*, p 12. For a psychoanalytical reading of this passage, see Nebeker, pp 94-95.
[900] For a discussion on the significance of exhibition and its use in *Good Morning, Midnight*, with regard to the "flaneur" figure, see Dell'Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment*, pp 16-38.
[901] Savory states that rooms and houses take on human characteristics, whereas humans behave like machines. *Good Morning, Midnight* depicts a "humanity depressed and degraded in the shadow of fascism" (Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 127). Savory also states that rooms are portrayed as small enclosed spaces, and as Sasha's "burial grounds", where she seems to live beyond her own death in a zombi-like state (p 126).

underdog and slave (in her youth), or as an outcast (in her current middle age). Reference is made again to the Exhibition: "And when the Exhibition is pulled down and the tourists have departed, where shall I be? In the other room, of course – the one just off the Gray's Inn Road, as usual trying to drink myself to death…".[902]

The memories that are triggered for Sasha lead to a simultaneous death of the self – her current self is dead to the world – and a resurrection of the self – her former, younger self is resurrected through memory. The desire for sleep without dreams signifies Sasha's desire to be free of desire, as discussed previously. By attempting to control her life, she must have a plan for everything. As Rachel Bowlby states in her article "The Impasse: Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*", Sasha engages in:

> a repeated sequence of routine consumption – time to be used up, food and drink to be taken in, places in which to purchase the right to spend the time to be passed, and brought into existence through the verbs of decision and ordering. The narrative thus sets off in the mode of a future that is already dead, produced in the form of automatic repetition.[903]

For example, Sasha thinks: "Planning it all out. Eating. A movie. Eating again. One drink. A long walk back to the hotel. Bed. Luminal. Sleep. Just sleep – no dreams".[904]

"No Longer Quite Human, No Longer Quite Alive"

Sasha as Mannequin

Sasha is aware that in her youth, she was also alienated. She remembers having worked as a mannequin and as a shop assistant, when she was younger. She recalls a boss, Mr Blank, who intimidates her by asking:

> 'You worked as a mannequin?' Down and up his eyes go, up and down.

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[902] *Midnight*, p 30.
[903] Bowlby, "The Impasse", p 39.
[904] *Midnight*, p 15.

'How long ago was this?' he says.[905]

Although Sasha has lost control of both her *Gros Bon Ange* and her *Ti Bon Ange*, she does, as a young person, demonstrate that she has a will. She is not in control of her will, but it is clear that she possesses one. For example, when working as a mannequin, Sasha feels as if she has lost her identity. The word "mannequin" is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a person employed by a dressmaker, costumier, etc., to model clothes". It is also defined as "a model of (part of) a human figure, used for the display of clothes, etc". The second definition instills the word with a degree of inhumanity, of artifice and suggests the man-made as that which resembles the human form but lacks humanity itself. Thus Sasha regards her role as a mannequin, and as a shop assistant, as "an object to made use of".[906] The wax mannequins she sees in the shop are a metaphor for those who have allowed themselves to made use of as objects of society, losing their self or soul:

> I would feel as if I were drugged, sitting there, watching those damned dolls, thinking what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women. Satin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes, sawdust heart – all complete.[907]

Sasha remembers having given birth in a house "for poor people", where there is no chloroform: "I am an instrument, something to be made use of".[908] This is how Sasha sees her place in the social structure in which she finds herself. She is one of the "poor" people, at the mercy of her masters, such as Salvatini, Mr Blank, and other employers, who cast their gaze upon her, determine her identity, resurrect her by employing her and metaphorically kill her by intimidating her or by firing her.[909] In this sense, Sasha as a young girl was like a zombie. She was not in control of her daily life, was forced to do a

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[905] *Midnight*, p 18.
[906] p 50.
[907] p 16.
[908] p 50.
[909] pp 24-26.

job she did not find fulfilling, and in which role she was at the bottom of the social hierarchy:

> Every time a customer arrived, the commissionaire touched a bell which rang just over my head. I would advance towards the three steps leading down to the street-door and stand there, smiling a small, discreet smile. I would say 'Good afternoon, madame. … Certainly, madam,' or 'Good afternoon, Madame. Mademoiselle Mercédès has had your telephone message and everything is ready,' or 'Certainly, madame. … Has madame a vendeuse?'
> […] There was no lift in this shop. That's why I was there.[910]

In the above passage, Sasha remembers herself as a young woman working in a dress shop. She recalls that at that age, she was not in control of her life, but her daily actions at work were dictated to her by her superiors and by the system in which she was merely an instrument. Rather than determining or controlling the system, Sasha was, at a young age, being controlled by it.

The Washerwoman

Years later, while on holidaying in Paris, Sasha sees a young washerwoman working in a cramped room marked "Service". Her inferior social position echoes the Sasha's own situation as a young woman:

> She passes me without looking at me. Bare, sturdy legs, felt slippers, a black dress, a filthy apron, thick, curly, untidy hair. I know her. This is the girl who does all the dirty work and gets paid very little for it. Salut!
> […] How does she manage not to knock her elbows every time she moves? How can she stay in that coffin for five minutes without fainting? … Sorry for her? Why should I be sorry for her?[911]

In this scene, the zombie figure is not Sasha herself, but the young woman, a shadow of Sasha in her youth. This physical embodiment of Sasha's former self reminds her of the plight of the underdog, someone placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy as a result of not fitting in to society. The washerwoman, for example, has "thick, curly,

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[910] *Midnight*, p 16.
[911] p 87.

untidy hair", denoting, perhaps her ethnic otherness. Her place of work is described as a "coffin", suggesting that the life she has been forced to live is like a living death, and echoing a scene early in the novel when Sasha contemplates her life of isolation.[912] Seeing the young woman working at the *tabac*, Sasha is now older, and not as financially desperate as she was in her youth.[913] She is, in a sense, on "the other side", as a customer in the *tabac*, rather than trying to support herself with low-paid jobs. However, the young washerwoman serves as a bitter reminder to Sasha that she herself was in a similar situation not all that long ago, and it was only unlikely circumstances that have allowed her to survive. Those circumstances, as indicated, take the form of a legacy from a deceased relative, who did not bequeath the money out of a sense of benevolence towards Sasha. This is another indication that Sasha's life is not in her own hands, and that she is forced to live it, against her will.

Demi-Mondes and Alcohol

Another example of the underdog, which strikes a chord with Sasha's own sense of self, is the story that Serge tells her about a mulatto woman he had met while living in London. The racial abuse she suffered from her neighbours, including from one of the children, forced her to stay indoors until night time, for two years.[914] Like the zombie, she interacts with the outside world only at night.[915] Serge relates the story to Sasha:

> '"I hate you and I wish you were dead," the child said. And after that she had drunk a whole bottle of whisky and there she was, outside my door. […] I just gave her what whisky I had and she went off, hardly able to walk. …'[916]

The child's insult echoes the step in zombification that involves insulting and death, described earlier. She tells the woman that she wishes she were dead, which, ironically,

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[912] "The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang" (*Midnight*, p 37).
[913] *Midnight*, p 64.
[914] pp 80-81.
[915] Douyon, Littlewood, "Clinical findings", p 1094.
[916] *Midnight*, p 81.

becomes the greatest desire of the woman herself. In being treated, to such an extreme degree, like an outsider, the woman loses the will to live. Her only desire is to die, or to be as close to death as possible, an effect which, like Sasha, she tries to achieve through over consumption of alcohol. The result, Serge recalls, is that the woman, although alive, seemed dead and lacking in humanity:

> 'But it was difficult to speak to her reasonably, because I had all the time this feeling that I was talking to something that was no longer quite human, no longer quite alive'.[917]

Like the zombie, the mulatto woman has lost a sense of her self and her soul has died, as a result of being deprived of human compassion. The Englishman with whom she lived did not sympathise with her. Serge elaborates on their relationship:

> 'I said: "But this monsieur you are living with, what about him?" "Oh, he is very Angliche, he says I imagine everything." I asked if he didn't find it strange that she never went out. But she said No, he thought it quite natural. She talked for a long time about this monsieur. It seemed that she stayed with him because she didn't know where else to go, and he stayed with her because he liked the way she cooked.' [918]

Clearly, the mulatto woman's feelings are not taken seriously by the Englishman, who is akin to the master in a master-slave relationship, whereby the slave is the zombie. The woman is kept by him because of her cooking, because she looks after and attends to his needs. The woman's needs, on the other hand, like those of the zombie, are neglected and completely disregarded. In the same sense that Sasha is a "thing to be made use of", so is the mulatto woman, making the two characters similar in terms of their usefulness either to society or to a particular individual. For Sasha, society in the form of her job which relies on social hierarchies (of which she always occupies the lower echelons), is the master that sustains her, against her will, restricting her personal freedom. For the mulatto woman, the master who makes use of her to his advantage is the English man

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[917] *Midnight*, p 80.
[918] p 80.

with whom she lives. In both cases, the zombie has no personal rights, and without a soul, begins to lose the will to live.

The mulatto woman's desperation goes beyond possible redemption, as she feels completely rejected from society. She has, by Serge's account, become "something that was no longer quite human, no longer quite alive", and as a result, he does not offer her the sexual gratification that he believes she desires from him.[919] She has become untouchable, so that when Serge puts his arm around her, "it wasn't like putting your arm round a woman. She was like something that has turned into stone."[920]

Although the mulatto woman has already been made to feel numb, the need to sustain this is fulfilled by alcohol. A death-like state brought on by over-consumption of alcohol rings true for both the mulatto woman and for Sasha. However, Serge discourages Sasha from comparing herself with this woman. He strongly suggests that the woman's skin colour was the determining factor for the way in which people mistreated her:

> 'I opened the door and there was a woman lying full-length in the passage, crying. I said to her: "What's the matter?" She only went on crying […] "Can I do anything for you?" She said: "I want a drink."'
> 'Exactly like me,' I say. 'I cried, and I asked for a drink.'[…]
> 'No, no,' he says. 'Not like you at all.'
> He goes on: 'I said to her "Come in if you wish. I have some whisky." She wasn't a white woman. She was half-negro – a mulatto. She had been crying so much that it was impossible to tell whether she was pretty or ugly or young or old.'[921]

As Elgin Mellown points out, Anna makes her living as a "demi-monde", suggesting that she and the other Rhys's protagonists have only a partial existence.[922] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term as "the class of women of doubtful reputation

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[919] "I knew all the time that what she wanted was that I should make love to her and that it was the only thing that would do her any good. But alas, I couldn't" (*Midnight*, p 81).
[920] *Midnight*, p 80.
[921] p 79.
[922] Mellown, "Character and Themes", p 107.

and social standing, upon the outskirts of 'society'", and gives its etymology as "'half-world', 'half-and-half society', thereby signifying the zombie-like, half-awake state in which Rhys's early protagonists find themselves. They are half-dead and half-alive, not completely one thing or another, and are indeed only half immersed into "respectable" society, in which they participate but do not fully belong.

As Mary Lou Emery states in *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, ghostliness in Rhys's novels is both frightening to women, while also being a source of power over men.[923] Julia's power over Mackenzie is established the moment that Mackenzie sees Julia walk into the restaurant:

> She walked in – pale as a ghost. She went straight up to Mr Mackenzie's table, and sat down opposite to him. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.[924]

In the above passage Julia's ghostliness poses a threat to Mackenzie's sense of security. Like Sasha, Julia hovers between the boundaries of life and death, not completely belonging to either category. Her status as Mackenzie's former mistress, as opposed to former wife, marks her as a demi-monde, and this socially questionable existence is a threat to Mackenzie, despite the irony that his role as her lover perpetuates such an existence:

> His code was perfectly adapted to the social system and in any argument he could have defended it against any attack whatsoever. However, he never argued about it, because that was part of the code. […] Simply, under certain circumstances you did this, and under other circumstances you did that.[925]

Immediately after Serge identifies the woman as a mulatto woman, he describes her as having cried so much so as to obscure her age and her beauty or lack thereof. Youth

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[923] Emery, *Jean Rhys at "World's End"*, p 74.
[924] *Mackenzie*, p 22.
[925] p 18. Mackenzie's contradictory behaviour is evident not only in his comment about hypocrites, as previously noted, but in his attitude towards the French: "When in England he would always say, 'I like Paris, but I loathe the French'". (*Mackenzie*, p 18)

and beauty cannot be identified in this woman because of her sorrow, which is a direct result of her alienation, which follows from her mixed race. Serge's comment that it was "impossible to tell whether she was pretty or ugly or young or old" suggests that her mixed racial heritage also places her, within her society, as impossible to define. She does not belong anywhere, for she is neither black nor white, but both and neither. Serge is also emphatic about the fact that the woman was not married to the Englishman with whom she lived: "Everybody in the house knew she wasn't married to him, but it was even worse that she wasn't white".[926] As Judith Raiskin states in her article, "Jean Rhys: Creole Writing and Strategies of Reading", the women in much of Jean Rhys's fiction are:

> neither daughters nor wives in their relationships; they are prostitutes or "kept" mistresses. The mistress, whom Emery argues (*Rhys* 98) operates as a third term between wife and prostitute ("good" and "bad" woman), occupies a similar position to […] the "colored" man, neither black nor white, whose existence threatens the colonial dichotomies of racial difference.[927]

Raiskin goes on to say that the "almost the same but not quite" status of these characters suggests the instability of such hierarchies based upon race and sex.[928] The mulatto woman, therefore, is impossible to define within the terms of a society that insists on rigid boundaries and fixed definitions of racial, sexual and class status. The mulatto woman is not married to the man with whom she lives, which makes her neither a single woman nor a married, respectable woman. She is half black and half white, which posits her as neither white (and, by implication, respectable), nor black (and, by implication, the object of racial abuse). Therefore, Serge is quick to prevent Sasha from comparing herself with the mulatto woman on the basis of a common humanity. Sasha sees in herself the sorrow and alienation that the mulatto woman experienced; however, as Serge relates, a white-dominated society would view the mulatto woman's alienation as far

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[926] *Midnight*, p 80.
[927] Raiskin, "Creole Writing and Strategies of Reading", p 63.
[928] "Creole Writing and Strategies of Reading", p 63.

more severe than Sasha's.

As Leah Rosenberg points out, Rhys grew up in a historical context in which there was a significant divide placed between the "white planter's daughter and the black peasant".[929] In *Good Morning Midnight*, Serge indicates his own belief in this class divide. However, as Rosenberg states, Rhys's texts merge the two classes together, rather than treating them as discrete entities. This comes as a result of Rhys's background of posing nude for artists:

> While in Europe, however, Rhys […] [was] confronted with the merging of black male and white female identities. As [a] model […] Rhys became sexualized and black.[930]

Therefore, the similarity that does exist between Sasha and the mulatto, is that they are both treated as outsiders in England, feel alienated and depressed, and rely on alcohol to perpetuate a feeling of deadness and therefore detachment from the too-painful daily existence of their lives. Thus race and class are placed on the same plane, whereby the mulatto woman is denigrated and treated as an outcast, by virtue of her mixed ethnicity, as well as her status as a woman.

The death of the self that Sasha has experienced has made her somewhat numb to the horrific experiences of her past. This distance from her traumatic past allows her to make such statements as: "It was then that I had the bright idea of drinking myself to death. Thirty-five pounds of the legacy had accumulated…That ought to do the trick".[931]

Sasha's fragmented nature is conveyed through her constant flashbacks and wanderings into memories past, along with her inability to deal coherently with the circumstances of her present tense. This is analogous to the Haitian zombie, whose soul is fragmented into two parts. Thus Sasha does *not* possess a unified self – she is

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[929] Rosenberg, "Caribbean Models", p 221.
[930] "Caribbean Models", p 221.
[931] *Midnight*, p 37.

constantly drawn back to her past, controlled by the flashbacks that haunt her in Paris. She exists partially (indeed, mostly) in her past and partially in her present tense. That is, she is not fully able to function in her present tense without being affected by memories of her past.

Sleeping with the Other

Anna and Walter

The "wildness" having "gone out" of the English countryside suggests that the soul of the countryside has been destroyed, analogous to the soul of a zombie being stolen. This analogy echoes Anna's own state of mind, while living in England. Anna's life is marked by monotony, a lack of colour and life, coldness, feelings of alienation and detachment, and a strong desire to sleep as if dead. Anna goes through her life in London as an automaton, not fully in touch with what is happening around her. Sleep forms a means of escaping from her life, whereby sleep represents a kind of death. She turns to this form of oblivion particularly as a way of dealing with the trauma of having been abandoned by her lover, Walter:

> Really, all you want is night, and to lie in the dark and pull the sheet over your head and sleep, and before you know where you are it is night – that's one good thing. You pull the sheet over your head and think, 'He got sick of me,' and 'Never, not ever, never.' And then you go to sleep. You sleep very quickly when you are like that and you don't dream either. It's as if you were dead.[932]

Anna's role as "tart" makes her analogous to a slave, in a master-slave relationship, whereby she is paid for her services.[933] Although Anna falls in love with Jeffries, a hint of their future unhappiness, and the fact that their relationship was never based on reciprocal

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[932] *Voyage*, pp 120-1. See also: "I looked at the bed and thought, 'There's one thing – I do sleep. I sleep as if I were dead'"; and "Everything was perfectly still, as if it were dead" (*Voyage*, p 97; p 144).

[933] My handbag was on the table. He took it up and put some money into it […] I meant to say, 'What are you doing?' But when I went up to him instead of saying 'Don't do that,' I said, 'All right…anything you like, any way you like' (*Voyage*, pp 33-34).

love, is made evident on one occasion after they have had sex. It is as if Anna's *Ti Bon Ange* has acted against her will, reminding her of the power structure within which she is placed, identifying her own status within this relationship as a type of slave. Within the following scene, three different time sequences take place: the present tense with Walter, a flashback to her school days in a convent, and the memory of an old slave register:

> We went upstairs.
> 'Children, every day one should put aside a quarter of an hour for meditation […] That was Mother St Anthony – funny old thing she was, too. She would say, 'Children, every night before you go to sleep you should lie straight down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut and say: "One day I shall be dead." 'Are you afraid of dying?' Beatrice would say. 'No, I don't believe I am. Are you?' 'Yes, I am, but I never think about it.'
> Lying down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut.
> 'Walter, will you put the light out? I don't like it in my eyes.'
> *Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. … But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this.*
> 'Are you asleep?'
> 'No, I'm not asleep.'
> 'You were lying so still,' he said.
> *Lying so still afterwards. That's what they call the Little Death.*[934]

In the above passage, sleep, sex and death are closely linked. Anna's memory of Mother St Anthony's words about death connect directly with her experience of having just had sex with Walter. In both cases, death is imminent. Literal, physical death is alluded to in the memory of the convent, with its implications of a spiritual element, through a Christian belief in the afterlife, whereas the "little death", or orgasm, is referred to in the sexual encounter with Walter. The experience for Anna is not conveyed as one of pleasure, but as something that causes a death in her self, so that Walter observes: "'You were lying so still'". This lack of movement and the act of lying still suggest Anna's passivity in the sexual act, as it is performed with Walter. In the memory of the convent, an acceptance of physical death is possible through the hope of a life after death.

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[934] *Voyage* p 48 (Rhys's italics).

However, this afterlife is not explicitly described in the passage; rather, the focus is on the physical death, which suggests the negation of physical life itself. Passivity is also a crucial feature of the above passage, in which the children are instructed to lie down with their arms at either side, imagining themselves dead. This anticipates Anna's sexual passivity as an adult (as well as that of Sasha, as previously noted).

The link to Anna's present tense is in the line: "Lying down with your arms by your sides and your eyes shut", which precedes Anna's request to Walter to turn out the light. This transitory line indicates Anna's passivity in the sexual act, suggesting that it has caused her to become detached from her self. As Raiskin states in "Creole Writing", many of the relationships in Rhys's novels involve "an older seemingly 'caretaking' man", which "underscores what Rhys saw as the exploitation inherent in sexual and colonial relations."[935] Hence Anna's own sexual exploitation is directly linked to that of the slave girl, Maillotte Boyd. As Veronica Gregg points out, Anna becomes the "blackened" other, and is "négrified" when she begins to relate to the black female other.[936] This marks her strong sense of identification with the slave, indicative of her guilt as a white Creole over the slave-owning status of her ancestors.[937] Anna's inner voice tries to justify her actions: "*But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this.*" The fact that Anna is not asleep, however, suggests an inability to completely destroy her soul, thereby allowing the *Ti Bon Ange* to conjure up memories.

Anna's daily existence in London includes going on walks for the sake of passing the time. Like the countryside, the city has lost its soul, represented by the lack of sunlight:

> I lay in bed pretty late because there wasn't anything else to do. When I got up I went out for a walk. It's funny how parts of London are as

[935] Raiskin, "Creole Writing", p 62.
[936] Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 118.
[937] *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 118

> empty as if they were dead. There was no sun, but there was a glare on everything like a brass band playing.[938]

The line, "There was no sun" occurs again, later in the narrative:

> There was no sun, but the air was used-up and dead, dirty-warm, as if thousands of other people had breathed it before you.[939]

The dead air that Anna is forced to breathe reminds her of the insignificance of her own life, the anonymity she endures while staying in an overcrowded, old city whose very air intimidates her with the menace of the dead vapours left behind by others who have come before her. While Anna's memories of her childhood home recall an environment teeming with life, London's life has already expired, and lives on in the "used-up and dead" air.

As discussed, Jean Rhys's West Indian protagonists have an ambivalent attitude towards their home in the West Indies. One clear example of this, which makes use of the sun, is found in *Voyage in the Dark*. Unlike her nostalgic memories of her childhood, Anna recalls a time when she felt terrified by the sky and the sun. Notably, this occurs shortly after Hester has tried to "poison" Anna's mind by convincing her that she would prefer living in England. Anna, aware that she will become "old and sad and everything", equating this with "[b]eing white and getting like Hester"[940], willingly exposes herself to the harshness of the afternoon sun:

> I thought, 'Well, all right. This time I'll die.' So I took my hat off and went and stood in the sun.
> The sun at home can be terrible, like God. This thing here – I can't believe it's the same sun, I simply can't believe it.[941]

Anna's experience in the sun leads to fever and a prolonged illness, during which

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[938] *Voyage*, p 36.
[939] *Voyage*, p 65.
[940] p 62.
[941] p 63.

she becomes "awfully thin and ugly and yellow as a guinea, [her] father said."[942] The sun itself is hostile. Its terror is the terror of a powerful God, but the simile also suggests benevolence, the strength of the soul. This is evident in Anna's inability to believe that the sun in the West Indies is the same as that in England. In both countries, the sun represents the soul. In England, the sun is lacklustre, signifying the drabness of the place for Anna. In the West Indies, by contrast, the sun's hostility signifies the racial tension between the English, the white Creoles and the black Creoles. For example, Hester tells Anna what she spoke about when ill:

> [S]he said, 'Yes, you talked about cats and a great deal about Francine.' It was after that she started disliking Francine so much and saying she ought to be sent away.[943]

Sasha and the *Commis*

Although Sasha says repeatedly to herself that she wishes to be left alone, she does not fully pursue this apparent desire, given that she allows the gigolo to keep her company; she meets with Delmar, the Russian; and visits her artist friend, Serge. Nonetheless, in sleeping with the *commis* at the end of the narrative, she demonstrates her desire for self-annihilation. The act of having sex with him does not signify an act based on mutual respect and/or love, nor does it signify a return to youth. Rather, it marks the final act of self destruction for Sasha, for she sleeps with a man whom she regards with disgust. Early in the narrative, she notes:

> The man who has the room next to mine is parading about as usual in his white dressing-gown […] I am always running into him […] He is as thin as a skeleton. He has a bird-like face and sunken, dark eyes with a peculiar expression, cringing, ingratiating, knowing.[944]

On another occasion, the *commis* knocks on Sasha's door:

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[942] p 63.
[943] *Voyage*, p 63.
[944] *Midnight*, p 13.

> I have just finished dressing when there is a knock on the door. It's the commis, in his beautiful dressing-gown, immaculately white, with long, wide, hanging sleeves […] He stands there smiling his silly smile. I stare at him. He looks like a priest, the priest of some obscene, half-understood religion.[945]

Echoing the above description, Savory describes Sasha's final act as a "retreat into nihilism", stating that the act may represent a fate worse than death, but "perhaps also functioned for Rhys as a kind of *obeah* incantation" which "protected the lost, and cursed those who abused power, including followers of empty religious conventions.[946] Although the *commis* is compared with a priest, he does not give the effect of a reassuring conduit between God and man. Rather, the *commis* "*looks like* a priest", and the religion he represents is "obscene" and "half-understood".[947] The reference to a priest also allows for a reading of the *commis* as a witch doctor. When Sasha sleeps with him, she is brought back to life, having already died and been resurrected several times. Her final descent into self-destruction does not mark a finality. Rather, the ending, marked by ellipses, signifies that Sasha will continue to be killed and brought back to life, in an endless cycle of death and rebirth. Her rebirth, however, is not comparable to the Christian notion of resurrection, but to the zombie who is forced to endure a soulless existence.

Sasha does not feel comforted by the *commis*; rather, he makes her "[f]rightened as hell" and gives her a "nightmare feeling".[948] This nightmare feeling intensifies when Sasha pushes him away from her door:

> I put my hand on his chest, push him backwards and bang the door. It's quite easy. It's like pushing a paper man, a ghost, something that doesn't

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[945] p 30.
[946] Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 132. For an analysis of the use of God in Jean Rhys's fiction, see Kavanagh, "Jean Rhys and God", pp 275-280.
[947] My emphasis.
[948] *Midnight*, p 31.

exist.[949]

The knock on the door is a foreshadowing of Sasha's later involvement with the *commis*. The *commis* is described as a "paper man, a ghost, something that doesn't exist". Like the zombie, the *commis* has lost his soul, and is in that sense, dead. He does not exist as a human being. Sasha describes him in terms of the ghostly and the non-human. The *commis* is what Sasha herself has already become, a person without a soul, and one who is not in control of her own actions. At first she despises him, partly because she fears him and recognises what she has already become, but does not want to acknowledge this. In abhorring him, she denies herself. At the end of the narrative, when she sleeps with him, she fully acknowledges that her own soul has died, and welcomes the *commis*, merging with her other in this self-annihilating act.

As stated, Sasha tells herself repeatedly that she does not wish to be loved. This, by implication, suggests a disinterest in the values of society, including that of youth. For example, when Sasha remembers a bald, old woman choosing a hat with her embarrassed daughter, she agrees that she would rather be like "the hag", than the daughter.[950] However, Sasha also proves herself to be a slave to some of society's values. She does, for example, care about what people think of her, which is why she changes her hair colour and buys a new hat. She is thus a slave to femininity and to youth – the new hair colour, blonde cendré, makes her look younger. Sasha believes that these outward flourishes will transform her. When she briefly flirts with the gigolo, she considers the possibility that youth and happiness have returned to her:

I have my arms round him and I am so happy. I stand there hugging

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[949] p 31.

[950] "Watching her, am I watching myself as I shall become? In five years' time, in six years' time, shall I be like that? But she is better than the other one, the smug, white, fat, black-haired one who is offering the hats with a calm, mocking expression […] It's like watching the devil with a damned soul. If I must end like one or the other, may I end like the hag". (*Midnight*, p 58)

> him, so terribly happy. Now everything is in my arms on this dark landing – love, youth, spring, happiness, everything I thought I had lost.[951]

By putting youth and happiness on the same plane, Sasha reveals that she is a slave to these values. As noted previously, the gigolo feels as if he is walking "with a child", while walking with Sasha.[952] This marks another similarity between Sasha and the zombie. The zombies studied in Douyon and Littlewood's article all appear much younger than in family photos. The zombie is thus child-like, easily controlled and influenced by others. Similarly, Anna is impressionable and falls in love easily with Jeffries. Likewise, her break-up is devastating, and she is unable to deal with the situation as an adult. Much in the same way that a child dreams and fantasises over a hero figure to rescue her and to make her dreams come true, Anna places Jeffries on a pedestal and pours all of her hopes into their relationship, equating it with love. Sasha does the same when she desperately tries to make herself believe that she has not lost out on "youth, spring, happiness".

As Elgin Mellown states, both Sasha and Anna are unable to become fully adult by having children that survive.[953] Sasha remembers having given birth when she was younger, and that her baby had died in the home in which it was born.[954] Soon after the baby is born, the woman running the house wraps Sasha in swaddling bandages, in order to remove any trace of wrinkles or creases, thereby making her body appear exactly the same as it was before giving birth: "with not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease".[955] These words are echoed to indicate the death of the baby:

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

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[951] *Midnight*, p 148.
[952] p 67.
[953] Mellown, "Character and Themes", p 107.
[954] *Midnight*, p 52.
[955] p 52.

without one wrinkle, without one crease…[956]

In the above passage, the removal of any evidence of having given birth directly parallels the death of her baby, so that it is as if the birth had not taken place. Sasha is deprived of the ability to nurture, as a mother, reflected in her inability to provide for her baby, and the fact that her baby does not survive. Not only is she unable to feed the baby, she cannot provide for him materially. The house in which her baby is born exists for the sole purpose of helping "poor people" to give birth.[957] Moreover, the baby's loss of life is akin to Sasha's loss of identity: "I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere".[958] By contrast, Anna's abortion is done out of choice. However, the similarity between the loss of her baby and Sasha's loss indicates the inability of both characters to become fully adult by having a surviving child.[959]

Apart from the different types of metaphorical death discussed previously, Sasha makes the choice to kill what little sense of self she has left, because such a self is riddled with traumatic memories and loneliness. The only way for Sasha to free herself from it is to destroy it. Thus her decision to sleep with the *commis* is the final act of self-destruction that she has been building towards throughout the entire novel.[960] At first she thinks of this finality as a possibility: "Saved, rescued and with my place to hide in – what more did I *want*? I crept in and hid. The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang".[961] Then she begins to act it out: "I lie very still…As still as if I were dead…"[962] Finally, she affirms her decision as complete:

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[956] p 52.
[957] *Midnight*, p 49.
[958] p 38.
[959] Rosenberg, "Mother and Country", p 166.
[960] As Savory states, in sleeping with the *commis*, Sasha brings herself down to his level and enacts her own self-destruction (Savory, *Jean Rhys*, p 131). Becoming even more like a zombie, she loses her sense of self and her self-will.
[961] *Midnight*, p 37 (my italics). See also "Saved, rescued, but not quite so good as new" (p 78).
[962] p 159 (second ellipses are Rhys's).

> I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time…
> Then I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying: 'Yes – yes – yes….'[963]

Although Sasha is acting based on choice, the result is both self-affirming and self-annihilating. The words "yes", uttered three times, suggest a positive self-affirmation. The act itself, however, is, as previously stated, self-destructive, because Sasha despises the *commis*, with whom she sleeps. The paradox is evident as Sasha's identity is not fixed, but is fragmented over space and time. She exists largely within her past, the memories that overpower her daily as she walks about Paris, the place that triggers memories seemingly *against* her will.[964] Sasha's fragmented narrative reflects her own fragmented self. She is not a whole or unified person. Using the zombie analogy, she has a will, often conveyed through interior stream of consciousness, with which she is often in conflict. This indicates perhaps not a loss of the soul itself, but a loss of *part* of the soul, either of the *Gros Bon Ange* or the *Ti Bon Ange*. In the case of Sasha, she is not a *complete* person, but exists in degrees, over time. Like the zombie, Sasha *has* a will, but is not *master* of her own will. This is evident in Sasha's desire to do or avoid certain things, coupled with her propensity for doing the opposite.

The three novels discussed above convey aspects of zombiehood within the female characters. As shown, Sasha's zombiehood indicates a death of the *Gros Bon Ange* as well as that of the *Ti Bon Ange*, causing her to repeatedly act against her own will, with

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[963] p 159 (last ellipses are Rhys'). The repetition of "yes" three times as an ending to the novel serves as a parody of Joyce's *Ulysses*, drawing a parallel between Sasha and Molly, who ends the narrative with: "and yes I said yes I will Yes" (James Joyce, *Ulysses*, London: Penguin, 1992, 1922, p 939). Elizabeth Abel comments that Sasha's "final 'yes – yes – yes. …' [is] both an ironic parody of Molly Bloom's affirmation and a sign that she has achieved a portion of Molly's wholeness and simplicity". ("Women and Schizophrenia", p 167) For further comparisons between Sasha and Molly, see Port, "'Money, for the night is coming'", pp 210-14; Angier, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*; Arnold Davidson, *Jean Rhys*, New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985; Howells, *Jean Rhys*, 1991; and Staley, *Jean Rhys*, 1979.

[964] "I walk along, remembering this, remembering that…The gramophone record is going strong in my head: 'Here this happened, here that happened…'". (*Midnight*, p 15)

which she argues internally, as if detached from her self. Anna, by contrast, is still in possession of her *Ti Bon Ange*, which allows her to use memories, dreams and daydreams in order to alleviate her current traumatic experiences. Thus Anna's detachment from her body serves as a means of protection against the pain of lost love, rather than as a result of such pain. Julia's alienation from any sense of "home" is triggered by the death of her mother, in whose failed relationship Julia experiences a death of her self. With the death of her mother, she has lost a sense of belonging. Her sister, Norah, by contrast, who maintained a close relationship with her mother, is likened to a zombie in her status as slave, formed in a master-slave relationship in which she loses time and her youth to caring devotedly for her dying mother.

In all three novels, memory plays an integral role as an aspect of zombiehood. In addition to Anna's use of memory to alleviate current trauma, Julia remembers past experiences obsessively, leading to circularity in her life in which she is never free from her past. The notion of resurrection, in the sense of the zombie being brought back to life against its will, is prevalent in *Voyage in the Dark*, in which Anna is forced to lead the life of a *demi-monde* and eventually as a prostitute. In each case, the characters are detached and alienated from their present-day lives, although in varying degrees and at times to their benefit. Their death-in-life state is, in all cases, marked with a recurring sense of coldness, both physically and emotionally. Despite the emotional misery that they face, the strength of their minds is clear in their vivid memories and in their inner thoughts, thereby preventing the simple designation of "victim".

CONCLUSION

The female protagonists in Jean Rhys's novels demonstrate their ability to affirm their own identities through different stages of postcolonial female subjectivity, despite being objectified by their male, and sometimes female, others. Rhys's writing allows for a female subjectivity for the white Creole as well as for the black so-called Other, the latter in the form of Christophine. The representation of this enigmatic character, whose influence within *Wide Sargasso Sea* has been widely debated, sheds light on the ways in which Rhys's other black characters have been portrayed, in her other four novels. These representations are not free from racial stereotyping, as has been discussed. They do, however, allow for an accurate representation of the white settler class, informed by ambivalence not only to itself, but to blackness and whiteness. Thus Rhys's white female protagonists are often torn between their unachievable desire to be black, and their yearning for belonging and acceptance in middle-class English society, which manifests itself as an identification with whiteness. Englishness and whiteness as categories, as well as blackness, are portrayed as changeable and unfixed, thereby revealing Rhys's characters' anxieties and the perceived need for a fixed view of framing identity. The female protagonists as well as the male characters and the English female characters are all shown to be victims of a society in which racial categories are regarded as fixed. But it is their inability to truly fit into one particular category that dispels this myth about identity, and presents Englishness as well as otherness as relational and changeable, thereby threatening the balance of power in the self/other polarity.

Despite this changeability, race and class inform the alienation that Rhys's white female protagonists' experience. These female characters, often having hailed from elsewhere, are alienated as a result of their lack of Englishness. The lack of fixity, however, for categories such as Englishness, whiteness and blackness, all lend a degree of

power and self-affirmation. In psychoanalytical terms, they are able to see through and beyond the patriarchal construct of the mirror, often shaping their sense of self instead from the Narcissistic pool of water. Although this is not always to their advantage, it allows for a sense of self that answers back to a patriarchal structure. Julia Kristeva's *chora*, for example, makes itself evident in the pulsional pressures that these characters exert, within the texts, as a form of writing back. Their marginal voices speak from a space of active resistance, rather than being silenced into passive victimhood.

Rhys's female protagonists begin as women objectified by the male and/or colonial gaze, but it is their ability to look back upon the gaze that demonstrates the power of the postcolonial female gaze. In psychoanalytical terms, they are able to exert an oppositional female gaze against the objectifying male gaze of patriarchy. This ability to look back echoes bell hooks' notion of "writing back", and thereby problematises any fixed notion of identity based on gender or race. Thus the characters disrupt the polarity of the coloniser/colonised power structure, as well as that of the male/female structure. Rochester repeatedly attempts to objectify his wife by exerting the male gaze against her, including dismissing her beauty as alien and, by implication, hostile and other. He also expresses disdain over Antoinette's affection for and occasional camaraderie with other black characters, including Christophine. By affirming himself with the repetition of the word "I", he dismisses the black people as inferior and not worthy of the attention of a white woman, such as Antoinette. Her otherness, however, takes precedence in Rochester's mind as to how he attempts to define her. Antoinette's beauty, as well as the way in which she dresses, for example, are characterised by Bhabha's "*almost the same but not white*" signifier.[965] Rochester's male gaze falls under threat throughout the narrative, beginning with his being objectified by the white Creole guests attending his

[965] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", p 89 (Bhabha's emphasis).

wedding. The interrelationships between Antoinette, her English husband and Christophine, all reveal different male/female power relationships that are characterised by race. In each case, a female desire is exerted, one which transcends the psychoanalytical "desire to desire", and which at times seeks to create a male desire, as is the case when Antoinette conspires with Christophine for the *obeah* potion through which she seeks to win back her husband's love and desire for her. Antoinette's desire is therefore not simply a "desire to desire", but a female desire to create a male desire.

The female gaze in *Wide Sargasso Sea* also poses a challenge to a psychoanalytical interpretation which characterises the feminine with a lack of desire and the masculine with power over such a lack. In addition to expressing her own individual desire, Antoinette negates Rochester and thereby subverts the male/female power structure, leading to a "feminisation" of Rochester's character. This feminisation allows for a degree of sympathy in the portrayal of Rochester's character, as well as drawing attention to the complexities of the male/female relationships within the text. These relationships, which also include Antoinette and Tia, as well as Antoinette and Christophine, develop from a seemingly straightforward self/other formation to reveal blurred boundaries and a lack of fixed categories. The interplay between these characters, informed by race, class and gender, exposes subject positions that shift in given scenarios, reversing rigid categories of "male" and "female", as well as "coloniser" and "colonised", while highlighting the complexity of racial divisions and differences. These differences fragment and displace the colonial "I" and allow for the possibility of subversion. This raises the issue of the degree to which subversion is more effective than resistance in the struggle for power. Christophine's character is shown to be an enigma who cannot be contained within the confines of the text, in terms of her refusal to look back as she leaves the narrative. Her gaze against Antoinette and against Rochester, as well as her use of

obeah, demonstrate her ability to look back from the margins. This is particularly significant in light of Kristeva's notion of power, which defines it as something from which women are marginalised. Christophine's achievement is that she neither seizes power from white patriarchy, nor does she allow her marginalisation from this type of power to result in a lack of power. Her use of *obeah* transcends such a structure, and, to a degree, prevents her from being framed and defined by the narrative, in the sense that she walks out of it.

Wide Sargasso Sea has been accepted as a novel in its own right, given its classification as prequel to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, thereby demonstrating the importance of Rhys's text to the postcolonial canon. Such a position also draws attention to ideological assumptions surrounding the existence of a literary canon, which are often informed by Eurocentricism and what Spivak calls "the imperialist project."[966] Despite *Wide Sargasso Sea* being a novel that is written on behalf of the white Creole subject, rather than presenting the voice of the black Other (in Spivak's terms), it highlights issues of racism prevalent amongst white settler communities in the period after Emancipation, thereby serving as a potential critique of such racism, which existed in various forms in its socio-historical context. In this sense, the text reveals the social hierarchies at the time as crumbling, unstable, and volatile. Antoinette's desire for blackness is one indication of such a blurring of boundaries between blackness and whiteness, expressing her ambivalence for whiteness, as it simultaneously expresses her sense of superiority based on being white. Homi Bhabha's theory of the ambivalent "I" is revealed not only in Rochester's attitude towards his Creole wife, but in Antoinette's perception and treatment of Christophine and Tia. In both cases, the status of the "coloniser" is threatened by the ability of the "colonised" to mimic, thereby making a mockery of any fixed notions of

[966] Spivak, "Three Women's Texts", p 904.

identity. Whiteness and blackness as categories are thus revealed as problematic, given their socially constructed nature, as is any fixed notion of Englishness. In all of Rhys's novels, Englishness, as it exists in both male and female characters, is revealed as a thin façade that attempts to hide the subject's desire for otherness. In the interconnection between the so-called "self" and "other", the two categories are shown to be mutually dependent and therefore ambivalent, rather than discrete and fixed. This ambivalence also applies to the female protagonists of Rhys's early novels, who often see through the performativity of their English male counterparts.

Antoinette's sense of self is partly based on her physical appearance in general and her physical beauty in particular. Having inherited her mother's beauty, she inherits a curse, rather than a blessing. Annette was able to use her beauty to escape from poverty and the "marooned" state that she and her two children had been left in, after Antoinette's father had died. Antoinette's beauty, by contrast, is seen as hostile and threatening to her English husband, whose prime objective is to secure his own financial prosperity through Antoinette's dowry. His feelings for his wife, therefore, are not based on love, and he is often struck by her difference, both culturally and physically. Rochester's own inability to see beyond the English way of assessing beauty makes his stay in the West Indies restrictive, and makes the place a hostile environment for him, highlighting Kenneth Ramchand's notion of a "terrified consciousness".

Sexual exoticism in the form of the non-English female other informs not only *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but Rhys's early novels. In the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is the white Creole Antoinette with her "long, dark, alien eyes" that marks Rochester's fear and feeling of being threatened by a perceived other.[967] In Rhys's early novels, particularly in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark*, the white female protagonists

[967] *Sargasso Sea*, p 56.

become sexualised and black. Their longing for blackness is marked by ambivalence and a sense of identification with and loyalty to certain superficial aspects of Englishness. This tension between a desire for blackness and a desire for whiteness is often conveyed through the characters' desire to belong to the society in which they find themselves, that of English middle-class society. Having hailed from a more "respectable" status in the West Indies, Anna, for example, becomes sexualised, black and othered while in England, where she works as a chorus girl. Her social decline is marked by desperation and eventually prostitution, exiling her and other of Rhys's female protagonists to the margins of society. But it is from this marginal space that these characters speak – their voices are often heard internally as thoughts, rather than as spoken words. These inner voices thus reveal the complexities of their desires, preventing them from becoming mere victims, and leading to a questioning of the extent of their passivity.

Performance is evident in all of Rhys's novels, but most predominantly in her early texts, where outward aspects, including clothes, hair and make-up, contribute to the characters' sense of themselves. As identity is neither fixed nor rigid, the ability of Rhys's female protagonists to perform their own identities – in terms of both race and class – is evident. Ethnicity itself can be seen to be changeable, based on a constructionist view. Various races and ethnicities, classes and issues of gender inform Rhys's early novels. This mosaic demonstrates that it is not only the female protagonists who have questionable ethnic, cultural or class backgrounds: many of the peripheral characters are constantly performing their identities. In the same sense that Sasha can change the appearance of her class status by buying a new outfit and having her hair dyed, so can her acquaintance, Delmar, a Ukrainian living in Paris, become a naturalised Frenchman. Societal views about fixed racial categories, however, do at times restrict the characters' ability to function within such societies. The mulatto woman, for example, whose story

Serge relates to Sasha, suffered as a result of racial prejudice against her as a mixed-race woman. Serge found it "'impossible to tell whether she was pretty or ugly or young or old'".[968] Her subordination on the grounds of both race and gender forces her to stay indoors, isolated and alone and turning to the elixir of alcohol, in order to feel alive. When Sasha compares her own loneliness to that of the mulatto woman, based on loneliness and the need for alcohol, Serge insists on their difference: the mulatto woman was "not white", and therefore treated as a social outcast based on her race.

In *Quartet*, Marya's lack of Englishness is evident when Heidler asks her, "But you are English – or aren't you?" and is attributable to her lack of money and desperate situation, in which she must turn to the controlling Heidlers in order to survive. Although she sees through the Heidlers' posturing and performing, she is socially disadvantaged in her inability to play along to her given role. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna's West Indian background prevents her from being able to maintain a long-term relationship with her lover, Walter Jeffries, whose condescending cousin, Victor, tells her that they must end the affair. In all of these cases, the female protagonists demonstrate their ambivalence towards Englishness: although they turn to it in an attempt at belonging, they also detest many aspects of it and see through its mask – worn by the Heidlers, Horsfield, Jeffries and Victor – thereby demonstrating that everyone, regardless of race or class, is liable to perform their identities.

Age and ageing are also major themes in Rhys's early novels, and comprise another form of performativity. Julia and Sasha, both of whom are described as no longer young, perform their identities in an attempt to appear younger than their age. These outward performances are not always successful, as Horsfield, for example, notices Julia's "older" appearance in a certain light. However, inwardly, memories play an integral part in the

[968] *Midnight*, p 79.

shaping of these characters' identities. Sasha's desire for the return of youth, as well as Norah's fear of growing old, reflect a societal equating of youth with happiness. In dyeing her hair, Sasha not only performs her ethnicity to make herself appear more "white", she attempts to make herself appear younger. Being openly insulted in public, and seeing versions of her self when she was young and as what she might become when older, Sasha is constantly made aware that she has become "la vieille".[969] Sasha and Julia are repeatedly given harsh reminders that their "commodification" value as women has diminished, as a result of their age.[970] When Sasha "gets on with the transformation act", however, René, a young gigolo, mistakes her for a wealthy woman. Their encounter plays itself out in layers of performance and posturing, in which Sasha's thoughts as well as actions reflect an ironically self-aware individual. Unlike the female protagonists in Rhys's previous novels, Sasha thinks as well as says what she feels, openly accusing René of showing off his teeth, for example. However, Sasha continues to play the role that has, in the case of the gigolo, been determined for her, that of "rich bitch". Sasha's "repeated sequence of routine consumption" eventually leads to her own self-annihilation.[971] In sleeping with the *commis*, a man whom she despises, she denies her self and embraces her other, in an ironic version of Joyce's Molly Bloom.

The final chapter, on the zombie, follows Rhys's female characters around the streets of London and Paris, showing them to be dazed and confused as a result of a previous traumatic experience. In the same sense that the Haitian zombie is poisoned by a sorcerer, Rhys's female protagonists have been "poisoned" by patriarchy or by nostalgia. Their metaphorical poisoning, which makes them wander through an alienating environment, far from home (and often from any sense of what "home" might be), comes

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[969] *Midnight*, p 35. Translation: "You know her, the old woman?"
[970] Nancy Harrison, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p 177.
[971] Bowlby, "The Impasse", p 39.

in the form of the hostile societies into which they find themselves thrown. Their inability to "get on" in such societies, however, does not automatically make them victims. Firstly, these characters are able to see through the constructs of such societies, evident in their ability to remember, to engage in nostalgia, and to dream. These faculties indicate that part of their soul, the *Ti Bon Ange*, is still functioning, thereby demonstrating another form of "writing back". Secondly, these characters are arguably more alive than the characters with which they interact – those who passively accept the values of the societies which they inhabit.

Like the zombie, a corpse that has been brought back to life against its will, these female characters often live a life they have not chosen for themselves, as chorus girls, demi-mondes and prostitutes. A master-slave relationship is evident in the case of zombies, whereby the sorcerer uses the zombie for his own advantage. In the early novels discussed above, this relationship exists between Norah and her mother, Anna and the men with whom she sleeps for money, and between the mulatto woman and her English partner. However, in resurrecting memories from the past, as Anna does in *Voyage in the Dark*, the protagonists attempt to overcome the trauma of their present-day lives, from which they are emotionally and physically detached. Critically self aware and acutely aware of the social norms to which other characters such as Jeffries and Mr Mackenzie adhere, the female protagonists "resurrect" the past in order to deal with the present. Anna's tendency to turn to memories of her West Indian past indicates that her *Ti Bon Ange* is still alive and functioning, thereby preventing complete victimisation of her self, which is fragmented over time. Sasha's fragmented self, also revealed through flashbacks of her past, reflects a tormented individual whose memories of youth are not, like Anna's, self-affirming. Her union with the *commis* at the end of the narrative marks her final descent into self-annihilation, and although distressing, it is an act that Sasha chooses,

rather than one being imposed upon her.

From objectified female to Modernist zombie, the female protagonists in Rhys's five novels are far more complex than a simple classification of "victim" allows. They use the tools of the social structures in which they are placed, in order to work against such structures. In the same sense that "writing back" must involve the use of words and – in order to be heard – the writing of a text in a colonial language such as English, Rhys's female protagonists look back to exert a female gaze, see through the construct of the mirror, perform their identities and live inwardly when metaphorically zombified. These characters are oppressed by forces such as race, class, patriarchal structures, lack of money, and a displacement from home. In each case, however, they demonstrate their ability to "write back" from the margins. Their self-awareness allows them to assert a subjectivity that changes, develops, and emerges within the contexts of their alienated and exiled existence.

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