

**Nomadic Passions: Encounters with Difference  
and Troubling Affect in the Novels of Jean Rhys**

**Johanna O'Shea**

**PhD Thesis**

**Department of English and Comparative Literature**

**Goldsmiths, University of London**

## **Declaration of Authorship**

I Johanna O'Shea hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Johanna O'Shea

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## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the largely unchallenged assumption that the passivity of Jean Rhys's protagonists is a dysfunctional limitation of agency. It proposes that Rhys's critique of oppressive forms of power is at the heart of a passivity which is in opposition to dominant ways of being and thinking. It is argued that in Rhys's four later novels there is a textual insistence on both the positive value of difference and the potentiality of difficult feeling. The study rethinks the value of Rhysian negativity using the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze as a presiding framework along with contemporary feminist theory, especially the work of Sianne Ngai and Sara Ahmed. Deleuze's celebration of difference and his theorisations with Félix Guattari of minor literature and affect are used to interrogate the complexities of Rhys's style and narrative strategies, and to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of her use of passivity as subversion and her exploration of becoming in the modern world.

The thesis analyses how Rhys's navigation of passionate dissent and morbid affects challenges the values attached to the less powerful and posits an alternative to the conventional quest for happiness. Focusing on failure, a textual death drive and the problem of female transmission, the study identifies in Rhys's later four novels a preoccupation with the limitations of the literary text, and contends that her work conducts a 'libidinal mapping' which addresses the problem of complicity. It is argued that a search for the conditions of communality spans these novels. Deleuze's intensive reading method is used to think through what emerges in Rhys's inscription of difficult connection in numerous fraught scenes, and the thesis questions whether, ultimately, danger and negative affect attend or in fact permit the possibility of self-making for the emerging subject.

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## Introduction: Reading Rhys with Deleuze

In 1972, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari published *Anti-Oedipus*, the first volume of their revolutionary philosophical project, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.<sup>1</sup> In it they pose the question: given that most people suffer because of inequality, why do we tolerate things as they are? They conclude that if we do not act against this situation, it is because we desire it: ‘it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 31). To this end, which they describe as the task of schizoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari develop many nuanced arguments concerning the productive functions of desire that is always social and ‘has little to do with fantasy and dream’ (416). Importantly, they celebrate literature as an art form that is exceptionally good at making desire visible.

This thesis is an attempt to account for the passivity of Jean Rhys’s protagonists – women who, like Herman Melville’s eponymous scrivener, *Bartleby* (1853), do nothing to improve their situation. Many critics have considered the problems of desire in Rhys’s fiction. I address these problems in the light of my belief in the strong political force of her writing. Deleuze and Guattari argue that schizoanalytic literary criticism should attend to the text’s gravitational pull to both an oppressive (reactionary, paranoid or fascizing) pole and a revolutionary or ‘schizoid’ one, and this study heeds this advice, focusing on textual strategies of resistance but also on the protagonists’ complicity in suffering – both their own and the suffering of others. Rhys’s novels expose the violent operations of ‘organised society’ and its ‘code’, and the passivity of her protagonists is undoubtedly partially an effect of this violence, as Julia and her ex-lover make clear in the opening pages of Rhys’s 1930 novel *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (17, 18).<sup>2</sup> Julia’s unusual attitude to the fact that she ‘doesn’t have a dog’s chance’ to succeed socially had, for some time in the past, attracted the privileged Mr Mackenzie, and his cruel rejection of her has compounded her difficulty to the extent that it somehow breaks her back, leading, as the words suggest, to a compounded passivity (*ALMM*, 17, 78). However, passivity does not just expose social inequality in Rhys’s fiction. Her narratives are troublingly devoid of ‘good’ activity;

<sup>1</sup> This was first published in Paris in 1972 as *L’Anti-Œdipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie*.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter, where needed, page references to *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* are given with the abbreviation *ALMM*. Throughout the thesis, when there is sustained quotation from a text which has been referenced using an abbreviation, the abbreviation is given for the first instance in each paragraph and then omitted unless needed for clarity.

there is negligible disinterested kindness, there are numerous cruel acts, and the people encountered by the protagonists mostly act in ways which support the oppressive order of things. The conditions for effective communality in the present are absent. There is also an insistence in these texts – sometimes voiced by the protagonists, but also a principle built into the narratives – on the value of nonconformity, on affirming difference and on thinking for oneself, beyond the parameters of received notions of rationality, morality, and success.

These conditions ‘enliven’ the passivity of Rhys’s protagonists. In the first novel, *Quartet* (1928), Marya’s passivity works as a mildly subversive rejection of a gendered moral code as well as a visible effect of oppressive political realities, but with the following four major works this embodied situation becomes the vehicle for Rhys’s critique of common sense, a quietly admonishing riposte to the ideological values we deploy in reading and desiring conventional narratives and characterisation and, I contend, the central term in Rhys’s ethical engagement with vulnerability.<sup>3</sup> In this light, passivity appears as the author’s desire for change. For over a century feminists have been concerned with opposing and dismantling Sigmund Freud’s claim, first articulated in his ‘Three Essays on Sexuality’ in 1905, that woman is innately passive (Freud 2001a: 123-243), and for far longer women have insisted on their active involvement in political, social and cultural life.<sup>4</sup> Feminists have demonstrated that women are every bit as active and creative as men. This thesis explores the potentiality of Rhysian passivity but is entirely opposed to an essentialist notion of female passivity. It proposes, rather, that now women have to a *certain* degree cast off patriarchal essentialism with its restrictive ideas of femininity and a universal, unknowable femaleness, looking to the variety of discursive female responses to oppression may help us to map out possibilities for resistance in the future. Rhys’s critical, creative and idiosyncratic responses to the oppression of marginalised women present a textual politics which differs greatly from the traditional notion of political engagement, but which resonates – strikingly, to my mind – with certain aspects of the textured field of contemporary feminist theory.

These conditions and responses are the ‘passions’ investigated in this thesis. They play out in Rhys’s novels in ways which correspond to key concepts and theories

<sup>3</sup> Page references to *Quartet* are given using the abbreviation *Q*.

<sup>4</sup> Freud’s text was first published as *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*.



in Deleuze's individual and co-authored philosophical work. I use the term 'nomadic' as shorthand for this correspondence and also to indicate my reading of subjectivity in this fiction as unbound, nonunitary and close to Deleuze's concept of becoming. Rhys's protagonists are not female *flâneurs* but, as Wally Look Lai describes, 'nomadic creatures inhabiting [...] a transient world' in which they are 'lonely, dispossessed, rejected' (1968: 38). That world and the bodies in it affect them, and Rhys's novels chart the results of these encounters, 'feeling [the protagonist's] pulse, as it were, all the time', to borrow Sasha's description of her self-awareness in the 1939 novel *Good Morning, Midnight* (128).<sup>5</sup> These stories reveal the world's tendency to be violent. It is, after all, not just humans who are violent in her writing – the wolves hunt, and the lice and ants swarm and devour. The impression made on Rhys by the violent natural history of her birthplace, its volcanic terrain and dramatic tropical climate is evident from her notebooks and interviews as well as her depiction of a beautiful, terrifying and tremendously powerful natural environment 'as indifferent' as a cruel 'God' in the 1966 masterpiece *Wide Sargasso Sea* (107).<sup>6</sup> Her social vision can, then, be understood as a world view in the sense of an understanding of the processes and tendencies of life, and it is comparable to that which we find in the philosophy of Deleuze, who comments casually in his 1981 book *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* that 'our place in Nature seems to condemn us to bad encounters and sadnesses' (1988: 28).<sup>7</sup>

I am not, however, suggesting that we should decentre the human in this consideration of a comparable sensitivity to violence. Both Rhys and Deleuze are predominantly focused on violent structures of thought, on human forms of violence which are historical and on those which are ongoing and embedded in experience. This last concern, in particular, in Rhys's earlier work speaks of her ability to foresee what would become the subject of major political inquiry from the 1960s onwards; and the fact that *Wide Sargasso Sea* appeared only two years before Deleuze's 1968 work *Difference and Repetition* (*Différence et répétition*) and only six before *Anti-Oedipus* should not be overlooked. While *Anti-Oedipus* develops Deleuze's project of

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter, where necessary, page references to *Good Morning, Midnight* are given with the abbreviation *GMM*.

<sup>6</sup> Hereafter, where needed, page references to *Wide Sargasso Sea* are given with the abbreviation *WSS*.

<sup>7</sup> This text on Spinoza has a complicated history. In 1970 Deleuze published an anthology volume called *Spinoza: Textes choisis*; and in 1978 his essay 'Spinoza et nous' was published in *Revue de synthèse*, 89/91. These two works were, respectively, updated as and incorporated into the volume first published in 1981 as *Spinoza: Philosophie pratique*. I am quoting from Robert Hurley's 1988 translation of this text for City Lights Books. See François Dosse, 2010: 143, 548 n. 87 and 88.

introducing difference into thought, and demands that we counter our tendency to permit the incremental growth of fascistic forms of social, political, economic and psychological control, Rhys's Caribbean tragedy presents a searing indictment of the systems, practices and institutions that encourage us to subjugate and exercise violence against those unlike ourselves. Rhys's dramatisation of the ways in which patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism and Western cultural practices operate together to perpetuate a logic of dominance that invades all areas of life constitutes a development of the anti-fascist position that she had taken in *Good Morning, Midnight*. The result is a set of ideas about desire, the individual, ingrained structures of thought, history and the workings of power that have a certain complex similarity to Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the ways in which the systems of modern capitalism co-opt desire in order to enact a 'manic attack by the body politic against itself, in the interests of its own salvation [...] an attack by the "whole" of society [...] against its "parts"' (Massumi 1992: 116). At the same time, while her novel gives us a sense of such an attack by the 'whole', and while it is set in the mid-nineteenth century, it is also located within women's struggles of the 1960s. Rhys's staunch denunciation of patriarchy in her final novel is, for this reader, comparable to and – in terms of raising political consciousness – as effective as Deleuze and Guattari's invective against capitalism. Like the latter, Rhys offers no easy means of overcoming the problems of violence that she traces. Her manner of reaching back over a century compels us to think about how these problems exist today, slightly differently, of course, but no less urgently requiring meaningful resistance and the social struggle for positive change.

Describing Deleuze's vision of nature as an order which is 'full of cruelty and lack of sympathy for our peculiar being', Keith Ansell-Pearson notes that the consequent 'task' for the philosopher is 'to comprehend' this situation and to 'bestow upon' the violence of nature – its deaths and losses – a 'new meaning, which is the "meaning" of a new praxis that can only arise out of creating, and experimenting with new possibilities of existence' (Ansell-Pearson 1999: 13-14). Rhys's novels incisively depict the fact that encounters are frequently violent, and ethical, life-enhancing, joyful action is difficult and, crucially, should not be presumed. This is, I contend, one of the most important meanings of Rhys's literary praxis and it is at the heart of the form of resistance she offers us. This thesis focuses on the ways in which this central meaning is sustained through the evolution both of Rhys's style and her concerns across the four

later novels, each of which conducts a different sort of exploration of new possibilities of existence.

## **I. A schizoanalytic method**

This thesis is guided by the schizoanalytic principle of reading literature for the procedures it sets into play, rather than concentrating on a fixed meaning to be deciphered. There are various reasons why the following arguments navigate psychoanalytic discourse but generally avoid depending on it, the most obvious being that this thesis attempts to counteract the emphasis on lack and defect which still somewhat dominates Rhys criticism. One reason I turned to Deleuze's philosophy near the beginning of this research project is that he and Guattari provide a model of desire from which lack has been ousted. Instead, their desire is social and political: desire is constituted, while it in turn constitutes the 'socius' – Deleuze and Guattari's term for the social body across which desire flows in an inexhaustible process. This model seems particularly suitable for a fiction in which, I contend, all problems experienced by the protagonists, including the familial and sexual, have the political – understood in a broad sense – at their core. Using this model of desire also enables a detailed focus on the unavoidable Rhysian question of complicity while allowing us to avoid positioning her protagonists' frequently destructive desire as something that is in any sense exceptional or purely individual. In their 1975 work *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (*Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*), Deleuze and Guattari develop the widely held opinion that the literary text is inseparable from the power structures that determine the moment of its creation: on their understanding this situation means that all literature, to varying degrees, reinforces the status quo (the order supported by the 'major' language of the time) and some also works against it, in a 'minor' mode, and creates possibilities for positive change, or what the authors call 'lines of flight'. All texts, then, reveal the schizoanalytic proposition – which is, of course, also a fundamental tenet of Christianity and other religions – that we are all guilty of bad desire to an extent. In particular, the dynamism that is central to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of a desire that is always pulled between an oppressive and a revolutionary pole also helps us to think about the tension between resistance and submission, resignation or acquiescence that runs through Rhys's narratives in terms of an overall aesthetic and the politics of her style, as well as content.

According to schizoanalysis, literature is to be read for what it does (to be critically evaluated) and how it does (a matter of style, vitality or ‘health’, to be evaluated clinically). In both the critical and clinical sense (though more clearly for the former), meaning depends on the use value of the text: on how the established order is resisted and how style is used to push language to its limit, on the text’s capacity to reveal how desire works, on the writer’s capacity for producing a diagnosis of her contemporary moment, and even her prognostic capabilities. These ‘uses’ are central to the discussions in the following chapters.

For Ian Buchanan and his co-editors in the introduction to *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Literature*, it follows from Deleuze’s ‘pragmatic’ claims for literature that ‘whenever we find ourselves pondering the meaning of something we are in fact “using” it in some way’ (Buchanan et al. 2015: 5). Mindful of this idea, the aim in this study is to use Rhys’s texts productively by attending to the possibilities in her depictions of difference, intolerance, bad feeling and the quiet forms of resistance in her work.<sup>8</sup> Of course, the focus is also frequently on the meaning of aspects of the texts. For example, I offer an answer to the interpretative question posed by the ending of *Good Morning, Midnight* which withholds definite meaning while encouraging us to search for it. I take Deleuze and Guattari’s postulate of a use-oriented schizoanalytic reading as guidance for a style of literary criticism which I aim to follow, rather than a prescription for a wholly realisable programme.

This approach necessitates a cautious navigation between what is happening in the narratives, what is happening in the text in a wider sense and processes involving the reader and academic communities. Often, the processes identified happen in parallel on different levels. For example, the drive that is posited in my fourth chapter is, I argue, both Sasha’s and Rhys’s, it belongs to the text (*Good Morning, Midnight*) and also involves the reader. Frequently, the unusual negative behaviour of the protagonists (Sasha’s crying fit at the start of the fourth novel, or Julia’s vagueness and compulsion to check her appearance in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*) disturbs both other characters and the reader and provokes both to voice disapproval. In a related manner, it often falls to the reader to detect the social and political impact within the narrative of a seemingly slight event, as well as the moment’s wider political charge and aesthetic function. When Sasha is unable to carry out Mr Blank’s mispronounced

<sup>8</sup> I return to this principle throughout the thesis.

demand she ‘stalls’ what Judith Halberstam describes as the ‘business of the dominant’, constituting a weak but notable kink in the business owner’s capitalist extraction of maximum profit (2011: 88). Sasha is fired and muses on her powerlessness, but with this incident her apparent dysfunctionality becomes an integral element of the anti-capitalist critique Rhys offers in this novel. Crucially, and as we see in this last example, the passivity of Rhys’s protagonists generally gives us excellent cause to question the presuppositions and ideologies that we bring to the texts. In my view we read Rhys most productively when we question our expectations and probe our deployment of concepts such as agency, freedom and failure as we construct meaning.

This differentiated reading practice has an important counterpart in the political arguments made in this thesis. The study does not propose that passivity is a meaningful, valid strategy of political action as such. Rather, the passivity of Rhys’s protagonists is read as an act of resistance within the realm of discourse. Their behaviour is, on this reading, a symbolic refusal of oppressive systems and of dominant discourses reliant on heteronormative conceptions of self-making. In these ways, Rhys’s writing acts on the socius itself. We can, I contend, learn from Rhys’s narratives to think differently about difference. Literature of the oppressed and dispossessed can inspire political hope. Rhys’s literature of the passive subject can also do this, but it is not the passivity of her protagonists which is of the greatest political value: it is, rather, the texts’ insistence on the potentiality of difficult feeling and the positive value of difference. Many of the ideas in this thesis could be – and many have been – investigated using feminist and postcolonial theories and put to work for their related political agendas. The intention here is not to overlook these approaches, much less to posit a superior Deleuzian approach in the place of others. The aim is to explore Rhys’s subversion from a different angle, to demonstrate the philosophical nature of her writing and thereby to contribute to the vast body of work on the politics of Rhys’s fiction. Four key concepts in Deleuze’s single and co-authored philosophy are used to this end. These are Deleuze’s logic of the outside, Deleuze and Guattari’s theorisation of art as one of the ways in which thought emerges, their concept of a minor literature and the idea of affect as becoming. These ideas suggest what I think is a useful way of extending the issue of Rhys’s textual politics beyond the realm of theme and narrative content, so it can also be approached formally, through style and the connections within and the dynamics of her texts.

This thesis examines the four later novels. It omits study of the short stories and *Quartet* for a number of reasons. The focus is on narrative strategies: on how situations, motifs, descriptions and dialogue repeat and, in important exceptions, develop; on passivity and the general absence of a desire for self-betterment over time despite, for example, changes in circumstance which, according to common sense, should lead the protagonists to seek employment, security or at least to try to modify their behaviour. This study identifies an elaboration of Rhys's aesthetic across these four novels and examines the complication of ideas that are relatively undeveloped in her earliest novel. I draw heavily on Rhys's statements about her life, work and political views in *Smile Please*, her posthumous autobiography of 1979, the unpublished Exercise Books and, in particular, her published letters.<sup>9</sup> This is done not to contribute to a biographical reading of her work but rather to support a philosophical reading. It is useful, for example, to have evidence of Rhys's suspicion of Freudian psychoanalysis in a study which is so heavily influenced by Deleuze.<sup>10</sup> Evidence of Rhys's literary pleasures and opinions is also very useful. Rhys had broad literary and cultural interests, which she often describes at length in her letters, and these statements are used to support the emphasis in this thesis on unexpected connections.

Chapter Six employs a relatively unusual method of analysis, as it identifies connections between *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in order to interpret the earlier novel.<sup>11</sup> While this retrospective method might seem unorthodox we can, I believe, locate patterns, repetitions and perhaps even 'strategies' at work in Rhys's fiction without attributing them to conscious artistic planning.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, the complex problem for Rhys scholars of composition and textual histories makes it impossible to disallow the idea that ideas, plots and even passages from a later novel might have been at least partially formed when earlier novels were being written, and might have informed how the earlier works emerged. Rhys is notorious for having

<sup>9</sup> Hereafter, Rhys's *Letters 1931-1966*, published in 1985, are referred to as *Letters*.

<sup>10</sup> In the Black Exercise Book (BEB) Rhys recalls picking up a book concerning girls' childhood seduction fantasies from Sylvia Beach's book store in Paris, and she notes in disagreement with the writer '████████████████████' (UTC, 1976.011.1.1.1). Every attempt has been made to obtain permission from Jean Rhys's estate to quote from Rhys's unpublished writing. Unfortunately my attempts have been unsuccessful.

<sup>11</sup> Hereafter, where needed, page references to *Voyage in the Dark* are given using the abbreviation *ViD*.

<sup>12</sup> Although the idea of an unconscious strategy is somewhat paradoxical, I am using the phrase to suggest goal-oriented tendencies in Rhys's writing which she neither theorised nor even explicitly articulated, and which may have been instinctual, deriving from affective and extra-cognitive layers of experience. Wilson Harris makes a similar argument regarding Rhys's use of myth (1980). See page 44.

produced multiple drafts of her work, making the mapping of textual production a minefield. To take the most obvious example, Rhys was planning and writing versions of *Wide Sargasso Sea* by the 1930s. Angier contends that she was doing so since a young woman in Dominica (1990: 371). Rhys claimed to have written three or four versions of the novel, and destroyed or lost the earlier ones (*Letters*, 213): it is known that she destroyed a version in 1939, and we cannot disallow the possibility that this was not the earliest draft (Angier 1990: 371). We therefore cannot say with certainty that elements of or even whole passages in *Voyage in the Dark*, for example, which seem to recall *Wide Sargasso Sea* do not do so because they were influenced by, if not actually intended for, a version of the latter that existed in some form when the third novel was being written.

The idea of connection is central for this thesis, and consequently I foreground numerous connections among Rhys's novels and other artists and thinkers including Arthur Rimbaud, Vincent Van Gogh, Franz Kafka, Deleuze and contemporary feminist theorists of unhappiness (Ahmed) and disgust (Ngai). The aim is to explicate an intricate political aesthetic which develops over time into a self-interrogating form of writing concerned with affirming connections with others precisely when it is most difficult to do so.

## II. Rhys's nomadism: subjectivity and dissent

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? Singing defiantly 'You don't like me, but I don't like you either. "Don't like jam, ham or lamb, and I *don't* like roly-poly..."' Singing 'One more river to cross, that's Jordan, Jordan...'

I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere. Too sad, too sad... (*GMM*, 37-38)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The modern Penguin editions of Rhys's novels referred to in this thesis use unusual formatting for the ellipses, which occur frequently in Rhys's writing. They include a full stop followed by a space and then an ellipsis. The first editions and the early 1964 manuscript of *Wide Sargasso Sea* held in the British Library use just an ellipsis alone as is customary (BL, MS 57587: 1964). Accordingly, my page numbers and the quoted punctuation follow these Penguin editions, except in regards to ellipses, for which I follow the standard format as used in these original editions and manuscripts. Interestingly, in letters of 1957 and 1964 Rhys complains about there being 'too many dots, too much emotion' in *Quartet* (*Letters*, 150 and 280). A case of life imitating art?

The protagonist of Rhys's fourth novel is a disturbing creation. She undergoes an endless vacillation between defiance and defeat, and passion and apathy, is subject to apparently unwilling eruptions into her consciousness of sad memories and different voices and she frequently veers into irrationality; the breakdown of certainty and lack of clear meaning are a constant threat for both her and the reader. In the passage cited above, Sasha appears to be 'schizophrenic' in the sense that her inner monologue suggests the absence of solid identity and, in its place, a plethora of 'masks' and a number of unusually distinct voices and modes of thought. We find this apparent multiplicity of the subject throughout the novel. Different voices appear according to different environmental circumstances and seem more like concretions of a subject in flux which are relatively independent of one another rather than enduring aspects of a stable self. In this passage Sasha thinks she can remove her face, and with it her 'torment', like a mask. In Part Four, after being attacked by René, she criticises herself in the second person and while we can read this as the co-presence of distinct facets of the personality there is, I think, good reason to understand the passage as Rhys's expression of the fact that the self becomes in a process of constant flux. Deleuze's philosophy provides us with some interesting ways of thinking about this situation.

For Deleuze this process is a constant variation of one's power due to the constant experience of being acted upon and acting: an 'individual is first of all a singular essence,' he writes, 'which is to say, a degree of power' (Deleuze 1988: 27). Sasha's 'detached' and scolding voice conveys the sense that she is trying to locate and express her agency by voicing her small but significant temporal and geographical distance from the feeling of inconsolable grief that overwhelmed her a split second ago: 'This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other – how do I know who the other is? She isn't me' (*GMM*, 154). The voicing of distance is Sasha's means of re-asserting herself. The 'second' voice is necessarily cynical and self-critical because she is trying to regain some control over her emotions, shutting down a threatening hysteria with a forced sense of detachment: 'say it all out calmly. You've had dinner with a beautiful young man and he kissed you and you've paid a thousand francs for it. Dirt cheap at the price' (154). In becoming, the subject differs firstly from itself, a process which we can sense in Sasha's affective awareness of the dangers posed by her feelings. Yet, as argued by Deleuze and Guattari in their 1980 work *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the subject is always caught in a material



entanglement, is always situated among other bodies.<sup>14</sup> Becoming takes place in zones of indistinction, as bodies and other multiplicities encounter one another, leading to the destruction of one body or the other or their co-assemblage. In this philosophy, agency is entwined with and inseparable from the various ways in which we are affected by other forces which come both from inside and outside. There is, I propose, a structural affinity between this idea of becoming and Rhys's narratives, indicating the fact that Rhys's fiction is curiously affective. The narratives of her middle three novels make particularly visible what is also the case for *Wide Sargasso Sea*: existence for Rhys's women plays out as a series of encounters, some of which might benefit the protagonists, most of which endanger them.

The psyches of Rhys's protagonists are not identical, nor fractured in the same way. Their inner worlds are different, just as the nature of their encounters differs, and we have a different kind of access to each of the protagonists. Nevertheless, this thesis proceeds from the idea that there is a characteristic Rhysian subjectivity. This is a depiction of an inner life riven by fracture, uncertainty, and passion, and which is, as Helen Carr writes, 'formed and deformed' by violent, oppressive social conditions (2012: 51).<sup>15</sup> Rhys's increasingly dramatic and nuanced method of depicting subjectivity offers a diagnosis of the problems of modern life: the narratives concern the effects of intolerance, marginalisation, alienation, dispossession and displacement. Yet we can also read the fraught inner lives of Rhys's women – the tumult of which is clearest and most extreme in *Good Morning, Midnight* – in terms of Rhys's 'diagnosis' or exploration of the flux of subjectivity in a general sense.

Rhys's writing evidences a complex understanding of inner life. Undoubtedly, this complexity stemmed from worldly problems (interpersonal, political, social, historical and environmental), but just as her awareness of the natural tendency to violence can be read as a world view rather than a view of what might be described as the local deficiencies of humanity, there is good reason to consider the possibility that Rhys conceived of inner life generally as dynamic and affective. Statements in her letters are testimony of Rhys's search for truthful and meaningful ways of writing about her view and her experience. In several striking examples of Rhys's perspectivism

<sup>14</sup> First published in French in 1980 as *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*.

<sup>15</sup> Throughout this thesis, references to Helen Carr's study, *Jean Rhys*, are to the 2012 second edition, although the majority of the analyses and arguments with which I engage here appear in the first edition of 1996.

which suggest a view of the subject in flux as much as it is unknowable, she asks ‘[w]hy demand a view of life?’ when this is ‘surely’ not a writer’s ‘business’ (*Letters*, 100). The search is for ways to inscribe one’s embodied perceptions in a manner which accounts as much as possible for one’s limited perspective and the process of continually being affected. In her letters Rhys describes the strong effects that alcohol, depression, illness, family problems, poverty, worry, place and literature had on her ability to write. ‘No one knows anything but himself or herself. And that badly’, Rhys states (*Letters*, 104). ‘Books and plays’ are produced from a position; they are

written some time, some place, by some person affected by that time, that place, the clothes he sees and wears, other books, the air and the room and every damned thing. It must be so, and how can it be otherwise except his book is a copy? (*Letters*, 101)

To a significant degree, Rhys’s earlier novels are transcriptions of her experience into fiction. She was plagued by worry that her last novel would not seem right or authentic, because she had settled on a more ambitious project of imagining an experience which she knew only from a remove. Yet there are similarities between *Voyage in the Dark*, *Good Morning*, *Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* which suggest that with Antoinette she was still writing about inner life as she herself felt it. This is the life of the ‘unusual mind’ which appears to some to be ‘mad’, but might just be the mind of the author or the mind of the reader. I am proposing that in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys was still aiming to depict subjectivity in a way which reflected her own experience of it: ‘I’ve never read a long novel about a mad mind or an unusual mind or anybody’s mind at all. Yet it is the only thing that matters and so difficult to get over without being dull’ (*Letters*, 254). In this letter of March 1964 Rhys suggests that the life of the mind is a continuum, and one which had not been and perhaps cannot be represented accurately in words. She tried, though, and I think she was very successful. Collectively, her novels suggest that the experience of violence makes inner life more fraught, but does so by degrees. Rather than exploring a ‘normal’ psyche which becomes contorted when under pressure, on my reading these works suggest inner life as that which is always contorting and distorting according to forces from within and without.

Any model of subjectivity which dissolves the ego’s boundaries raises questions about agency which have political efficacy to the extent that they disrupt our

unquestioning participation in hegemonic processes. Affect theorists such as Ahmed (2010) and Lauren Berlant (2011) are among scholars who have shown that Western political regimes depend on the populace's belief that each individual is free to work for the good life which can be attained if sufficient effort is made and capital accumulated. Unhappiness, we are often told, is a personal problem rather than the evidence of a structural deficit which exacerbates to a dangerous degree the natural flux of experience. Conceptualisations of the subject which complicate the unimpeded progression from 'I desire' to 'I act to fulfil my desire' threaten to destabilise the edifice of neoliberal capitalism, and mitigate against the 'thought control' on which it depends and which Rhys so clearly perceived (*Letters*, 99). This thesis contends that her passive women are exemplary exercises in such complication.

While Deleuze's ethics of joyful action has certain problematic political implications, to which I turn shortly, it is worth noting here that it is erroneous even to discuss a Deleuzian 'subjectivity' because Deleuze generally avoids fixed definitions, but also – and, for this discussion, more importantly – because he is concerned with countering the idea that individual experience is, in fact, individual. This agenda has numerous political aims, including to demonstrate the fact that capitalism has intruded into every aspect of existence; to offer a model of connection as the basis of political change; and to reveal the political force of desire in order to help us to recognise and resist the ways in which we are manipulated into positions of complicity. Crucially, Deleuze's politics is not distinct from his ontology and ethics. His thinking of imbricated subjectivity takes place in a vitalist realm in which change is constant, the self is always part of a multiplicity and – to simplify here – is a momentary instantiation of a form of Life that exceeds the organic (Deleuze 1995: 143). As Ansell-Pearson states, recalling a potent description from *Difference and Repetition*, the 'radical move proposed by Deleuze consists in viewing individuality not as a characteristic of the self, but rather as that which informs and sustains "the system of the dissolved Self"' (Deleuze 2004b: 219, in Ansell-Pearson 1999: 77-78). In this sense, individuality might be understood as a habit of choice, or the function of the occasions for joy and sadness that we create over a lifetime, where both such totalities are determined as much by external forces as by forces of which we are the adequate cause.

Rhys's insistent attention to the impact of the world on every aspect of one's existence is, I think, ahead of its time, and reading her through a Deleuzian lens helpfully illuminates both this preoccupation and the ideational complexity of her

writing generally. In Rhys's last three novels there are moments of self-overcoming which involve what might be described as a synchronisation with this impact, as though the protagonists' individuality or sense of self finally achieves an orientation which can productively accommodate the difficulty of the constant process of being formed and deformed. These moments do not concern the subject's self-consolidation, but rather a concurrent dissolution and effort which, I contend, together both stand for the subject's past experience and affirm its continual dissolution in the future. These ambivalent scenes of transcendence are in keeping with Rhys's narratives generally. They fit organically into stories concerning difficult experience and difficult lives, and minds which are under duress and which are considered unusual. Ultimately, the precise nature of Rhys's understanding of subjectivity might be less important than the commitment to difficulty in her writing. If we take seriously Rhys's statements about her desire to write about the unusual mind, then we might understand the affirmation of dissolution that we find at these key moments as an encoded commitment to her artistic engagement with an idea of subjectivity as that for which the centre does not hold – and perhaps even, in a certain sense, as testament to her adherence to an idea of the subject as a process of self-differentiation. The fourth chapter of this thesis turns to Deleuze's philosophy of difference and repetition to explore this idea in *Good Morning, Midnight*; and Chapter Six and the Coda offer different models for reading other comparable concluding scenes in terms of a slightly different commitment. Here, though, we can pause on the final note of Ansell-Pearson's comment on Deleuzian individuality – dissolution – to consider the light it sheds on an interesting and otherwise rather obscure facet of *Good Morning, Midnight*, the novel in which, I propose, Rhys explores the flux of subjectivity with greatest stylistic precision.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides seventeen major definitions of the verb 'dissolve' and while many of these can be linked to situations in Rhys's fiction generally, most of them correspond to significant themes, motifs and dynamics in her fourth novel, suggesting that dissolution might be a principle of some sort in this text. These definitions also demonstrate a fundamental ambivalence which corresponds to the notable indeterminacy of Sasha's narrative, concerning as they do both a 'loosening' or the destruction of 'physical integrity', and a 'setting free' or breaking of constricting 'bonds'. The first sort of dissolution is the main process at work in the Mr Blank scene, as Sasha loses her grip on meaning, and her physical capacity for orientation breaks down. The other sense of being liberated is palpable in Serge's studio

when Sasha drifts off in the ‘miracle’ of a moment’s happiness; and, I think, it can be sensed again at the end of the novel when Sasha ponders ‘the enormous effort, under which the human brain cracks. But not before the thing is done, not before the mountain moves’ (*GMM*, 157). I argue in Chapter Four that the final pages of this work confront the capacity of art to effect change and thereby to liberate the world – to move the mountain – by increasing its degree of freedom. To dissolve also means to relax, to weaken and to enfeeble bodily strength, and Sasha’s entire narrative concerns her psychological and bodily enfeeblement. In one of the most significant dynamics, she experiences a gradual weakening of her ability to refuse René, which results in his attacking and stealing from her in Part Four. Another meaning is specifically cinematographic, and here we can recall Sasha’s ‘film-mind’, and the way her flashbacks are dissolved in and out of her present narrative (147). To dissolve can be to deny an overbearing authority and to denounce it as illegitimate. Sasha’s narrative works ‘to bust the roof off everything’ (33), revealing the workings of capitalism, racism, patriarchy and the effects on society and the individual psyche of the control exercised under fascism and the other violent political regimes of Europe in the 1930s. Sasha frequently dissolves into tears, a dissolution foregrounded in her first public encounter in the novel, much to the chagrin of a well-behaved café customer. Sasha has a surprising affiliation to water: she cries, is ‘fished up, half drowned’ (10), and becomes fixated on the fountains of the Exhibition. This is clearly her element. A final definition is significant. It is not just the bonds of authority which are broken in dissolution: to dissolve can be to put an end to association or connection. The severance of the Sasha-Serge bond is an unexplained and subtle form of textual violence, but also entirely in keeping with the novel’s general principle of dissolution. Yet I would argue that despite the various manifestations of this principle Sasha never entirely cracks up; her response vacillates but her anger or *potentia* does not weaken, and the text never flinches from its vision of the impact that the world has on her. *Good Morning, Midnight* is a narrative of dissolution, in which Sasha is formed and deformed by her experience, her individuality emerging as the tenor of this process, as that which ‘informs and sustains “the system of the dissolved Self”’. Of course we can understand Rhysonian subjectivity in pathological terms – as many critics have shown – but we can profit from considering the author’s interest in the essentially unusual character of the mind.

Returning to Sasha's disavowal of her 'other' voice after René's attack – '[s]he isn't me' – it is quite possible that the evocation of Rimbaud's famous declaration, 'I is an *other*' is not accidental (Rimbaud 2008: 113).<sup>16</sup> Although Sasha's (and Rhys's) preference is for alcohol rather than opium, this protagonist's senses are disordered in a manner we can read through the young French poet's aim of liberating a truly creative expression – of writing the new. As importantly, Sasha's schizoid thinking is frequently irrational, proceeds in non-sequiturs and is often self-contradictory, but it is not without definite orientation. Like Rimbaud, Sasha also demonstrates an impassioned yet coherently expressed desire as dissent. This involves her anger ('but I don't like you either') at the violence of society which renders her existence a depleted movement through dark, hostile streets. Sasha's angry dissent, which is so effectively dramatised in her schizoid self-reflection about removing her mask/face, is her *potentia* or her productive (as opposed to repressive) power.

Rosi Braidotti describes *potentia* as the 'intensity' of the nomadic subject, her 'rate of change, transformation or affirmation', and the spirit of nomadic thought. 'Life as the exploration of this affirmative capacity' is at the heart of both Deleuze's Spinozist philosophy and Braidotti's own feminist use of 'nomadic subjects' as a set of 'transformative tools that enact progressive metamorphoses of the subject away from the programme set up in the phallogocentric format' (Braidotti 2011: 12). Rhysian anger is often reactive rather than affirmative, but as Patricia Moran has argued recently (2015), the individual's expression of anger at social injustice becomes affirmative and creative when the social order disallows anger as a valid response to oppressive conditions. Sasha's dissent is a phobic striving away from the dominant order. Rhys's novels in general demonstrate a phobic striving away from established structures of thought which is comparable to the restlessness of Deleuze's nomadic thought: both involve a 'kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour' (Braidotti 2011: 26). Deleuze and Guattari introduce their nomadic thought in their introductory chapter on the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus* in which they state that the nomad is the non-sedentary type of individual who is not included by history (2013: 24). The nomad tries to 'write sufficiently in the name of an outside' which 'has no image, no signification, no subjectivity', producing an

<sup>16</sup> Formulated by Rimbaud in a letter to Georges Izambard, 13 May 1871. This relationship is discussed further in Chapter Three.

‘assemblage with the outside, against the book as image of the world’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2013: 24). The nomadic writer aims to write against all established forms of knowledge. Deleuze’s philosophy accordingly resists finite forms, is dynamic or unstable, and open to interpretation in a manner which exceeds the general indeterminacy of meaning characteristic of philosophical and literary texts. This thesis contends that this is also the case to a significant degree in Rhys’s novels, signalled clearly by the invisible multitude of further possibilities in Antoinette’s statement that there is ‘always the other side’ (*WSS*, 106). Rhys, like Deleuze, critiques and resists dualistic thought and dominant forms of sense-making, and this is an obstacle for those who seek a stable, definitive interpretation of her writing.

### III. Problems of difference

This study proceeds in the awareness of the paradoxical nature of the thesis. Even though my arguments rest on the proposition that equivocality is central to Rhys’s aesthetics and politics, I am still offering what is, in a sense, a ‘strong’ reading of Rhys as a writer whose intellectual preoccupations overlap with Deleuze’s and in whose fiction passivity has a resistant, ‘deterritorialising’ function: that is, it works against the established order. This problem of defending a strong interpretation of a fiction in which equivocality is central is a function of nomadic thinking: how can we argue that this type of thought proposes anything other than a critique of established modes of thought, when it is invested in refusing the terms in which we, in the Western tradition, know and think? By way of an answer to this question, I propose that we can choose to embrace the knottiness of these nomadic issues and engage with them in a compatibly restless critical consciousness to see what possibilities are thereby opened up, or we can reject the philosophy on the ground that it does not meet the standards of established, rational (Aristotelian, Hegelian) practices of thought, and declare it to be self-contradictory and therefore fundamentally flawed.<sup>17</sup> This study is an attempt at the former. It locates creative potential in differentiation rather than contradiction, in flux rather than stability and endurance and in a method of difficulty as opposed to an entirely coherent systemisation.

<sup>17</sup> Fredric Jameson’s interesting though rather ‘paranoid’ critique of Deleuze is a prime example of the latter kind of reading (Jameson 2009). The ‘paranoia’ I am referring to here is that evoked by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her 1997 critique of cultural theorists who aim to expose all ideological structures at the expense of other intellectual projects and a more creative, affective sensibility (2003: 123-151).

Braidotti and Ansell-Pearson both place emphasis on Deleuze's creativity, and how this translates by necessity to the reader's encounters with his work. Ansell-Pearson describes Deleuze's anti-method as being akin to the evolution of culture itself, and as the performance of thought experiments (1997, 1999). Braidotti argues that we should not be afraid to think through Deleuze's concepts in new ways, given that he is 'one of few philosophers who preached conceptual disobedience' (2011: 272). This is a central proposition in her feminist use of Deleuze and it guides my study of Rhys which practises relative disobedience in the attempt to carve out a new way of reading passivity in her texts as something which has political efficacy. Deleuze engaged with the work of philosophers he admired, and subjected it to strong re-workings, which he described, in characteristically provocative though unfortunate terms, as 'buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception' (Deleuze 1995: 6). This study attempts a generous approach to Rhys's writing which also tries to be faithful to the spirit of her work as I understand it. However, my use of Deleuze's thought here is something like an unfaithful re-working. That is, I am presenting a defence of passivity using a philosopher who argues unequivocally for an ethics of positive, self-enhancing action. Deleuze explains this positive ethics in terms which recall some of the more stringent criticisms of Rhys's protagonists:

That individual will be called *good* (or free, or rational, or strong) who strives, insofar as he is capable, to organise his encounters, to join with whatever agrees with his nature, to combine his relation with relations that are compatible with his, and thereby to increase his power. For goodness is a matter of dynamism, power and the composition of powers. That individual will be called *bad*, or servile, or weak, or foolish, who lives haphazardly, who is content to undergo the effects of his encounters, but wails and accuses every time the effect undergone does not agree with him and reveals his own impotence. (Deleuze 1988: 22-23)

In one sense, my use of Deleuze may be justified because this study is my attempt to organise my encounters with Rhys's fiction, the scholarship on her writing, and Deleuze's philosophy. My engagement with Deleuze starts from the premise that his Spinozist ethics is a system for lived behaviour rather than the 'behaviour' of fictional entities. While his ethics might seem to be almost incompatible with a positive reading



of Rhys's protagonists, his study of literary texts is, as Gregg Lambert has noted, most often a matter of offering a surprisingly positive reading of writers who seem to be ethically compromised or 'perverted' in some manner or another (Lambert 1998).<sup>18</sup> The refusal of Rhys's protagonists even to try to organise their encounters certainly fits this description, and I trace the affinity in this fiction with what Deleuze and Guattari see as Kafka's inability to affirm in the present a shared language of resistance. Passivity in Rhys's novels is, I contend, a function of a comparable inability.

This thesis maps across the later four novels Rhys's search for the conditions which give rise to the possibility of good connection with others. This search largely follows Rhys's development as a writer: it is most unsuccessful in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, futile in *Good Morning*, *Midnight*, nearing fulfilment in *Voyage in the Dark* and finally complete in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In this sense, Rhys's writing itself undergoes a creative evolution, and we can therefore understand this development not so much as a pessimistic indictment of humanity (though Rhys comes close to this position in her fourth novel) but as a working through of that which limits our capacity for joyful action. On the one hand, then, this study proposes that Rhys's novel-writing career displays a form of self-overcoming that is congruent with Deleuze's ethics of joyful action. On the other, I suggest that this same process of self-overcoming engages with fundamental problems of political commitment that Deleuze's philosophy often problematically elides.

Most pertinently for this thesis, Deleuze's ethics of joyous action does not pay sufficient attention to the fact that all bodies do not have an equal capacity to act. Rhys vividly dramatises this inequality in narratives which foreground the nuances and ambivalence of situations of limited agency. She shows us how, given the inherently violent order of things and the thorough invasion of capitalism into every sphere of existence, it is often very hard for the relatively powerless individual to act 'joyfully' by organising her encounters so as 'to join with whatever agrees with [her] nature' and 'thereby to increase [her] power' (Deleuze 1988: 22-23). Access to what 'agrees' with one may be dramatically limited – and this is the case for Rhys's protagonists. One's material resources, social position, kinship network or lack thereof and the available 'structures of feeling', to borrow Raymond Williams's phrase (1977), might not be of an order which allows one to thrive. Moreover, thriving, in Rhys's fiction, too often is

<sup>18</sup> See the discussion on page 159.

proximate to complicity. Deleuze does not seem to account for what Denise deCaires Narain describes as the ‘stark reality facing’ the historically oppressed ‘who cannot position [themselves] effectively, *or* affectively’ within existing genealogies and social structures (2013: 289). In this sense his is an unlikely theoretical framework for reading Rhys. Yet unsuitability can be productive.

An important point of convergence of the political visions of these two writers is revealing on two fronts, demonstrating a serious limitation of Deleuze’s philosophy, and an important political and ethical sophistication in Rhys’s work. For both Rhys and Deleuze, the issue at stake is not whether one is free, but how one acts, desires and writes within one’s constraints. First, then, we can see that Deleuze does not pay sufficient attention to the fact that different people experience different types and degrees of constraint. Furthermore, although Deleuze is clear that Spinozist joy arises when bodies enter into good arrangements with one another, and this principle is surely intended to mitigate against the possibility that the project of increasing one’s power might involve diminishing that of others, he also seems to assume a problematic transparency which supposedly allows us to act in the full awareness of the constraints experienced by others, and to know beforehand what sort of relations will benefit us *and* others. Deleuze’s Spinozist philosophy fails to account for the power differential among groups, and the necessary partiality of one’s knowledge of other people. Indicated, ironically, by his choice of the male pronoun in the passage cited above, he fails to give sufficient attention to the fact that the project of self-organisation in order to increase one’s power all too often props up prevailing power structures. The phrase ‘increase one’s power’ is far from innocuous, and Deleuze’s refusal to engage meaningfully with this fact is jarring. However, these problems indicate a productive approach to Rhys’s narratives. My proposition is that the thorny issues of inequality and difficult relationality that Deleuze overlooks constitute both a stumbling block to action within Rhys’s novels and their driving ethical impulse. The passivity of her protagonists is inseparable from the dominant theme of complicity, and it poses the question: how do we act joyfully with the assurance that we are not contributing to the dominant order and harming others? In Rhys’s last three novels there is no easy answer, no example set for how to act, no masterful ‘should’ proposed for ideal behaviour. Instead, these texts disabuse us of the Deleuzian presumption of a transparent harmony between bodies, even within minority groups, as feminist and postcolonial theorists have done, and the narratives provide us with only a singular negative ethics: the only

certain principle of action that can absolutely be affirmed in the present and in relation to present conditions is that cruelty is bad. Rather than offering wider ethical certainty, these stories of the haphazard lives of protagonists who fail to organise their encounters encourage us to engage honestly with the idea of difficult connection.

As Elaine Savory notes, ‘political resistance, as the Caribbean knows, as feminism knows, is successful when individuals join together into effective groups’ (1998: 83), yet Rhys’s novels tackle the problem of how to act when the conditions for solidarity are absent. DeCaires Narain develops an argument of central importance for this thesis in several studies of the productive impossibility of easy connection (2010, 2013). In readings of Rhys and other women writers who explore racial discord and inequality, she proposes an ‘affective feminist solidarity’ which does not presume an adequate ‘feminist community’ already in existence but which involves, instead, ‘the hard graft required to begin approaching’ difficult, often ‘abrasive’, ‘affective connections’ between diverse women, and the effort to be ‘alert to the structures of power that mediate how women encounter each other’ (deCaires Narain 2013: 295-96). This thesis emphasises those ‘structures of power’, focusing not on the relationship between individuals but on the ramifications for Rhys’s lonely protagonists of this ‘hard graft’.

This study contends that the passivity of the Rhys woman works to an extent as a figuration of the problem of how to locate agency in the process of becoming. The passive Rhys protagonist is read here as a model of the subject as that which is not self-determining, yet such models raise the question: how can we, then, understand agency? If we do away with the idea of the individual as a self-determining entity that is ontologically prior to its actions and expressions, in reconceiving of the subject as that which is constantly acted upon and as that which is constituted by the regulatory processes of culture and discourse, are we not rendering notions of resistance, freedom and identity so problematic that we might, in fact, be undoing the conditions of both individual agency and political action? My suggestion is that, rather than being something the protagonists do or do not have, agency emerges in this literature as the form of effort which moves the protagonists closer to joyful action. That is, agency is expressed by modes of being – that involve action, thought, perception and feeling – which increase the protagonists’ force of existing, but effecting this increase, without contributing to the systems that perpetuate inequality, is always difficult and therefore always requires hard work. Similarly, as I argue in my subsequent chapters, Rhys

positions solidarity neither as a given for a self-identifying group, nor as an impossibility. Rather, through her narratives, she demonstrates the fact that solidarity requires great effort. As deCaires Narain argues, in practice this effort can productively take as its focus, if not its *raison d'être*, the negative affect that frequently erupts between bodies and the lack of transparency on such occasions. The negative affect that saturates Rhys's novels makes visible the need for this effort.

The absence of the conditions for communality in the present in Rhys's novels indicates other questions that have been central to postcolonial and feminist studies: namely, how do we write with and for an historically oppressed group without both eliding differences of identity within that group and disavowing our own privilege in making such a linguistic gesture? Furthermore, how do we write against the dominant order when our language is the language of masters? As I argue in Chapters Five and Six, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a minor literature provides some ways of addressing these questions in the context of reading Rhys, though the problems themselves remain irresolvable. The Spinozist ethics of joyfulness that is so central to Deleuze's understanding of affect and becoming constitutes a problem for thinking about affect and passivity in Rhys's fiction when using Deleuze's philosophy. Similarly, Deleuze's affirmative philosophy of difference in itself is a powerful tool with which to read Rhys's subversion of the established order, and her alternative to a widespread failure of thought. This thesis explores a number of the different ways in which Deleuze attempts to revalorise difference, in order to explicate what I argue is Rhys's attempt to think the radically new or 'difference in itself'. Yet there lurks within any notion of pure difference the risk of eliding violent histories, real inequality and real differences between people. The poststructuralist celebration of difference is aimed at countering the historical construction of 'difference as pejoration', a construction which has been 'constitutive of the self-asserting power of Sameness' (Braidotti 2011: 75). This poststructuralist theoretical agenda is important but in practice it is risky. Too abstract or utopian an approach to this project often at least suggests – if it does not actually result in – the conflation of the theoretical and the political; and this is one of the charges that is frequently levelled against Deleuze.<sup>19</sup> Difference is a highly

<sup>19</sup> Prominent among those who have taken this position are Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), Peter Hallward (2001), Jeremy Gilbert (2009), Fredric Jameson (2009) and Benjamin Noys (2015).

contentious term in critical theory, and the reification of pure difference remains a deeply suspicious move for many.

If, in 1997, Rita Felski could claim that difference ‘has become doxa, a magic word of theory and politics radiant with redemptive meanings’, there are plenty of theorists (Felski among them) who have contributed to the stringent critique of that doxa (1997: 1). Any broad deployment of difference as a signifier of any social group risks eliding the differences within that group and obscuring that group’s relative privilege. Summarising, Felski asserts that ‘we are now in a postmodern condition’ where any universal form of difference such as ‘female difference has fragmented into multiple differences and any appeal to general ideals or norms can only be considered politically questionable and theoretically naive’ (1997: 1). For Felski, no vision of ‘pure otherness’ has a place in a reasoned attempt to engage in and with political practice (1997: 5). Her feminist critique targets feminist discourses in which

the feminine serves as the privileged marker of difference, standing in for all the forms of diversity that are repressed in contemporary societies. Braidotti, for example, refers to the difference between men and women as the prototype of all differences [...] describing feminism as the discourse of modernity. (Felski 1997: 5)

Felski’s argument offers necessary caution to poststructuralist projects, but I think we can recognise an important distinction between the notion of ‘pure otherness’ that Felski critiques and a Deleuzian engagement with difference in itself as part of a ‘radical redefinition of thinking as the activity that consists in reinventing the grounds for subjectivity’ (Braidotti 2011: 77). The distinction may be one of category error, perhaps involving too easy a conflation of identity politics and politically committed epistemology. The charges brought against theorisations of pure difference seem generally to rest on a Hegelian, dialectical opposition: the discursive ‘privileged marker of difference’ works, for Felski, to occlude and thereby to oppose real diversity that always exceeds any universal representation. Felski’s point holds water to an extent, but she is still perpetuating the dualistic thinking against which Deleuze and Braidotti, among others, are working. However, this same criticism has been made of Deleuze and feminist theorists. For some critics, such poststructuralists posit a pure difference or pure otherness that merely reverses the terms of the existing hierarchy, establishing

the previously oppressed or different as the new dominant order over which a new self-identity presides. The task of even beginning to understand what a non-dualistic practice of thought might be is an enormously difficult one, and this to me is the key point. I think Felski underestimates the necessity of Deleuze and Braidotti's shared project of both freeing our thinking of difference from its historic associations with inferiority, and effecting an incremental loosening of the dialectical hold over our capacity for thought. These politically committed philosophical writers do not claim to have completed their task, but position themselves as performing a necessary form of intellectual work. At its best, thinking difference in itself is a 'starting point' in a larger process of necessary rethinking. That is, the meaning of performative writing such as Braidotti's

does not function in terms of the author's 'intentions' and the reader's 'reception,' but rather in a much wider, more complex set of possible resonances and interconnections [...] As readers in an intensive mode, we are transformers of intellectual energy, processors of the 'insights' that we are exchanging, and cobuilders of possible inter-relations. (Braidotti 2011: 19)

A valid theorisation of difference, as Braidotti explains, will be processual rather than aiming to reveal a sanctified truth. Above all, it will involve trying to find new and more adequate ways of thinking through embodied and always-relational subjectivity. Importantly, here she stresses the need to appreciate that, as critics, theorists and readers more generally, we are at work together. In my opinion, the creative disobedience that Deleuze and Braidotti practise is instructive. We can engage with other thinkers in good faith, usefully attend to the principles that we share, and draw on what we find to be of value, without overlooking the limitations of their proposed method for improving the condition of things.

There are risks in any reading practice, and the aim of thinking through a literary text without the dominance of a clear framework of dialectical and empirically based argument might result in forms of 'over-reading'. The idea of difference in itself might offer itself too readily to redemptive readings with their own agendas, which stray too far from context. However, this need not be the case, and the attention to historical context in this thesis is, I hope, one way in which this risk is allayed here. If we can proceed in an awareness of our intellectual and political location and the risks of elision

and erasure, and if we can emphasise the discursive nature of the claims being made, then we might, I think, stumble onto useful ways of thinking affirmation, vulnerability and the unusual mind despite real differences and despite difficulty. There is also the possibility that we can theorise difference in Rhys's writing in a more innocent way than Felski and others might have us think. It is not that fiction before 1968 – the 'watershed' year for a certain type of post-Nietzschean poststructuralist theory – or before the feminist and postcolonial critiques of difference from the 1970s is immune from making 'politically questionable' use of a concept of privileged difference. Rather, it is useful to think in terms of genealogy, and before there were critiques of theorisations of difference, there was a celebration of difference for valid and urgent political reasons. Rhys's writing may not involve the same 'critique of the deep-seated conservatism of institutions' that preoccupied the thinkers of '68 (Braidotti 2011: 76), but I think there is an important affinity between Deleuze and Guattari's work and Rhys's outsider protagonists who rage in unusual fashion against the machine. There is, I contend, room to argue that before we satisfy what might well be a legitimate demand to critique Rhys's orientation towards any sort of difference in itself, we need to establish that her work demonstrates such an orientation in the first place. This is one aim of this thesis.

The problems of conducting a Deleuzian reading of Rhys outlined in this section are returned to intermittently in this thesis, and no definitive solutions are offered. As I have mentioned, it is useful to bear in mind the fact that Deleuze's Spinozist ethics and his aesthetic philosophy are not one and the same, and so perhaps we need not worry too much if the former does not work as a framework for reading the behaviour of Rhys's fiction. Heeding Deleuze's nomadic method, this study also puts to use a non-Spinozist model of affect, and argues that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of literature's production of 'pure' affect is compatible with the argument (developed in my second chapter) that negative affect is political and powerfully disruptive. Furthermore, although Deleuze's ethics does not seem to allow for weakness, this may well be a weakness in his system of thought. It is quite possible, I think, to read the lack of joyful action in Rhys's novels as having political value, and to identify joyful action as that towards which the texts move. Finally, I propose that there are sufficient reasons for setting Deleuze's thought into dialogue with Rhys's writing despite these problems – reasons which recast the problems as things to be thought about in all their difficulty rather than 'solved'. Indeed, the difficulty of using

Deleuze in a reading of Rhysian passivity might be surprisingly apt given that her fiction concerns the difficult absence of the conditions of good connection.

This introduction has outlined the key terms of both this thesis and its use of Deleuze, and what I understand to be some of the key issues in the readings I develop. There are some more general problems with using Deleuze's philosophy in this study which is invested in reading against the dominant order. The emphasis in Deleuze's aesthetics on 'superior' white male writers, Deleuze and Guattari's claim that women are not *the* oppressed sex but only one among many, their criticism of democracy in the 1991 work *What is Philosophy?* (*[Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?]* 1994: 107-08), their problematic use of the terms 'tribe' and 'nomad' and their general elision of the difference between forms of labour exploitation in the West and elsewhere are problems which deserve to be acknowledged in political applications of their work.<sup>20</sup> It is, however, legitimate to take a generous approach and to use this philosophy anyway, in ways which might, possibly, help us to repair of some of the divisions which it leaves untouched.

In a collection of essays on the legacy of Edward Said, deCaires Narain argues that Said's failure to account sufficiently for gender and his positionality need not mean his work is of limited value for postcolonial feminists. Rather, certain central concepts and propositions in his work can be well 'deployed in a reading of contemporary postcolonial women's texts in ways that both invigorate feminist inquiry *and* help align Said's work more closely with women's writing than is usually the case' (deCaires Narain 2010: 122). DeCaires Narain's analysis 'explore[s] the relevance' of these key theoretical terms for postcolonial women's fiction and 'suggest[s] trajectories for extending the application of his insights' (2010: 123). My study aims to follow a comparable approach in using Deleuze's philosophy to read Rhys's fiction. Among the most important of the thematic links between Rhys and Deleuze is their shared commitment to the value of risk. I take this to be an ontological, epistemological and aesthetic principle thematised in Rhys's fiction. She formulated it in an unpublished manuscript fragment in a fashion which is strikingly consonant with Deleuze's work: 'It was a long time before I learnt that when you are safe you are very rarely free. That

<sup>20</sup> An example of an important formulation of Deleuze's aesthetics which is nevertheless troubling for its political myopia is his 1977 essay 'On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature' which was co-written with Claire Parnet for *Dialogues*, their book of the same year (*[Dialogues avec Claire Parnet]* Deleuze and Parnet 2006: 36-51).



when you are free you are very rarely safe' (UTC, 1976.011.1).<sup>21</sup> Deleuze's philosophy is today recognised for the great potential it has for thinking through relationality, embodiment and our existence in capitalism, and the aim in this thesis is to engage with these ideas and others in order to open up productive lines of thinking about risky forms of self-making in Rhys's writing. In so doing, this study will, I hope, also contribute to the body of work which demonstrates the value of Deleuzian thought for politically engaged literary analysis despite and even because of the imperfections, biases, and risky manoeuvres characteristic of schizoanalysis.

#### **IV. Chapter summary**

The first chapter maps connections between the history of Rhys scholarship, the arguments in this thesis, and what I understand to be the key aspects of Rhys's artistic vision: her radical critique of the logics of intolerance, the centrality of difficulty in her aesthetic, the absence of the conditions of communality and her complex intellectual engagement with negative affect. The focus is on the problems in her fiction which, since the 1920s, have moved Rhys's critics to voice discomfort and, not infrequently, disapproval concerning the politics of these texts. I outline the main directions and debates that the criticism on Rhys has taken, and pay particular attention to the range of answers that critics have given to Helen Carr's question on behalf of Rhys's bemused readers: 'why don't [her protagonists] *do* something?' (2012: 14). The chapter considers the affective force of Rhys's fiction, and the problem of placing her work within categories – such as modernist or postcolonial literature – in the academic tradition.

The second chapter charts multiple connections between passivity and affect in Rhys's novels by staging encounters between the novels, Rhys criticism, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy and recent work on disruptive affect by Ahmed (2010) and Ngai (2005). The key problematic which emerges, and which the rest of the thesis continues to explore, is how a literature of the passive subject works as an act of resistance. Continuities are established between two crucial terms in Rhys's poetics: her critique of the politics driving the production and circulation of negative affect, and a narrative economy which insists on the constant variation of her protagonists' proximity to joyful action. Focusing on scenes involving disgust, contempt, shame and other

<sup>21</sup> Fragment titled 'I think I fell in love with words', cited in Savory 1998: 25.

uncomfortable feelings, the chapter maps the ways in which negative affect makes visible, disrupts and disobeys the diktats of imperialist, patriarchal capitalism and what Ahmed describes as the heteronormative ‘promise of happiness’ (2010). It is argued that Rhys positions unhappiness, vulnerability and even difficulty in opposition to the common sense idea that the quests for social success, for happiness and autonomy are innate and unquestionable aspects of human behaviour that are prior to ideology. This is read as a major narrative strategy which has significant implications for reader response. The final section conducts a Spinozist reading of joyful and sad passions in order to further draw out the nuances in Rhys’s writing of unhappy embodiment.

Chapter three concentrates on the political context and the political meaning of Sasha’s inactivity in *Good Morning, Midnight* and examines her ethical failure. Foregrounding the historical rise of fascism and the violence of other oppressive political regimes against which the narrative plays out, the chapter focuses on Sasha’s vacillation throughout the novel, and on questions concerning the demand for conformity, the centrality of the Serge plot and the impossibility of communality for Sasha. The latter half of the chapter analyses the crucial scene at the end of Part Two in which Sasha claims inaction as a valid social position. Crucially, I argue that in this novel Rhys develops a style of failure. Connections are drawn between, on the one hand, Sasha’s failure to think and act and, on the other a failure of language which can be understood as a modernist predicament. Using Deleuze’s understanding of literary style as the ways in which writers push language to its limit, and the important final chapter on art in *What is Philosophy?*, the chapter proposes that constant variation is a key stylistic device in Rhys’s attempt to deterritorialise language.

Chapter Four draws on arguments in Deleuze’s important work *Difference and Repetition* to read Sasha’s passivity in *Good Morning, Midnight* as a form of death drive which works towards thinking beyond the given. The chapter probes Rhys’s critique of common sense and, focusing on scenes concerning visuality, close readings of Deleuze’s theoretical idea of a death drive and his chapter on the ‘Image of thought’ (both in *Difference and Repetition*) are related to Sasha’s inability to recognise violent sights. This inability is modelled as the text’s drive to think the unthinkable. The conclusion establishes connections between intertextuality, Deleuze’s logic of the outside – according to which the greatest exercise of any faculty involves the striving for the limit of that faculty – and his aesthetic concept of affect, biographical statements and historical context in a counterintuitive reading of the novel’s violent conclusion.

Ultimately, the chapter argues that in this novel Rhys confronts the possibility that the literary text and art more generally is passive and cannot effect meaningful change in a world that repeatedly tends towards violence.

Chapters Five and Six turn the focus to *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in an examination of Rhys's inscription of problematic maternal relationships and her rejection of female linearity. Reading these novels against Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, both of these chapters identify the difficult maternal relationship as the prototype for subsequent scenes of desire. Chapter Five begins by outlining the key ideas in the schizoanalytic concept of minor literature. It then turns to Rhys's troubling of the concept of female transmission, which is read as a liberating movement away from tradition. However, in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* this break is not wholly realised. The central story arc – Julia's return to the maternal home – is unravelled in terms of a more potent return to the childlike, a fantasy realm of isolation and freedom. The chapter posits Julia's anger towards society as the impetus for her problematic becoming-child, which is a refusal to grow up and, crucially, a refusal to address in any direct sense her own oppressive desire and her complicity in her suffering and the suffering of others.

This refusal is contrasted to Anna's movement towards unwanted pregnancy or what I term her becoming-unmother in *Voyage in the Dark*, which is the focus for Chapter Six. It is argued that in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys conducts a libidinal mapping, as she develops a strategy for engaging with the central importance of difficult desire in her writing. This third novel is read alongside the final one to show that in place of the female line (the transmission across generations), there are numerous thematic, symbolic and formal connections that resonate between dangerously different, politically potent scenes of desire across temporally divergent series. These connections are read in terms of the proliferation of the two contrary states of desire posited by Deleuze and Guattari in their book on Kafka: fascistic desire and schizoid desire. The absent maternal inheritance is, it is argued, the key to actualising the resonance between these divergent series and thereby making visible the radical political aspect of Rhys's nuanced inscription of desire. The deterritorialisation of the maternal line, figured so dramatically by Anna's sad fate in *Voyage in the Dark*, is positioned in this chapter as the liberating, dangerous and necessary line of flight that enables the most productive form of self-making open to Rhys in her third novel.

Crucially, this process involves a virtual communality that finally comes into sight at the end of the novel.

The Coda turns to *Wide Sargasso Sea* to continue to trace this becoming-visible. Drawing together the various discussions through the thesis it proposes that anxiety is the dominant affect in Rhys's novels. Grounding the discussion in Rhys's descriptions of her feelings about authorship and incorporating a recent study of modernist anxiety by Anthony Cuda (2010), it is argued that the passivity of Rhys's protagonists can be read as a figuration of an authorial anxiety surrounding the moment of succumbing to the artistic passions in the act of literary creation. This anxiety is related to the search Rhys conducts across her writing for the possibility of communality. To conclude, ideas about the 'thought' of art in *What is Philosophy?* are used to read the power of sensation in Part Three of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and to detail the intricate emergence in the text of the possibility of reparative connection with others.

## **Chapter One**

### **Dancing through the minefield: tracing critical difficulties**

#### **I. 'Unpublishably sordid' and 'works of rare artistry': the early response**

To an unusual extent, the history of Rhys criticism reflects the main developments in twentieth-century literary studies. For Elaine Savory, whose 1998 monograph and 2009 *Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys* both include detailed accounts of Rhys studies, 'the narrative of Rhys criticism is the narrative of cultural and racial history' (1998: 198). As Savory observes of the early reviews in the 1920s and 30s, critics characteristically attended to form at the expense of politics and voiced praise for Rhys's style but disapproval of content (1998: 198). From her first known attempt at fiction, in versions of what would become *Voyage in the Dark*, Rhys's subject matter was challenging, with many readers finding her unabashed depiction of emotional devastation unwarrantable. 'An unpublishably sordid novel of great sensitiveness and persuasiveness' was the verdict of Stella Bowen, Ford Madox Ford's common-law wife, on a manuscript version of this earliest story (Bowen 1941: 166) – a perhaps

exaggerated but nonetheless typical response.<sup>22</sup> A representative review of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* concludes that Rhys's 'preference for gloom is not artistic so much as personal', a comment that suggests the unexamined sexism which dominated the early reception and has left its mark in the fact that despite the similarities Rhys's work bears to literature by male writers of the unhappy human condition such as Albert Camus, Knut Hamsun and Samuel Beckett, her fiction, unlike theirs, has not generally been explored for its philosophical significance, and her brand of alienation has too often been pigeonholed as a mark of her gender, and read as the mark of either a limitation or pathology.<sup>23</sup> The question considered in the pre-war reception remains a matter of debate today: whether Rhys's fiction is too personal, too 'utterly, intensely individual' to allow it to function as a 'social document'.<sup>24</sup> This articulation was offered by Florence Haxton Britten in a 1935 review of *Voyage in the Dark*. Although Britten concludes that the personal nature of Rhys's writing is indeed such a limitation, her piece is generally positive, arguing that Rhys's novel shows a 'fresh, sensitive vision', and is a work of 'rare artistry' in which the author 'put into words the thing itself. Just that. No metaphors'. Unusually for the inter-war criticism, Britten's analysis suggests both Imagism and Ford's Impressionism as influences. Of Rhys's four earlier novels, *Voyage in the Dark* received the most praise at the time of initial publication although the praise was, of course, mitigated by those who condemned the moral degeneracy of the passive, promiscuous Anna.

It is possible that changes in the political climate of Britain in 1935 allowed for a brief tolerance or even appreciation of Rhys's subject matter. Either way, four years later Rhys was far less fortunate. The timing of the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight* in April 1939 was disastrous. With the imminent outbreak of war with Germany, critics were less tolerant of the apathy and fecklessness of her protagonist, and no longer welcoming of the challenging moral ambivalence of Rhys's world.

<sup>22</sup> Bowen is commenting on the 1920s typed draft of what would become *Voyage in the Dark*. The manuscript was given to Ford with Rhys's chosen title, 'Suzie Tells', and he suggested the alternative 'Triple Sec' (Angier 1990: 131). This was Rhys's first attempt at writing a novel, and a section from it entitled 'Vienne' was her first published work, appearing in Ford's *transatlantic review* in 1924. The extant manuscript of 'Triple Sec' is held in UTC, 1976.011.1.5.11-12.

<sup>23</sup> 'The Pursuit of Misery in some of the new novels', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 January 1931. See the discussion on page 57. References in this paragraph to the early (pre-1968) criticism, except where otherwise stated, are taken from the book review press cuttings held in UTC, 1976.011.1. As much information as possible is given in the following, and I have made every effort at accuracy.

<sup>24</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, 17 March 1935.

‘Terrible’, ‘oddly impressive’, and ‘irritating’ were terms applied by Ralph Straus who, nonetheless, conceded that the book had a ‘considerable effect’.<sup>25</sup> On republication in the 1960s, Bertrand Russell and Eva Figes viewed the novel with more circumspection, calling it ‘a damned romantic novel of a romantically damned love: mature and disturbingly original’.<sup>26</sup> Yet there were (and still are) critics for whom Sasha is simply intolerable, as demonstrated in a *Sunday Times* piece from 1967 which is worth quoting at length for its passionate disapproval of Rhys’s ‘passionate one-sidedness’. ‘Sasha is the sort of woman one avoids with some reason’, writes Mary Conroy,

and one feels Miss Rhys might have recognised the fact instead of letting Sasha poeticise herself silly: ‘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...’

It has been suggested that Miss Rhys’s work is ‘peculiarly modern.’ While an increasing standard of literacy may enable those who enjoy sentimentality to enjoy it with Miss Rhys, the passionate one-sidedness of her sympathy, and the double plea for admiration and condolence are far from modern. In her insistence that women live by one thread alone, that sin is glamorous and sadness rather fine, Miss Rhys is no more modern than Françoise Sagan and a good deal less so than Jane Austen and the Beatles.<sup>27</sup>

Today Conroy’s complaint looks peculiarly unmodern. Her charge of self-indulgence presupposes that a ‘modern’ writer should demonstrate an appropriate restraint, and thus fails to comprehend the value of – and humour in – Rhys’s challenge to the established order. Conroy’s analysis entirely overlooks the formal techniques that Rhys skilfully deploys in her innovative depiction of modern consciousness, such as the fragmentation of a pared down prose and the interplay of contrasting linguistic registers. Conroy’s suggestion that *Good Morning, Midnight* lacks a certain, desirable singularity evidences a critical deafness to Rhys’s savage irony and polyvocality. The canon of the modern propounded by Conroy, every element of which agrees on fixed principles, and which proceeds smoothly in the tradition established within English borders is the very canon against which Rhys writes in her refusal of homogeny, the

<sup>25</sup> *The Sunday Times*, 11 June 1939.

<sup>26</sup> *Guardian*, 15 December 1967.

<sup>27</sup> ‘A certain sentimentality’, *The Sunday Times*, 9 July 1967.

singular and the complete, and her passionate denunciation of English respectability. Conroy's review is defiantly dogmatic, providing an excellent template of how not to read Rhys. Her language recalls Bowen's response and the attitude of Lois Heidler, Rhys's fictional cipher for Bowen in *Quartet*, who dismisses the 'simple', 'sweet' songs of a Spanish entertainer on the grounds of inauthenticity: 'She tries to get an atmosphere of fate and terror. The weak creature doomed and all that – such nonsense' (*Q*, 68-69). Self-pity, a refusal to take responsibility, lack of will power and a childlike posturing are accusations frequently levelled at Rhys's protagonists, and occasionally at Rhys herself. Cumulatively, they suggest that the central problem in her fiction is that the protagonists are Rhys's mouthpiece for a Nietzschean *ressentiment*. However, the critique in Rhys's writing of the judgement of supposed weakness and inferiority involves the reader's positionality in such a way that the levelling of this charge is troubling. To judge weakness as self-indulgence or defect is, often, to speak from a place of relative security, to obscure the mechanisms of oppression and to perpetuate the association of all that is less 'successful' with immorality and inferiority. The good Lois opines that weakness is 'a damn convenient excuse sometimes' (*Q*, 69), thereby revealing her privilege and her fear of being contaminated by Marya's defective moral code, but also problematising the same judgement from readers. The climate of literary studies today is less concerned with moral judgements than in the interwar years. Politically sensitive readings emerged with postcolonial theory, second and third wave feminism and poststructuralism in the 1970s and '80s and these developments, along with the general renewal of interest in Rhys following the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, laid the intellectual foundations for the highly nuanced readings that, increasingly since the 1990s, interrogate the coincidence in her fiction of distinct political problems and Rhys's form of writing back.

In the more recent studies, after Look Lai's seminal 1968 essay which was the first to position Rhys as a West Indian writer, we can discern several critical divisions with readings often focusing on either the issue of Rhys's racial politics or the issue of female complicity and the centrality of violence in this fiction. In outlining these responses, I first concentrate on problems of placing Rhys, and in the latter section of the chapter I explore feminist concerns and readings which attend to difficulty, affect and subjectivity. There is also a division between the critical camp which tends to read the protagonists' problematic behaviour as the result of a personal defect or an inhibition of will, and the other that focuses on the protagonists' behaviour as a

symptom signifying an external lack (social injustice or the absent mother, for example) which has resulted in a depletion of their agency. Both of these approaches, to varying degrees, create problems for our appreciation of the radical political force of Rhys's fiction, and I propose that we need to rethink the passivity of Rhys's protagonists as a productive textual strategy. The disapproval voiced in the last fifty years has tended to aim its opprobrium not so much at the protagonists' moral degeneracy as at the ambiguity of Rhys's representation of violence and the attendant fact that she does not write *in the right way* against the oppression she depicts. Coral Ann Howells's study, for example, which focuses largely on Rhys's gender politics and idiosyncratic modernism, describes Rhys's fiction as 'fairly insidious': insofar, writes Howells, as Rhys's 'female victim complex' is presented in her writing as a 'distinctive construct of the feminine, it speaks to women's deepest insecurities' and confirms their 'deepest fears' (1991: 19-20). This thesis argues that Rhys's fiction is dangerous, but not because it is insidious in how it speaks to women's greatest fears. Rather, its 'danger' lies in the challenges it poses to its readers: that we think differently, that we question the ideal that says there is a 'right way' to write about the difficult life, and that we consider that the condition of safety itself may be a problematic notion that comes charged with bourgeois conventions and heteronormative assumptions about how to live and think. Rhys is a challenger of values. As such, her critical reception is fraught with disapproval and suspicion.

## **II. Problems of place**

### **From Paris to plantation: how to read Rhys?**

Andrew Thacker's work on the intensely complicated textual histories of Rhys's work and the centrality in it of vast spaces, border crossings and other sorts of journeys explicates her politics of space and flags up the difficulty of establishing unity in any critical inquiry into Rhys (2003, 2012). Her published work defies easy generalisations concerning literary movements to which it might 'belong' and specific political agendas to which it might adhere. Rhys's writing spans the era of 'high modernism' in the 1920s to the so-called postmodern decades of the 60s and 70s, and the texts have different concerns according to where they are set as the stories roam from the cities of Vienna, Paris and London to the estates and reserves of the West Indies. My reading of Rhys as a modernist follows critics such as Mary Lou Emery (1990) and Christopher



GoGwilt (2011) who have argued that Rhys ought to be read through a pluralised concept of modernisms.

Two years after the publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Rhys had her first story, 'Vienne', published in Paris which, in 1924, was a centre of the international avant-garde. Consistent with the modernism associated with writers such as Eliot, Joyce and Ezra Pound, for the early part of her writing career Rhys, too, was 'pan-European and cosmopolitan' (Rainey 2005: xxii). Rhys's unique depiction of a particular type of consciousness is, of course, a formal achievement as well as a thematic one. Characterising the well-known writers in *Modernism: An Anthology* (2005), which includes six of Rhys's short stories, Lawrence Rainey describes the modernist use of 'rigorous, difficult, yet coherent forms' in order to provide distance from and control over the 'contingencies of time and place' (2005: xxii). Rhys's fiction is not, in general, formally difficult but her intuitive, affective prose is ordered by what Emery describes as a 'poetic logic' (1990: 164), which depends on dramatic fragmentation and a series of symbolic structures and complex allusions – most often to popular culture and modern literature.

Writing of *Ulysses* in 1923 in response to negative criticism the book had received, Eliot states that Joyce's use of Homeric myth 'provided a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' (2005: 167). There is futility in Rhys's novels, and occasionally (as in the last half of *Voyage in the Dark*) a sense of encroaching anarchy, but rather than myth, it is the protagonist's fraught consciousness which acts as the 'register' of the external tumult and 'their fraught position in the world' (Carr 2012: 114). There are correlations between Eliot's claims for Joycean form and Rhys's writing of subjectivity which, in its permutations and deformations, gives poetic expression, and thereby 'shape and a significance', to the fact that the chaos without, even on the scale of the world historical, truly permeates the inner life. Rhys does not address history with the universal inflection found in Eliot's meditations on time, but history is a burden and threat in her novels from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* onwards. Her fragmented prose, the protagonists' awareness of the mutability of language, their alienation and ironic detachment, their metropolitan meanderings which are akin to and yet so distinct from that of the *flâneur* and the many allusions in the fiction to other art works and artists all locate Rhys as a writer deserving of her place among Rainey's

modernists.<sup>28</sup> The recurrence of certain tropes and themes does likewise: homelessness, fleeting café conversation, popular songs and the language of advertising, casual sexual encounters in liminal city spaces, anxiety about make-up and the threat posed to the individual by that which is life-like but inanimate (such as mannequins) in her work all designate a particular modernist sensibility associated with London and Paris in the interwar years.

Reading Rhys as a modernist writer is complicated by a certain postmodernist inflection in her prose. Language is not just unstable for Rhys. It is the object of a distrust which is accompanied by a Nietzschean, self-conscious refusal of rationalist presuppositions concerning ‘truth’, ‘good’, and the sovereign subject of universal reason. Still other preoccupations which are often understood as defining terms in the widely contested terminologies of postmodernism seem dominant in Rhys’s oeuvre – foremost among which are a sense of the loss of faith in progressivist discourses of modernity, and the collapse of distinction between spheres of experience which is at least partly the result of the fact that capitalism, in Rhys’s world, invades everything. Power in Rhys’s fiction is, as Carr observes, more Foucauldian than Marxist, determining as it does the inner life (thoughts, knowledge, desire, imagination) and bodily capacity of the characters as well as their material and social existence (2012: 54, 108). In these ways and in others, Rhys’s writing resonates powerfully with certain strands of the theory and philosophy that have come to dominate Western social, cultural and literary studies since the 1960s.

More importantly, a focus on Rhys’s modernism or any universal theory in relation to her fiction risks obscuring the centrality of her politics of place and identity. As discussed, managing this problem is a major task in my reading of Rhys through Deleuze, who has been accused – famously by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak – of ‘ignor[ing] the question of ideology’ and his ‘own implication in intellectual and economic history’ (1988: 272). Proceeding in awareness of this difficulty, this thesis argues that Rhys’s investment in difference is not neutral but passionate: it is born from her acute social perception which is inseparable from her colonial heritage and her identity as a white West Indian Creole. This study concurs with those critics – the earliest among them being Look Lai (1968), Kenneth Ramchand (1970, 1976) and

<sup>28</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner’s 1982 essay details Rhys’s intricate intertextuality in *Good Morning, Midnight*. See page 58.

Wilson Harris (1980, 1983) – who have argued that Rhys must be read as a West Indian writer.

Rhys's inscription in *Wide Sargasso Sea* of the power struggles converging on a white Creole woman in post-Emancipation West Indian society involves class, race, nationality, gender and sexuality and takes as its backdrop Emancipation – a pivotal moment in the history of empire. Yet the questions, ideas, problems and possibilities inherent in Rhys's writing of race and empire are central to the value of her work as a whole. Criticism since the 1990s has shown that while we might still regard *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Rhys's two 'West Indian novels' – as Teresa O'Connor's described them in her influential 1986 study – the region and its history also constitute what Savory terms a 'submerged text' in the other three novels (Savory 1998: 117).<sup>29</sup> Importantly, in analysing *Voyage in the Dark*, the novel which evolved from Rhys's first serious attempt at writing, many of these studies have demonstrated that it does not make sense to confine the Caribbean of Anna's memory to family background, history or one aspect of her identity. There is a general Spivakian recognition that this 1934 work, which contains within it the first traces of Rhys's authorship, shares with her final novel a concern with that most curious of socio-historical facts whereby as impersonal a thing as imperialism determines the most personal of things – identity itself.

In a 2010 essay which applies Deleuze's model of the three syntheses of time from *Difference and Repetition* in a reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Lorna Burns analyses the conceptual terrain occupied by both Deleuze and those theorising the postcolonial dilemma of how to allow for newness without repudiating the past. Burns's essay is a noteworthy turning point in Rhys studies. Carol Dell'Amico was the first critic to draw detailed connections between Rhys and Deleuze, with her 2005 book *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*, but her argument still centres on a psychoanalytic reading of behaviour.<sup>30</sup> Burns was the first to conduct a detailed examination of the complex connections between Rhys's

<sup>29</sup> For example, Savory points out that in *Good Morning, Midnight* the Caribbean is momentarily made present in the Paris-set narrative, but in a relatively oblique sense. In Part Two as Sasha drifts off into a dreamlike fantasy in Serge's studio, the geographical description and characteristic, affective imagery, serves, for readers 'familiar with Rhys texts', as 'a sure code of the coastline of Dominica and Sasha's inheritance of memory of the island' (Savory 1998: 117).

<sup>30</sup> See the discussion on page 164.

treatment of temporality and Deleuze's philosophy.<sup>31</sup> The essay argues that Rhys's final novel explores and attempts re-creation in a dramatic and peculiarly affective manner. As Burns suggests, Harris's early, subtle reading of the Arawak-Carib myth of re-birth in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a persuasive approach to this elusive textual preoccupation. In 'Carnival of psyche: Jean Rhys's wide sargasso sea', Harris argues that Rhys makes intuitive and perhaps 'unconscious' use of certain myths originating in the Caribbean and South America (1980). In characteristically idiosyncratic style, Harris proposes that Rhys's novel allows successive generations of new readers to access new meaning hidden in old myths, as meaning emerges in dialogue with change over time. This is, I think, a particularly rich approach to reading Rhys. Harris highlights the importance of intuition in both Rhys's writing and the process of reading her – a critical point which is central to this thesis and its attention to those moments in Rhys's fiction which seem to exceed rational explanation. Harris's unusual focus on Rhys's re-creation and its significance for reading practices generally moves from the political into the abstract, but in so doing his arguments do not relinquish their political force but, rather, perform his contention that there are alternatives to the dominant forms of knowledge and thought in the Western tradition. Burns's and Harris's studies offer useful caution against underestimating the significance of what we might term the place of time in Rhys's fiction – a literary production described by GoGwilt as being 'shaped by [Rhys's] career-long investment in memories of the Caribbean environment of her childhood' (2011: 63). Importantly, both critics demonstrate, in very different ways, how Rhys's engagement with West Indian and Caribbean history coincides with her exploration of the idea of thinking anew.

### **The collapse of distinction**

This study follows the work of Emery, Carr and Savory who have argued that the collapse of distinction is a fundamental characteristic of Rhys's writing. In this fiction the distinction between the postcolonial and the modernist is not secure, and the political and aesthetic are often inseparable. To take an obvious example, it is

<sup>31</sup> In her 2002 book on Deleuze, Claire Colebrook refers briefly to *Wide Sargasso Sea* in her explication of Deleuze's transcendental repetition from which newness emerges – a repetition which is of particular significance in postcolonial literature and other forms of 'minor literature'. Such literature 'repeats the past and present in order to create a future', and the 'hidden forces of difference [...] produce texts, rather than repeating the known texts themselves' (Colebrook 2002: 120). There is more work to be done on Rhys's postcolonial minor literature.

problematic to understand the fragmentation of Rhys's prose simply in terms of modernist experimentation with form, without also considering the author's West Indian origins. Fragmentation is also a significant feature both of Rhys's non-fiction prose (the Exercise Books, *Letters* and autobiography) and her poetry, thus suggesting, I believe, that this was an instinctive feature of her writing as much as a finely honed and self-conscious artistic mode.

GoGwilt argues that we ought to be alert to the possible relation of this fragmentation to the heteroglossial world of Rhys's childhood in Dominica (2011). As he describes, this was a divided and divisive linguistic world of West Indian Creole English, standard English, French and French patois which Rhys rendered into a self-interrogating and specifically Creole form of modernism which was problematically determined by the facts of decolonisation and which works to disrupt assumptions about the English language and the author's literary tradition (GoGwilt 2011). GoGwilt's intricate comparative study is concerned with showing the ways in which the postcolonial and modernist aspects of Rhys's writing are inseparable, thereby locating itself in the re-evaluative field of the new modernist studies that argues for a pluralised, differential understanding of geographically and temporally expansive modernisms. He explores the difficult relationships and tentative 'affiliations' between Rhys's writing and the politically effective 'Creole modernism' that established itself in the decades between the 1950s and 1980s in the writings of Caribbean figures such as Harris, Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite and Édouard Glissant, writing which 'has enacted a decisive displacement of literary traditions and the relation between different traditions' (GoGwilt 2011: 148).

On the question of political allegiance, GoGwilt concludes that while affiliation might be possible between Rhys and other writing produced from an '*outside perspective*', that is, in consciousness of the discontinuity between it and other literary traditions,

to the extent that *Wide Sargasso Sea* also attempts to grasp the *inside perspective* of a particular Creole – the madwoman in the attic of *Jane Eyre* (1847) – the problem of identity, literary and racial identity, remains unsolved. Above all, it remains a problem for reading. (GoGwilt 2011: 148)

GoGwilt places great importance on Rhys's refusal of interpretative certainty, positioning this at the heart of the meaning-making processes in which, on his reading, her fiction is involved. However, as we see in the quotation above, his study also foregrounds the enormous complexity of Rhys's writing. These two aspects of her work are inseparable. On the one hand, Rhys mines ambivalence and resists categorisation and dualistic thought. On the other, she delves into the murkiest issues of identity and the most complicated matters of political, social, sexual and literary life. Rhys does the latter in *Quartet*, in her exposé of the hypocrisies and the routine exploitations that enabled bohemian, Anglophone, Left Bank cultural life to work for those already safely cosseted by relative privilege in a ruthless system of burgeoning patriarchal capitalism. Yet the acme of Rhysian complexity is reached in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as our author finds a form that allows her not just to explore how any one instantiation of a problem both reveals and conceals others, but also to take distinct approaches to a problem simultaneously. In this sense, then, it is not so much a question of whether Rhys invests more in the inside or the outside perspective, in GoGwilt's example above; rather, the significance is that she manages to do both in one text. In a related point, considering the diverse usage of the term 'Creole', GoGwilt argues that this word had a crucially pluralised set of meanings for Rhys which she set to play in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to signify *both* 'a particular kind of figure', including white, black and mixed-race people born in the West Indies, *and* 'something different, something more akin to the emerging theories of "creolisation" that shape the linguistic-literary formation of Creole modernism' (GoGwilt 2011: 148-49). While this thesis does not explore ideas about creolisation, some of the main arguments are comparable to GoGwilt's. I am proposing that two simultaneous operations concerning bad feeling are at play in the oeuvre as whole – one which has a resistant negative force, and the other which leads to an overcoming of negativity. Similarly, my final two chapters focus on Rhys's inscription of multiple modes of desire in her second and third novels. Further work could be done on how Rhys's style of approaching a problem in multiple ways enables us to untangle the relationship between her Creole modernism and what I am proposing is her minor literature. For now, though, it is worth noting that the fragmentation of her prose, with which this discussion opened, can be understood as a manifestation of the commitment to the multiple as opposed to the singular and linear.

In arguing for a passivity which has a positive role in the politics and ethics as well as the stylistics of Rhys's aesthetic vision, I am particularly interested in the

ambivalence and irresolvable contradictions involved in Rhys's inscription of politically and socially contentious scenes, figures and concepts – such as the much-contested term 'Creole'. Carr states that the nineteenth-century imperialist imaginary fixed the attributes of indolence and moral lassitude to the figure of the white West Indian Creole, and that central to Rhys's work is her investment in 'writing back to [this] specific representation' (2003a: 39). This writing back exposes 'the authoritative language of power' and the 'injustices that keep [...] "things as they are"' (Carr 2003a: 44, 50); and it targets English respectability – that national self-image so integral to the production of the stereotype of white Creole degeneracy. Contending Veronica Gregg's assertion of Rhys's racism with a nuanced account of the conflicting statements concerning race that we find in both the fiction and non-fiction, Carr concludes that 'perhaps what it is important to note is how remarkably opposed to racism [Rhys] was for her day, and how far she resists or complicates the essentializing definitions that colonialism relied on' (2003a: 53). Following these arguments, I suggest that while Rhys exposes the oppressive mechanisms of the English class system and the suffering of those who exist in the interstices of its social categories, she is also mocking the hypocrisy of its rigid moral system and deconstructing its notion of 'good' behaviour. The passivity of her protagonists can, then, be understood as Rhys's refusal of the moral and social imperative to work which, when set in relation to the civilising mission of imperialism – the Europeans' 'first experiment in capitalism overseas' as George Lamming describes it – assumes a doubly subversive function, constituting a notably weak yet disruptive rebuttal of imperialist economic and moral logic (Lamming 1995: 23). Rhys's alternative logic is the intuitive, and it is presented in an accordingly oblique fashion. This does not detract from the possibility of reading in her fiction a powerful alternative to Western rationality and its will to knowledge, the West's imposition of a universal moral code and the capitalist rendering of life as a game of winners and losers.

Since her seminal 1990 study, Emery has been leading the line of inquiry into Rhys's expansive modernism, finding Rhys's oeuvre rich ground for exploring the dynamic relations among European, third world and female modernisms (1990) and, more recently, for charting the transatlantic and global modernisms so central to debates in new modernist studies (2009, 2012a and 2012b). In the 2012 *Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* which, significantly, includes three entries which consider Rhys at length, Emery draws on a number of postcolonial theories of spatiality

and modernity, including Glissant's work on relationality, and Homi Bhabha's concept of a contra-modernity that 'may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it' (Bhabha 1994: 6). Emery elaborates on their relevance for the recent expansion of the concept of modernism:

We can revise modernism as global by merely adding new and different modernities to a picture already drawn, or we can reimagine the larger picture by locating the constitutive alterity simultaneously within and outside of modernity, a project that recognises the previously unassimilated as necessarily so. (Emery 2012a: 49)

For Emery, Rhys's register of this 'constitutive alterity' works in conjunction with other writers from the Caribbean region to form a contramodernism which 'erupted in the contradictory encounter of global forces of modernity, those that made human beings into objects of property and those that promised emancipation' (2012a: 53). Rhys's prose rejects 'the rationalist logic of received histories', instead evoking 'a palimpsest of time and mutable spaces of land and sea, gesturing toward a larger vision of the planetary even as they portray the contradictory violence and creativity of global exchange' (Emery 2012a: 49, 59). Emery has developed a unique reading of Rhys's magic realism as an important intervention into the production of grand narratives, and this work has been important in releasing Rhys criticism from the confines of the European literary tradition. For my purposes, the most valuable contention in Emery's work on Rhys's contramodernism and the idea of the planetary is that of Rhys's refusal of a rationalist logic of time. Emery's work catalogues the alternatives that Rhys offers, several of which are close to my schizoanalytic reading: Rhys's non-western model of subjectivity; her refusal of dominant models of visuality; and her non-linear, non-teleological concept of time.

A related trend evidenced in the work of critics such as Dell'Amico and Christina Britzolakis (2007) focuses on Rhys's inscription of the intersection of various power structures such as imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy.<sup>32</sup> While immensely rich studies which locate political questions at the heart of ideas about modernist

<sup>32</sup> Although these critics locate their analysis in the European city, this intersection can also be situated in the West Indian plantation, as Emery has demonstrated (2012b).



literature, there is sometimes a tendency in these intersectional readings to overdetermine the protagonists as subjects with drastically limited agency. Intersectionality allows for a nuanced consideration of the difference of the experience of oppression, an awareness that different individuals – within larger demographic categories such as ‘women’ – contend with different forms of social difficulty, and that various forms of oppression are frequently bound to one another in ways which alter and intensify their effects. Clearly, this approach is well suited to this fiction which targets capitalist ruthlessness, racism, patriarchy, misogyny and, more generally, intolerance to difference. In this critical vein, the protagonists are often read as making manifest and, to that extent, disturbing hegemonic processes of objectification and exclusion. Yet, reading the fractured nature of their inner lives as primarily an effect of these combined and dominant forms of power – albeit an effect which has the power to disturb the status quo – forecloses on the potentialities which Rhys’s inscription of fraught subjectivity creates. It may be the case, as Sedgwick argues in her 1997 riposte to ‘paranoid’ readings (2003: 123-151), that analysing these texts in terms of the many different types of power which are operating negatively and simultaneously on these protagonists inevitably tends towards a picture in which their agency is overshadowed. In this way, all counterintuitive and obscure forms of being and resisting are categorised as aspects of hegemony – at best, mere reflections of exclusionary and negating practices, rather than as part of any positive aesthetic and ethical stance. Rhys’s fiction demands to be read with a sensitivity to the dynamic, multifarious manifestations and operations of power which constitute modern life. Such a reading can produce a very bleak picture. However, Rhys’s writing also makes other sorts of demands which create possibilities for meaning rather than exposing, or serving as platforms for, already-established meaning. These are demands which are implied – which the texts yield up rather than state – and which involve a sensitivity to Antoinette’s statement that ‘[t]here is always the other side, always’ (*WSS*, 106). Power never operates in just one direction in this fiction; the protagonist is never entirely without agency; it is up to the reader to interpret the ‘negative’ in these texts, and – a central claim of this study – Rhys’s fiction problematises negative judgement of the relatively powerless female other. Accordingly, this thesis pays close attention to the subversive potential of hard-to-discern and counterintuitive forms of resistance and the experientially negative in Rhys’s novels.

This self-conscious positivity is not simple. Nor is it to underplay the bad feeling in Rhys's writing and the existing criticism. Rather, I propose that bad feeling gives this writing great force. In Rhys's sympathetic re-writing of the history of the dispossessed white West Indian Creole, Rhys made herself part of what, in 1966, was urgent political discourse. Her last novel seems to lay claim to being heard in the debates of its historical moment concerning West Indian history, literature and identity. For some, Rhys's racial identity renders any such claim problematic at best and dishonest at worst. This was the issue debated by Brathwaite and Peter Hulme in the 1990s across a series of articles for the journal *Wasafiri*. In 1974 Brathwaite put forward the view that white Creoles could not be identified with the spirit of West Indian culture. Two decades later, Hulme took up this argument, making the case for a pedagogical approach to *Wide Sargasso Sea* which centres on a troubling of the categories being applied. He draws on Ramchand's 1976 claim that we can justify the teaching of this novel on a course on West Indian literature because the text makes us think: it poses challenges by making us analyse what it is that 'makes a West Indian novel? and what do we mean when we say that a writer is a West Indian writer' (Ramchand 1976: 93). For Hulme, the critical literature had by the mid-1990s established that the textual problem being grappled with by critics across diverse scholarly positions is not a matter of 'essential and exclusive qualities in the novel', but one which concerns 'the kinds of cases that can be made out for certain sorts of linkage' (1994a: 10). Importantly, Hulme highlights the fact that this novel reveals, above West Indian or Caribbean concerns, a set of 'specifically *Dominican* affiliations' (1994a: 8). In response, Brathwaite voices both impatience with what he sees as overly complacent relativism, and suspicion of critics' tendency to use a naïve and revisionist language of 'competition' in regards to Antoinette's positionality (comparing the suffering of the white Creole woman to that of black West Indians, for example). He argues that it is the duty of the critic to approach the problematic issue of the post/coloniality and West Indian credentials of *Wide Sargasso Sea* with the awareness that 'who you are inc yr ETHNICITY determines how you SEE Caribb (or any?) culture' (Brathwaite 1995: 70). For Brathwaite in 1995, the majority of the readings of the novel had not been duly attentive to the troubling aspects of Rhys's depiction of racial politics which, for him, is epitomised by Rhys's depiction of the historically impossible friendship between Antoinette and Tia. Rather than opening up the potential significations and linkages of the text, they have served primarily as a register of the critics' ideological stances,

agendas and, for many, a certain ‘element’ of white ‘guilt’ (Brathwaite 1995: 73). Further study is warranted on how the bad feeling which manifests in a certain form of highly charged, emotive language encountered relatively often in Rhys criticism speaks to Brathwaite’s charge. Hulme’s troubling of categories is a useful method for reading Rhys, and one which I follow here, and yet my study is equally in agreement with Brathwaite’s claims about the necessity of the reader’s awareness of her perspective.

One reason I have outlined the Brathwaite-Hulme debate is because their exchange illuminates the difficulty of engaging critically with Rhys’s work – collectively, their arguments forcefully demonstrate that no reading can be all things to all readers. The same can be said of all literature, but this is an unusually potent and necessarily political dimension of the act of thinking critically about Rhys’s last four novels in particular. The aim in the following chapters is to proceed in appreciation of the issue of perspectivism in Rhys’s writing and in awareness of the partiality of my reading, while offering interpretations focusing on what I contend is the political meaning of certain aspects of Rhys’s difficult narratives and attending to the political force of Rhys’s general stylistic tendency to destabilise, described well by Savory:

The Rhys woman is a subversive not just in intention and reaction to social conditions but in her very existence as a puzzling, riddling, self-questioning loose cannon who continually destabilises conventional values for women, sexuality and male behaviour towards women and all easy definitions of national, class and ethnic identity. Rhys’s collective portrait of women at different stages of life destabilises all easy definitions, racial, gender, class and national. (Savory 1998: 83)

### **Can Christophine be contained?**

How, then, can we square this reading of Rhys as a challenger of values with her own occasional lapse into what sometimes appears to be close to Orientalist revisionism and even an unthinking racism? In what is probably the most problematic and discussed example of what may be evidence of latent racist assumptions, Rhys writes in a letter of 1966 to her editor, Diana Athill, of whether she can justify how ‘articulate’ she made the black servant/nursemaid character of Christophine in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (*Letters*, 297). Critics such as Carolyn Vellenga Berman (2006) and Gregg (1995) have cited Rhys’s problematic phrasing as evidence in accusations of, respectively, racialising the

term 'Creole' which had originally served as a neutral term for a regional language, and as 'Othering' the black West Indian in her writing through an imagination with a 'profoundly racialised, even racist structure' (Gregg 1995: 37). Gregg's study, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole* is the most unequivocal investigation into Rhys's 'racist' credentials. In a central claim, comparable to one in Carr's 1996 book, Gregg argues that one of the most significant aspects of Rhys's work is her inscription of the 'historical and discursive processes through which the Creole subjectivity is construed' (1995: 24). The crucial difference between Carr's and Gregg's analyses is the latter's emphasis on the proximity of Rhys's writing to the discourses which have historically constituted Creole subjectivity. Whereas Carr emphasises the ambivalence and dynamism of Rhys's depiction of the processes by which a particular type of consciousness is 'formed and deformed' (2012: 51), Gregg focuses on how Rhys's writing 'participates in contending representations of the West Indies' (1995: 25) and concludes that, while Rhys writes in critical awareness of the problems of her white Creole perspective, 'exposing the fault line and fissures in the colonialist discourse it repeats', the texts nevertheless emerge from a 'perspective which articulates the political values and the emotional and psychological investments embodied in [...] colonialist discourse' (1995: 72, 37). From Gregg's stance, the mixed race and black characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are 'only props' that Rhys 'exploits', and this supports Gregg's claim that Rhys remains 'entrapped in the same assumptions she critiques' (1995: 37). I contest this point on the ground that in Rhys's novels *all* the secondary characters (white, black and mixed race) are precisely this – 'props'. At most they are endowed with a limited form of inner life onto which the reader is given a brief window of access. Mr Horsfield in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is allowed his own realistic cowardice, and in *Wide Sargasso Sea* a section of the novel is largely given over to the husband to voice his side of things. Yet Rhys's interest always centres on the experience of her protagonists alone. For her secondary characters she provides occasional details rather than portraits of their origins, kinship networks, pleasures, troubles and memories; and, though their destructive desires are delineated, positive motivation is largely omitted. This is as true for Laurie and Ethel in *Voyage in the Dark* as it is for Daniel and Tia in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

I also agree with Carr's compelling argument that what Gregg takes as Rhys remaining 'entrapped' in negative assumptions about non-white West Indians may

equally be read as Rhys's honest, if difficult, understanding of the racial politics she experienced in Dominica:

Rhys's characters can be situated within the archive of colonial stereotypes with which we are now so familiar, but they most often break out of them. Gregg appears to interpret her awareness that the whites are regarded with hostility or hatred by some of the black or coloured Dominicans as racist; it might be thought more, in the early twentieth century and possibly even more in 1936, when Rhys had her one return visit, a painfully honest realisation of the facts. (Carr 2003b: 106)

To write about racism is, of course, not necessarily to align oneself with the racist views one depicts. In the opening pages of the husband's narrative in Part Two of *Wide Sargasso Sea* the reader is forced suddenly out of Antoinette's consciousness, which is mired in profound ambivalence and painful awareness of violence, and into a vehemently racist mind-set. Rhys leaves us in no doubt of the husband's attitude to all that is different from him: Antoinette's homeland, its black and mixed-race inhabitants and their customs are 'debased', 'not civilised', 'savage' (*WSS*, 57, 61). When he overcomes his fear of Christophine sufficiently to voice his disapproval of this woman who is 'blacker than most' (61), he declares that her 'language is horrible', her manner of wearing celebratory dress is 'not a clean habit', and 'she looks so lazy. She dawdles about' (71-72). While Rhys gives the husband a voice through which his weakness and cruelty are explained and given nuance, and which thereby prevents him from being a two-dimensional villain, she also allows no room for doubt concerning his character. In this respect, at least, Rhys makes things clear: his is a reprehensibly racist view which utilises accusations and stereotypes that are engrained in the language of colonial relations. In my opinion, Rhys's narrative and characterisation express an authorial condemnation of racism.

Returning to the thornier issue of the hostility against the white Creole woman that we encounter in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and elsewhere in her writing, I read this, following Carr, as a truthful if difficult presentation of real conflict and racial tensions experienced by Rhys. It is worth noting that she depicts such hostility as working in several directions: white against black and black against white (although the category of Creole complicates this binary), and – though to a far less explicit extent – both

white and black against the Carib people. In my view, we should neither discard nor simply try to ‘solve’ the problematic of Rhys’s positionality when she writes on race. The problems may be read productively. The fact that violence in her novels is unavoidable is helpful in thinking about the political problems of her autobiographical statements on race: to some degree they may be Rhys’s refusal to let her youthful self ‘off the hook’, while also refusing to keep quiet about that which it is not easy to say.

The ideology of Rhys’s presentation of racial conflict remains a sticking point. Savory tackles this question in her 1998 study, deciding that Rhys was both ‘racist and anti-racist’(x). In response to the interpretation that Tia in *Wide Sargasso Sea* stands for Rhys’s ambivalent, idealised identification with black Dominicans, Savory writes,

Rhys certainly reflects the prejudices of her time, race and class, but she also marks a pathway for white writers, for whom too much liberal guilt and refusal to offend is as dangerous as racism itself. At least Rhys found an honesty which opens dialogue: she was in many ways ahead of her time in that willingness to deal with race. (Savory 1998: 135)

Despite the difference of their readings of Rhys’s racial politics, Carr and Savory agree that Rhys’s writing proceeds from a particularly difficult honesty – which could, perhaps, be rephrased as an honesty concerning difficulty. In an interesting testament to Rhys’s capacity for troubling readers, Savory’s opinion on this matter seems to shift considerably in subsequent studies, and by 2003 she no longer sees honesty in the final novel but precisely the opposite: Savory argues that the emotional immaturity and alcoholism which in the earlier novels were still allowed as deficiencies by Rhys are, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, positively romanticised. The Antoinette-Christophine relationship is rehearsed as a pernicious combination of inequality and wilful blindness, with the young woman using her black servant as a substitute mother while remaining securely mired in a childlike level of illusion and escapism. Rhys exoticises Obeah in a troublesome manner: its use as the ‘mainspring of the plot’ is ‘manipulative’ (Savory 2009: 88). Various romanticised aspects of the text constitute its nostalgic mode of longing for an Edenic Caribbean world, which cloaks real, personal and historical difficulties in a seemingly treasured aura of vanished, idyllic exoticism. This ‘gothic romance [is] entirely different in tone’ from the earlier novels (Savory 2009: 80); it demands ‘illusion’ (Savory 2003: 23).

Savory's argument that the novel's romantic mode gives rise to political problems that are avoided in the earlier, relatively realist novels is compelling, but I cannot wholly agree with her assessment of Antoinette as wilfully deluded. On my reading, Antoinette is not just mired in illusion but is a profoundly uncertain character who is acutely aware that 'there is always the other side'. Her state of being is dream-like and vague; she cannot or will not comprehend the history which divides her from Tia and is the ugly occasion of her relationship with Christophine. While in the context of the lush, decadent Caribbean landscape of the novel these attributes are highly problematic, it remains possible to read them as part of Rhys's counter to dogmatic rationalism (the husband's certainty) and the violence committed in the name of the will to knowledge. If she cannot 'know' history, it is perhaps because the history to which she has access is the history told by and for the colonisers. Antoinette's adequate knowledge of the history of white, black and Carib on the island is an impossibility, Rhys suggests. This is not wholly pessimistic but rather constitutes an insistence on the effort needed for authentic knowledge to be possible, and Antoinette's intuitive and mysterious concluding call to Tia affirms the function of feeling in this effort, as I argue in the Coda to this thesis. The romantic landscape of *Wide Sargasso Sea* may well be a problem for the reader, rather than for Antoinette – being that which may seduce us into associations which are maybe too easy (given what I am arguing is Rhys's commitment to difficulty): the romantic backdrop does not necessarily mean that Antoinette's vagueness is romantic or dishonest. Identification in Rhys's oeuvre is, I contend, never positive. I am thus cautious about equating the character of Antoinette with her island or with formal attributes of the text.

The most famous answer to whether Rhys's last novel is anti-racist and anti-imperialist is Spivak's 1985 essay, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism'. For Spivak the character of Christophine is the litmus test for Rhys's textual politics, and she asks whether Christophine can speak or is only a silenced other in the text, marking only its limits. Spivak concludes, famously, in the negative: Christophine is a silenced subaltern who cannot be 'contained' by a text which operates in the 'interest' of the oppressed white woman (1985: 253). Spivak's criticism concerns the claim made by Western critics of Christophine's effective resistance, as well as Rhys's somewhat too-easy alignment of Christophine's otherness with that of the white Creole Cosway-Mason women. For Spivak, the subaltern cannot be made to speak by the West. As Anne Maxwell elucidates: the post-colonial intellectual's 'attempt to

recover an autonomous form of subjectivity for the Others of Europe that will allow them to speak for themselves' is a fundamentally flawed exercise predicated on the need of 'First World intellectuals to know and thereby control the Other of the West' (1991: 81). In the conclusion to Maxwell's extensive account of the debate between Spivak and Benita Parry (Spivak's primary theoretical opponent in this matter), Maxwell concludes in favour of Spivak, defending her against Parry's charge of over-theorisation and arguing that

faced with this prospect of the inevitable, Hegelian subordination of the Other which attends the act of speaking for the Third-World subject, the most that post-colonial intellectuals can hope to do is to continue critiquing the subject of the West. This is Spivak's position. (Maxwell 1991: 81)

I propose that rather than focusing only on whether Christophine is imbued with sufficient agency and authenticity, we think through this problem as we also attend to the possibility that the problematic relationship between Antoinette and her nursemaid constitutes a productive textual difficulty involved in Rhys's project of unsettling *all* easy concepts and categories, including those of relationality and ideological affiliation. Though dramatically different in purpose, this position is not altogether dissimilar to Spivak's refusal of the binary logic structuring the First World intellectual's discourse of the Third World subject.

As the arguments outlined here demonstrate, the questions at stake in the Spivak-Parry and the Hulme-Brathwaite debates, which were part of the explosion of postcolonial theory in the late 1980s and '90s, are still contested today, though we might perhaps say that their urgency has abated as an appreciation of the challenges posed by Rhys's work to dialectical thinking has developed. To read her today as for or against decolonisation, for or against mainstream, collective forms of feminist or class resistance is, I suggest, of relatively limited value. Instead, following deCaires Narain, Carr and Emery, whose arguments are outlined at the end of this chapter, my analysis focuses on the potential in Rhys's exploration of difficult life.

Every affiliation in Rhys's texts is at once a disaffiliation; every gain is also a loss. The conflicts of race and racial identification are a crucial set of problems in her creative schema and not, I contend, something to be resolved or 'worked out'. They are valuable for the encounters to which they give rise. Rhys's writing prevents us from



settling too easily into established patterns of thought which are reinforced by the conventions of the bourgeois novel as well as by a binary logic in which exploration is confined by the parameters of well-worn stereotypes, grand narratives and rigid academic categories. In so doing, Rhys encourages us to follow creative and generous lines of flight in our reading and thinking.

### **III. Problems of life**

#### **The biographical ‘phallacy’**

I turn now to what might broadly be described as concerns with unhappiness, at the heart of which is the problem of language in Rhys’s writing. This problem is not confined to issues concerning the inadequacy of words but includes, of course, the inadequacy of people and the fact that in Rhys’s vision, language is frequently used as a ‘weapon’ (*GMM*, 44). Rhys’s fiction is replete with moments in which language is used cruelly and inflicts pain, but feminist critics in particular have focused on the mechanisms through which language inflicts violence over time as it performs the work of dominant regimes. Now recognised as a key principle of Rhys’s fiction, the linguistic problem has been subject to a vast range of interpretations, many of which anchor themselves to Rhys’s personal difficulties. Her biographer Carole Angier, for example, takes Rhys’s emphasis on violence – worldly and linguistic – as evidence of her penchant for self-pity and revenge fantasies, her distrust of people being alchemised into a mistrust of words (1990: 139, 405). Many psychoanalytical readings have retained a biographical focus, often taking as their cue Rhys’s unpublished account in her *Black Exercise Book* of the sexual abuse she suffered as a young teenager (at somewhere between the ages of twelve and fourteen (Angier 1990: 27)), perpetrated by a much older family acquaintance named Mr Howard. Such criticism includes studies by Deborah Kloepfer (1989), Anne Simpson (2005), Maren Linett (2005) and Kristen Czarnecki (2009). This work generally explains the violence which lurks within Rhys’s prose in terms of trauma, depression and personal loss.

My exploration of the potential in unhappy states draws little on these studies, not least due to my belief that Rhys’s inscription of unhappiness is well considered through her profound intellectual engagement with difference and embodied subjectivity. Female authors are still too often marginalised by the erroneous sexist assumption that women’s writing is usually ‘merely’ personal. Though claiming a

philosophical significance to Rhys's work by aligning her representation of difference with Deleuze's work may appear unduly grandiose – perhaps also thus perpetuating the Western masculinist privileging of the intellectual over the emotional which works to devalue non-rationalist ways of conceiving of experience – it is a risk that I believe is worth taking. In an important essay of 1982, Judith Kegan Gardiner analyses Rhys's rich intertextuality in *Good Morning, Midnight*, identifying her incorporation of Emily Dickinson, John Keats, Oscar Wilde, Sidonie Gabrielle Colette, Anatole France, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce among others. Even by 1982, when Rhys's interest in intertextuality and writing back had been made explicit with the publication of her final novel, this particularly literary quality of her writing had been largely overlooked in the criticism, along with other intellectual and philosophical concerns. At the end of her essay, Gardiner describes the bias through which women's writing is, by the fact of the author's sex, personalised:

When a writer like Joyce or Eliot writes about an alienated man estranged from himself, he is read as a portrait of the diminished possibilities of human existence in modern society. When Rhys writes about an alienated woman estranged from herself, critics applaud her perceptive but narrow depiction of female experience and tend to narrow her vision even further by labelling it both pathological and autobiographical. The myth of Rhys as despised and solitary recluse furthers this misapprehension of her work. (Gardiner 1982: 247)

Gardiner's essay is just one of the first in a line of criticism which has established that Rhys's fiction deconstructs the distinction between the personal and public, as well as that between many other apparent fixed oppositions. Gardiner is interested in demonstrating Rhys's credentials as a highly literary artist whose 1939 novel incorporates a canonical literary tradition (which includes women but is dominated by men) in order, partly, to write against the easy, bourgeois and false oppositions which this tradition sustains – those 'polarisations about sex, class and moral value that oppress women and the poor' (1982: 233). The passage quoted above indicates the ironic fact that while Rhys's novel undermines the logic of dualistic thinking, where one term is privileged at the expense of the other – such as the distinction between the good wife and the immoral prostitute, or between the happy, sexual young woman and the bitter, lonely old spinster, to use examples in Gardiner's analysis – Rhys's work

has been categorised by many critics precisely according to such an opposition and labelled personal *rather* than intellectual. Gardiner shows that Rhys's work is intellectual, and studies such as Carr's (2003a, 2012) have shown that her intellectual concerns and inscription of intimately personal experience frequently coincide. Rhys did not continue writing about her life in the way that she does in *Quartet*. In the years after *Quartet*, her life came to centre on her writing, and I think that her writing developed to concern the situation of her writing. In tandem with this progression, Rhys developed a poetic language increasingly capable of registering the fraught experience of being enmeshed in a world which is all too often violent. I aim to show in this thesis that by her final novel these two concerns had become one.

### **Mining the unspoken: feminist psychoanalytic responses**

Psychoanalytic criticism has done the most work in probing and speculating about Rhys's writerly intentions and the significance that certain ideas held for her, both consciously and unconsciously. Since the late 1970s, psychoanalytic feminist readings have focused on female difficulty in her fiction and sought answers and clues in this 'dark' terrain, mining the unknown, the unknowable and, crucially, the unsayable. Nancy Harrison's 1988 study and Deborah Kloepfer's book, *The Unspeakable Mother: Forbidden Discourse in Jean Rhys and H.D.*, the following year, are representative examples of the psychoanalytic feminist readings which have positioned Rhys's fiction as a form used by the author to work through psychical problems of desire which are inextricable from the reality of male dominance and which include, and may even be determined by, the fact of having a limited access to a male language. These studies have ensured that it is virtually impossible to ignore the fact that this fiction is about protagonists who have difficulty with the dominant discourse and the discourses of dominance.

Nancy Harrison argues that the recording of a woman's unspoken response within the framework of a masculine speech or discourse is the point of the novels – not what the characters desire to say (1988). She contends that Rhys's fictional world is not a *demi-monde*, as often suggested, but a world of women's speech, of women talking back, saying what they want to say in the interstices of 'real' dialogue. For Harrison, Rhys utilises a heightened example of a fundamental strategy of women's writing: this is a writerly self-consciousness unique to women, which constitutes a staging. The 'performative aspect of the woman's novel' is its foregrounding of the

ways in which the lives of its characters are determined by discourse (Harrison 1988: 3). This staging, for Harrison, functions in a unique manner, speaking to its female audience of the female experience of being trapped in male discourse. It

invites the reader to personal participation, allows the drama of women's writing to surface in form as well as content. For the woman reader, the woman's novel invokes an audience whose response is communal, though private – 'communal' because it is perceived by each reader as private and personal. (Harrison 1988: 3)

As Andrew Gibson points out, Harrison's claim of a singular female readership 'fails to take account of the play of difference across identity', and therefore allows her to 'still believe in a "we" who share tradition or a conversation' (1999: 171). Gibson's comments appear in a study concerned with ethical frameworks that are based on difference, rather than identification (1999: 171); and, drawing on various philosophers, including Emmanuel Levinas, he locates 'self-difference' at the heart of Rhys's profoundly ethical fiction. His intervention flags up the limitation of Harrison's argument, and in so doing raises various difficult questions, including the irrepressible matter of how to balance the need of an historically oppressed group to claim an identity with both the need to recognise diversity within groups, and the project – contested, but supported by many – of breaking the dominance of oppositional logic generally. Harrison's arguments deserve to be contextualised within the project of recuperating previously overlooked women's writing, which was a particular concern in Anglo-American feminist scholarship in the 1980s. Her study deals with questions of literary history and feminist theory more generally, and her delineation of the woman's novel should be considered against the history that gave rise to the need for such a concept. Today, some of Harrison's arguments seem overly optimistic and problematically unselfconscious in their eliding of the differences among women; and yet, I think her study is particularly valuable for its demonstration of the fact that women – such as Harrison – are powerfully affected by the message of female affirmation in these stories, and by the nuanced and complicated mode through which this message is delivered.

In a comparative study which theorises female language through lack rather than identity, Kloepfer reads Rhys's protagonists (in particular, Anna in *Voyage in the*

*Dark* and Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*) as speaking back to a dead mother (1989). Reading the dead mother as a trope for textlessness, Kloepfer thereby argues that these women are working towards a way of speaking the unspeakable. Like Harrison, Kloepfer draws on psychoanalytic feminist thinkers, such as Hélène Cixous ([1975] 1976), Julia Kristeva (1980) and Nancy Chodorow (1978). She argues that the maternal sphere is a place of dissonance within language and thus a peculiarly complicated site for Rhys's protagonists, who are drawn instinctively to the realm of the non-verbal. Their problem with language is no simple madness or muteness, but a passing on of what has been cut out in the Symbolic order, and a feminist assault on the privileging of the signifier in androcentric discourse. Both of these books argue that Rhys develops a feminist poetics, and both offer valuable insights into her reception. Harrison foregrounds the intellectual dimension of Rhys's poetics by illuminating her intricate intertextuality. Kloepfer highlights the 'blind spot' which has excluded Rhys from the inner circle of 'high' Anglo-American modernists. The main question raised by these feminist studies is: to what extent is the voice of the Rhys protagonist silenced, unheard, or disruptive? Kloepfer is far more equivocal than Harrison in regards to the third possibility.

This question is an important one in Rhys criticism, and is raised in different contexts by many other political readings. Does Rhys's subversive textual politics remain always as indirect critique, by exposing the oppressive effects of social and political injustice on the protagonists and revealing their difficult mode of being as an effect or a response, or does it work against the status quo in a more active way? Stated otherwise, how effective is Rhys's writing back or counter-discourse? This thesis argues that Rhysian passivity is an obstinate non-conformity and part of a strategy of insistent difference which works in the worlds of the narratives but also on the reader. This is a similar argument to those made by Elizabeth Abel (1979) and Arnold Davidson (1985), who both contend that certain difficulties and conflicts in Rhys's fiction can be resolved to an extent if we understand Rhys to be intentionally manipulating the reader, moving her towards unlikely expectations and judgements.

Davidson argues that Rhys manipulates the reader's expectation of plot development in the bourgeois novel (1985). My reading of *Good Morning, Midnight* similarly takes Sasha's troubling repetition as a refusal of teleology and heteronormative readerly expectations. Abel's early, highly influential feminist reading takes a positive approach to Rhysian subjectivity, arguing that her depictions of fraught

and schizoid inner lives are an exaggerative, literary means of ‘expos[ing] submerged realities’ whereby ‘woman’s common experience’ opens ‘into the pathological’ (1979: 170). The protagonists’ passivity and helplessness are best understood as being ‘schizoid-like’, in the sense developed by R. D. Laing in 1960 for the distinction between a mild precursor to and the full-blown schizophrenic state: this schizoid state is a legitimate though cyclical response to certain interpersonal interactions which have resulted in the protagonists lacking ‘ontological security’ (Abel 1979: 157). Political and social oppression renders these women childlike, helpless and passive, causing them to be treated increasingly as helpless individuals; significantly, there is ‘a continuum between the general lack of confidence produced in women by cultural attitudes and the radical lack of sense of self characteristic of schizophrenia’ (Abel 1979: 169). The excessive helplessness of Rhys’s protagonists usefully gives visible form to the often-obscured effects of patriarchal violence.

Abel argues that it is in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that the radical force of Rhys’s critique is given fullest form. Antoinette becomes ‘representative of women’s disintegration’ just as Jane in *Jane Eyre* is (or has been) the representative of their successful integration (1979: 172). The characters in this text and the confrontations between them are archetypal: Antoinette represents intuition and subjectivity and Rochester represents rationality and objectivity (O’Connor adds Christophine’s pragmatics into the mix (1986)). Rhys dramatises the interaction of two fundamentally different ways of ordering experience and, by making the rational and objective husband the villain of the piece and the foremost agent of imperialism in the novel, forces us to ‘re-examine our response to madness’ (Abel 1979: 173). Rhys shows experience and language to be relative, not absolute – they are, Abel says, ‘fluid’: as the husband tries to impose his form of perception onto Antoinette, Rhys shows us that ‘to impose strict categories is to falsify’ and the author thereby ‘forces us to question our own logical categories’ (1979: 173). Abel’s essay is highly relevant in this thesis because she conceives of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as enacting an epistemological conflict in which the reader is *forcibly implicated*. Rhys

force[s] our intellectual and emotional responses into contradiction. Because we know objectively that Antoinette is mad, while we feel subjectively that she regains her sanity, we undergo the conflict that the novel dramatises in its portrayal of the clashing points of view of Rochester and Antoinette, and we

are forced to ask ourselves the question that the novel poses: how does one judge experience? (Abel 1979: 175)

In Abel's opinion Rhys does not provide easy answers, but positively stresses the intuitive as a mode of perception and cautions the reader against objective rationality concerning this text in which imperialism is shown to be 'intellectual as well as economic' (1979: 175).

At times Abel's reading does not account sufficiently for the intersecting forms of power depicted in Rhys's work. One of the most problematic aspects of her essay is Abel's positioning of the protagonists with women, in general, against men. She assumes – although more tacitly than Harrison – a self-identical demographic of 'women' for which Rhys advocates. In my opinion, Rhys never lets women off the hook: the power struggle is, as Carr writes, always between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', not between white and black, men and women (2012: 60). However, this thesis shares Abel's contention that Rhys's characterisation and narrative shape constitute an intentional manipulation of the reader's expectations, and also addresses the key question of how we might best understand the instability and the violence in her narratives.

There is now a consensus in Rhys studies that problems of language reveal important truths about how familial, social and political problems affect our capacity for experience. This consensus is not always a happy one. As Maren Linett has argued, while 'the fragmentary nature of Rhys's writing is sometimes celebrated by critics as evidence of a subversive stance, either in Rhys or in her characters', a response which is of course, not peculiar to Rhys studies, but 'part of a broader trend in feminist criticism', this stance in Rhys studies can seriously mislead us (2005: 437). According to Linett, when 'applied to Rhys's novels' this approach

often leads to overly optimistic accounts of her characters as actively resisting such 'culturally constructed oppositions'. In turning our traditional expectation of agency on its head, these accounts value Rhys's incisive wit and social criticism, but they also underrate the characters' unsavory but fundamental helplessness. (Linett 2005: 437)

This thesis refutes this charge of ‘fundamental helplessness’, but agrees that the passivity of Rhys’s protagonists appears unpleasant and undesirable and proposes that it is precisely to the extent that it *does* that these characters challenge dominant values and ‘culturally constructed oppositions’. Linett’s wariness is shared by many critics who cannot definitively support the idea that Rhys’s narratives are more subversive than accepting of the status quo, and who celebrate Rhys’s formal innovations while remaining uneasy about what may in fact be her reproduction of the terms she seems to argue against. My approach to this problem is in the line of those critics who attend to the things that Rhysian difficulty makes possible. In particular, this study attends to the generative potential with which Rhys imbues the ambivalent and the unknowable.

### **Positive encounters with difficulty**

Unlike Linett, Savory is relatively at ease with Rhys’s gender politics, certainly in comparison to her response to Rhys’s handling of race. Savory emphasises the political and affective force of *Good Morning, Midnight* in particular, arguing that while this novel appealed neither to pre-feminist readers of 1939, nor to a 1960s feminist audience, with Sasha’s refusal to ‘stop hurting herself’ a key problematic for many to this day, this text ‘seems very much in tune with our postfeminist, postmodern time’ (2009: 68). There is, I suggest, unusual prescience in Rhys’s inscription of ugly feelings – to borrow the title of Ngai’s highly influential 2005 book – and the potential of these minor affects for revealing and resisting oppressive political realities. Savory reads this fourth novel as a profound staging of the ways in which language is both ‘functional and entirely meaningless’, lending the work a similarity to both absurdist literature of the modernist period, and an affinity with ‘postmodernism’s recognition of the inability of language to have stable meaning’ (2009: 69). She identifies *Good Morning, Midnight* as Rhys’s best novel: this ‘masterpiece’ is ‘mordantly funny, at times highly satirical, very stylised and brilliantly observed’ (Savory 2009: 66-68). In her alcoholism, sexual promiscuity and other dysfunctional behaviour, Sasha embodies the key traits of all of Rhys’s protagonists but in a more heightened form. She is a fundamentally unreliable narrator, but this unreliability is mitigated by Sasha’s searing ability to ‘see herself with brutal clarity’ (Savory 2009: 70). The strength of this 1939 novel, then, is its unflinchingly honest presentation of the experience of decline for those unable to survive society’s cruelties by manipulating others for their own Darwinian survival. This argument is very close to one developed in my next chapter.



Importantly, Savory foregrounds the difficulty facing the reader who tries to identify any unequivocal political stance in this work:

Rhys's unwillingness to take a single, linear position on major political issues marks a sensibility able to understand political and social currents of history with remarkable and uncomfortable honesty: she was entirely unable to be ideological, and fully determined to observe unpredictable contradictions of human behaviour; interesting details of consistent failure to live up to heroic ideals. (Savory 1998: 35)

As argued, Rhys's relentless confrontation with difficulty is handed onto the reader, forcing her into a plethora of problematic if not impossible choices. Ultimately, Savory seems to suggest that the problem with Rhys's textual politics comes down to her insistent individualism. I attempt a positive reading of this attitude, positioning it against a fascist dictate of uniformity, but it remains, of course, highly problematic. For Savory it leads inevitably to failure. Rhys's protagonists are both 'politically subversive and willing to play along with middle-class conventions which are essentially inimical to their survival' and this is 'a difficult and exhausting game which one individual can never win' (Savory 1998: 83):

Both the Caribbean and the women's movement have had internal struggles between those who were willing to stand up against established authority and respectability and those who were willing to go along with it. Rhys's characters seem to incorporate and internalise this struggle, often as simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from male-centred England. (Savory 1998: 83-84)

This thesis explores the potential in the ambivalence we find in Rhys's fiction and her textual confrontations with complicity, and takes as its ground the absence of the conditions of communality that we find in these novels rather than seeing the protagonists as rejecting good relationships. It reads Rhys as navigating an uneasy path that rejects 'easy' identification and charts the dangers of isolated individualism.

As we have seen, deCaires Narain addresses this issue by thinking through tangled, fraught and abrasive intimacies in postcolonial feminist fiction and the 'labour involved in *narrating* [the] tense intersections' of 'experience, affect and knowledge'

(2013: 279). Along with feminists such as Ahmed, deCaires Narain is invested in moving past Spivak's pessimistic conclusion that not only should we not speak for third world women, but the subaltern cannot speak. Feminist solidarity, she argues, depends on the effort we make: 'Attention to the cultural and historical politics of location requires detailed work which does not lend itself to a readily graspable idea of solidarity. But the commitment to making "woman" and "feminist" signify in more meaningfully universal ways requires such work' (deCaires Narain 2013: 278). My subsequent chapters also identify ways in which Rhys's fiction 'worr[ies] away at difference and inequality, struggling with modes of narrative that might recognise such inequities without compounding, dissolving or resolving them' (deCaires Narain 2013: 279). Significantly, deCaires Narain also identifies a problematic romantic aestheticisation in *Wide Sargasso Sea* but, unlike Savory, casts a positive light on this, arguing that Christophine is the feminist marker in this text in contrast to Antoinette. The servant has a strong voice and her spoken challenge to the husband has political force whereas Antoinette is ontologically unsure and has a severely limited ability to speak. In short, Christophine has 'more power than her charge, a reversal that may appear to wilfully ignore history' (deCaires Narain 2010: 128). Yet for this critic Christophine's power is evidence of Rhys's understanding of history, and it is history which

shapes the novel and positions Christophine as the *rightful*, and indeed *righteous*, claimant to the homeland. Antoinette, by contrast, proclaims her affiliation with the *landscape*, but both her need to lay claim to it and the aestheticised nature of the claim belie the anxiety that attends it. In other words, Rhys confirms that Christophine belongs without question to the West Indies but endows Antoinette's sense of belonging with none of that ethical certainty. (deCaires Narain 2010: 129)

For deCaires Narain Rhys's textual politics is ambivalent: she attempts to affirm Christophine's authority and world, but is unable to do so. However, Rhys's 'equivocation also indicates a space of uncertainty which might be read more generously – and productively':

‘Black’ and ‘white’ women [...] are inscribed textually in terms which are too ontologically distinct for full ‘conversations’ between these constituencies of women to be possible. However, the conversations between writers, readers and critics which Rhys’s texts enable are crucial steps towards mapping out the conditions – in societal and narratological terms – in which such conversations might be(come) possible. (deCaires Narain 2005: 500-01)

In attending to postcolonial women writers’ risky depictions of fraught intimacies among unequal women, we might do well to be ‘more flexible, generous and forgiving than the grandstanding rhetoric of much current critical practice allows’ (deCaires Narain 2005: 498). We might take risks in order to extend ‘affiliative possibilities in our own critical practices as postcolonial feminists’ (deCaires Narain 2010: 139). The aim in this thesis for a reading that is both risky and generous is congruent with this argument. There is an insistently problematic impulse towards individualism that is central to Rhys’s writing, but might we not, following deCaires Narain, concentrate on Rhys’s equivocation in this matter? *Wide Sargasso Sea*, after all, concerns the attempt to forge difficult connections – Rhys’s relationship to the West Indies, and Antoinette’s relationships to Tia and Christophine being, as the criticism testifies, potent examples. If Rhys could only ultimately speak for herself – extended in the final novel to the white West Indian Creole woman – might we not infer in this a modest, ethical attention to positionality? A refusal to speak for ‘others’, transformed in her writing into an insistence on thinking through a feeling with (as opposed to feeling ‘for’)? In attending to the negative affect which suffuses her fiction and its reception, is a sense of connectedness not unavoidable? Does Rhysian affect not stage Ahmed’s claim, noted by deCaires Narain, that we ‘cannot not encounter each other, what is at stake is *how*, rather than *whether* the encounters take place’ (Ahmed 2000: 167).

I contend that for Rhys, we are ‘in it together’, but this is a deeply uncomfortable state and in no way implies solidarity. This is enmeshed existence, inseparable from others, without the idea that one’s property is one’s private world, because there is only existence as part of *this* world. Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of the assemblage and minor literature as the collective assemblage of enunciation are useful theorisations with which to think through Rhys’s always-difficult relationality. Identification and transmission are never positive in this fiction; but encounters and ruptures make possible new realities. In writing that probes our difficult connectedness,

our enmeshment in an often hostile world, Rhys makes evident the fact that feeling is not distinct from thought. Rhys's epistemology is Nietzschean: we see, think, know from our perspective; and violence is required to jolt us out of our well-worn patterns of thought, which are too often not really thinking at all. But her epistemology is also a function of her ontology, which is a vision of enmeshed subjectivity. Erica Johnson has recently theorised Rhysian subjectivity in terms of posthumanism (2015). This study draws upon Deleuze and Guattari's work to understand it. Affected by every encounter, the protagonists' bad feeling and their passivity evidence the peril of becoming. But Rhys's creative passions also chart the possibilities of becoming as encounters lead to new perspectives and new insights. Affect can be disruptive; the disrupted can become the disruption. Passive characters can resist; and, I propose, in this fiction they serve as the figuration of the dilemma of becoming – that urgent task of locating agency when the self is no longer a contained, self-determining entity and the world is violent. And if we are all in it together, in what is, for many, an all-too-often hostile world, then Rhys's fiction is not just a much-needed reminder that fear of difference is dangerous. It is an affirmation that even when it seems unlikely, we can effect change. Her work is a line of flight: an insistence that things can be different.

I close this chapter with a brief look at two considerations of Rhys's concern with a certain, modern, 'different kind of consciousness' by Carr and Emery, both of whom offer positive readings of Rhys's inscription of difference, elaborating not just its resistant force but also its generative function (Carr 2012: 27). Arguments by both are utilised in later chapters, and for this reason the following is just a general outline of their generous approaches to Rhys's depiction of subjectivity.

For Carr, 'Rhys's fiction registers the sense of disorientation and the uncertain identity of those who live the ambivalent, uncentred, dislocated existences which some now argue have become paradigmatic of our postmodern times' (2012: 28). The protagonists struggle with authenticity, to find their voices and 'to refuse the definitions others thrust upon them', a narrative parallel to the fact that the 'fiction was [Rhys's] attempt to reject the hegemonic view of her existence, or of existences like hers, and to find terms of her own in which to tell her story' (Carr 2012: 36). The 'struggle' is key in Carr's account: the fiction explores how this different, sometimes resistant and sometimes defeated type of consciousness is 'formed and deformed through exclusion, prejudice, marginality and hatred' (2012: 51). It is the inscription of this struggle and

ambivalence, of this ‘fusion of apparently contrary elements’, of ‘protest and creation’ that, for Carr, is central to Rhys’s work and which sustains its incisive, generative force:

Rhys rejects the language of empire, of colonialism, of class, of bourgeois morality, and constructs a different one. Language is not only the empty code that keeps injustice in place by claiming it is justice: it is the one tool one has to make alternative sense of the world. (Carr 2012: 110)

On this reading, Rhys’s language mines ‘ambiguity, difference, darkness, warmth’, and demonstrates that ‘it is through the pain of the destabilisation of identity, and through the destabilisation of language, that the truth can be found’ (Carr 2012: 110, 112).

Emery also focuses on how the novels depict ‘cultural conflicts of marginality and sexual exploitation’, arguing that Rhys’s inscription of the experiences of colonial and sexual exile constitutes an exploration ‘of possibilities for new aesthetic form at the intersection of three kinds of modernism – mainstream European, female and Third World’ (1990: 174). For Emery, each novel involves ‘a search for community and place [...] that supersedes the European quest for identity in the form of discrete individual “character”’: Rhys’s inscription of colonial and sexual difference operates in terms of ‘formal alterations of conventional fictional patterns, alterations that may appear as silences, stuttering, interruptions, or inconsistencies’ (Emery 1990: 174). In their most generative form in Rhys’s final novel, argues Emery, these ‘formal alterations’ constitute ‘an opening onto alternate fictional possibilities for conceiving character [...] as the brutal loss of identity that necessitates new spiritual and political alliances in a dreamed-of, magically realised, and chosen community’ (1990: 175). Crucially, Emery states that judging these works according to ‘European aesthetic, moral and psychological standards’ is fundamentally misconceived as it is precisely such normative criteria that Rhys’s oeuvre challenges (1990: 176). These novels ‘tear the fabric of realism – even of European modernism, with its illusions of a self to be fragmented – by rupturing sequences of beginning-middle-end and by exploring the *possibility* for consciousness when a unified, discrete self has never been a possibility’ (Emery 1990: 176, my emphasis).

These two readings are foundational for the arguments presented in the following chapters. Like Carr and Emery, I attempt a forward-oriented reading. I propose that rather than constituting a search for lost origins, Rhys’s narratives enact a

search for possible forms of communality which are realizable through intuitive connection rather than a logic of valorised identity. There is a form of self-making in her novels predicated not on a stable self that is capable of being fragmented or buttressed, but on the on-going, dangerous but also liberating experience of the loss of the self which we can equally describe as the ‘freeing of life from entropic containment’ – a helpful way of thinking about becoming proposed by Ansell-Pearson (1999: 81). Yet perhaps the most important similarity between this thesis and Carr’s and Emery’s readings is that I am also proposing that ‘freed’ subjectivity in Rhys’s writing involves something more than the personal. For Emery, it constitutes new aesthetic possibilities for conceiving of character, and for Carr its destabilisation is the condition of the possibility of the emergence of truth. This thesis, then, views Rhys’s nomadic protagonists, who are uncomfortable composites of agency and passivity, as opening up new possibilities for thinking about resistance.

In these novels concerning how life overwhelms these women, an affective, intuitive mode of thinking is shown to have more potential than Western rationality for creating possibilities beyond our current predicament. Rhys does not present us with forms of resistance which operate independently of oppressive assemblages. Her writing often assembles itself in the likeness of the worldly assemblages of which it is part, as many of the views outlined in this chapter indicate. But rather than simply damning Rhys’s complicity we can profit by thinking through this problematic using Deleuze’s philosophy and other projects in radical thought. Activity, thought and desire are never ‘autonomous’; agency is not a ‘pure’ thing, prior to external forces; and as Rhys’s last three novels show, our language is inadequate for expressing this predicament. We do not yet have a widely spoken differential language, sufficiently capable of accommodating the excluded middle, but Rhys’s mature novels give us lines of thought which might help us develop that language. This chapter has traced the connections between this thesis and the decades of criticism which have secured Rhys’s place as an important modernist, a divisive feminist and a troubling postcolonial writer. I turn now to the intriguing possibilities and productive difficulties which lie in reading Rhys as a schizoanalytic artist, beginning with an examination of how negative affect functions in her writing and what it reveals about our readerly desires and expectations.

## Chapter Two

### **‘I don’t love what they love’: negative affect and Rhys’s writing-machine**

#### **I. Negative affect: some definitions**

This chapter utilises an idea from Deleuze and Guattari’s study of Kafka, and argues that affect is a ‘saturating body’ in Rhys’s mapping of oppressive systems (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 7). Affect destabilises things in such a way that the possibility of change is actualised. The analysis begins to chart Rhys’s search for the possibility of affirming communality, by focusing on the feelings that surround Rhys’s passive protagonists, and exploring the relationships between embodiment, feeling and Rhys’s refusal of the false promises and oppressive demands of the dominant order. Her stories of passive women demonstrate that bad feeling is a major currency of oppression and dramatise how negative affect circulates and is produced (often through gendered and racialised language), and how it controls and produces a sense of inferiority in marginalised subjects. Crucially, Rhys’s novels also demonstrate that negative affect can disturb the status quo and occasionally, with difficulty, it can even create possibilities for positive change.

This chapter deploys several different theorisations of affect. The earlier sections refer to affect as feeling with a psychical and bodily dimension and focuses on how affect circulates among bodies, how it is produced under particular conditions and how it sometimes disturbs the status quo. The concluding discussion turns to a Deleuzian notion of affect as becoming. The chapter aims to take into account the notorious difficulty of defining affect, and the fact that Rhys’s fiction is intensely affective, indeed ‘uniquely affective’ in its evocation of ‘powerful feelings, gripping moods [and] emotions’ that are unusually ‘difficult to sort out, classify, account for’ (Johnson and Moran 2015: 8). Due to this difficulty Johnson and Moran describe the dominant affect in the writing as ‘spectral’ (2015: 7). It cannot be grasped but haunts the texts and the critical literature. They suggest that a good approach to this ineffable entity might be Sedgwick’s ‘reparative’ reading practice that moves away from what Sedgwick

terms the ‘transhistorical, almost automatic conceptual privileging [...] offered

by a Freudian view' to less Oedipal, drive-oriented understandings that 'leave us in a better position to do justice to a wealth of characteristic, culturally central practices [...] that [...] [otherwise] become invisible or illegible'. (Sedgwick 2003: 147, in Johnson and Moran 2015: 8-9)

In readying ourselves to be surprised, we might better enable an 'openness to Rhys's reconfiguration of emotional terminology, [and] attend to the way in which she offers, instead, her own vision of affective dynamics' (Johnson and Moran 2015: 9). I propose that a flexible and inclusive understanding of affect itself benefits such an approach. Given the spectral nature of affect in these novels, a variety of models is helpful for exploring the possibility that Rhys is actually exploring different registers of feeling.

Dominant ways of thinking about affect include taking it as something akin to transindividual emotion, as theorists like Ahmed (2010) and Berlant (2011) have done; positing affect as a built-in biological system that underlies emotion, following psychologist Silvan Tomkins (2008 [1962-1992]), or as a precognitive physical response or action composed of intensities that is distinct from emotion, as Brian Massumi asserts (2002). In their *Affect Reader* Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth navigate these approaches and others, offering their definition of affect as 'an in-between-ness', an 'accumulative beside-ness', marking the 'body's belonging to a world of encounters or [...] non-belonging' (2010: 2), a point that brings their definition into contact with Deleuze's understanding of becoming. I have argued that Rhys's novels chronicle life unfolding as a series of difficult encounters. Accordingly, the affects with which I am concerned for most of this chapter are negative.

Ngai's influential literary study, *Ugly Feelings* (2005) unravels various negative affects which she describes as 'minor' and 'ugly', and I use the term negative affect following her work. For Ngai, ugly feelings are minor affects in a quantitative sense: these states tend to be overlooked by the philosophical canon which takes greater note of more unequivocal, weighty affects such as jealousy, hatred and love. Ngai's minor affects such as irritability, animateness and paranoia are experientially, semantically and syntactically negative – definitions which are explored in this chapter. In short, this means that these affects are congruent with displeasure rather than pleasure; the value of their linguistic associations is usually negative; and they involve a phobic striving away. The affects discussed in the early part of this chapter are doubly minor, matching Ngai's first two definitions and, in its correspondence to her third, also demonstrating



that schizoid function that Deleuze and Guattari assign to minor literature: a striving away from the established order. Syntactic negativity also stems from the fact that ugly feelings involve a boundary confusion. They tend to generate feelings of ‘affective disorientation’ about what one is experiencing, and feelings of proximities and ‘paradoxical convergence’ (Ngai 2005: 16, 36). These disoriented feelings make visible problems (often political) which are usually hard to articulate. Passivity in Rhys’s writing is not an ugly feeling, but it is intimate with and inseparable from ‘ugly’ affect and – as will become apparent in the rest of this thesis – it inhabits numerous boundaries, such as those between the defective and the symptomatic, and the personal and social. Above all else, passivity is what constitutes Rhys’s writing as an intervention: it produces affect that disturbs, that discloses the ill health and bad feeling of the worlds about which Rhys writes, it poses problems and reveals literature’s flow of impersonal life which exceeds the individual.

The ‘problematization of the distinction between subjective and objective enunciation’ in Ngai’s definition of ugly feelings is related to the question of what affect is in general: whether it is something subjective, belonging to the subject, or something in the world (2005: 20). There is now general agreement with Raymond Williams’s contentions that affect is social, and not just personal, and that there always remains the question of how one can speak about something which is felt, perceived, bodily and ‘on the very edge of semantic possibility’ (1977: 32). To attempt to define affect is to encounter these problems; to attempt to write about passivity in Rhys’s fiction is to encounter similar problems. Thinking of both in Rhys’s novels necessarily involves ‘slippage over rigid correspondences between words and meanings’ (Ngai 2005: 308). Slippage describes what is involved in using language to discuss experience which is on the ‘very edge of semantic availability’. Slippage also indicates Deleuze’s practice of deterritorialising terms by changing how he used them. In his work on Spinoza and *A Thousand Plateaus* affect means the passage between embodied states in the sense of the continuous variation of one’s force of existing. In his writing on art, it denotes an independent aesthetic entity. Both Deleuzian uses of the term are drawn upon in this thesis, although this chapter concentrates on the former.

Affect in Rhys’s writing exists on numerous ‘levels’. It is a central aspect both of Rhys criticism and the protagonists’ mode of being, and secondary characters are often delineated largely by their affective responses to the protagonists. Affect also conjoins distinct political problems concerning agency. Given that *Wide Sargasso Sea*

is Rhys's impassioned corrective to Brontë's insubstantial and politically problematic representation of the white Creole woman, we surely have grounds for also reading affect as the power of spirit or the power of an idea that art makes durable. This chapter, then, practises its own sort of slippage by moving among these various forms of affect. It begins by considering Rhysian passivity as a strategy that, like Ngai's ugly feelings, feels bad.

## **II. Affective passivity: the experientially and semantically negative**

One of the most important starting points for the arguments in this thesis as a whole is the compelling claim by recent feminist and queer theorists that we have good reason to question and defy the insistence that resistance must take certain, prescribed forms. Ahmed's work is particularly significant for the arguments made here. She proposes that we should attend to how feelings are produced and circulate, the politics behind this production and movement, and how feelings cause objects to circulate. Examination of the production of those bodily and cognitive feelings which seem innate and belonging to the personal and private makes possible a disruption of the ways in which power encodes not just the world but our bodies, our perceptions and our reactions (Ahmed 2010, 2014a). Ahmed's work is an exceptionally useful tool for reading novels which insist on the fact that the production of feeling is not a private matter. Rhys's most powerful critique of the ways in which modes of being, thinking and feeling are discursively determined as valuable or undesirable according to their 'relative proximity to a social ideal' (Ahmed 2010: 53) is the deconstruction of nineteenth-century English attitudes towards Creole indolence and female insanity in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. We find a similar deconstruction in Rhys's other novels, and these texts all contain scenes in which the naming of negative affect has a performative function. Crucially, Ahmed presents a powerful analysis of the ways in which unhappy bodies and alienated subjects can disrupt and resist hegemonic practices just by being. To appreciate such strategies of resistance we would do well to learn to practise a differential form of thought rather than perpetuating an oppositional logic:

Rather than hold on to the binary opposition active/passive, we can challenge the opposition, and we can do so by showing how that which has been deemed as passive, as just there doing nothing, is doing something and even provides

the conditions of possibility for doing something. The task is not to redescribe passivity as activity (creating as it were a generalised field of action) but to think of passivities as involving different kinds of action. (Ahmed 2010: 209-10)

Rhys's protagonists are passive in various ways, frequently withdrawing from the world to their bed, but we should not assume that they are without will nor that they are inactive. These women move through public spaces, converse with others whom they affect, engage in sexual relationships, respond passionately when upset, and do much more besides. They impose their mode of being on their world, exemplifying Ahmed's words to a notable degree. The intention here is to consider the affective force and the ideological value of the protagonists' anti-normative orientation in their passivity, and to pay attention to the small, quiet or 'minor' things that Rhysian passivity, in all its bad feeling, does. It does two things exceptionally well: it illuminates the ways in which judgement (the language of value) and the language of feeling work together in an oppressive performative function, and it challenges us to rethink the value of things.

Carr's brief 1996 critique of Shari Benstock's book *Women of the Left Bank, 1900-1940* (1987) is extremely useful for opening up this discussion of why we should question the pejorative function of the term passivity in a discussion of Rhys. Several of the arguments developed in this chapter have antecedents in Carr's criticism which pays close attention to the performative function of value judgements. In Benstock's feminist account of Anglo-American women artists in Paris in the early twentieth century only a few pages are dedicated to Rhys, but they are remarkable for the force with which Benstock asserts the writer's affinity with the sordid. Benstock's observations position Rhys's inhabitation of certain areas apparently unvisited by the more refined female members of Paris's modernist coterie as the effect and manifestation of her defective psyche. For Benstock, Rhys is in the wrong place. 'The city's margins, its peripheral limits' in the thirteenth *arrondissement* was a 'part of the Left Bank unknown to other of its residents' (Benstock 1987: 448); Rhys's movement and orientation are also wrong, being – paradoxically – emptied of purpose, yet drawing her to the iniquitous. Rhys spent 'long days of aimless walking through mean and uninteresting quarters, passed nights in cheap hotels, and made weekly visits to the Santé prison' (Benstock 1987: 448). This attraction to the wrong part of the Left Bank

is described as evidence of a pervasive moral weakness inseparable from Rhys's passivity. The 'Left Bank represented exhausting and degrading efforts to provide the necessities of survival [... It] drew Jean Rhys like a magnet: disgusted by the sordid, she was nonetheless incapable of resisting it' (Benstock 1987: 449). The tone, lexis and content of Benstock's account all convey a negative moral judgement which is palpable in the distinct emphasis on descent in the passage ('underworld', 'ladder'), and in the images of bodily and physical 'disgust' which abound ('descend toward degradation').

Carr observes that Benstock's portrait serves to turn 'Rhys's experience of oppression, this time economic, into a choice, or more precisely, into a failure of will' (2012: 13). In declaring that Rhys was 'drawn' to the 'sordid', Benstock is, at best, ignoring the social structures which determined Rhys's experience of poverty and marginality. Configuring her passivity as moral and psychological failure obscures and denies the very processes of oppression that Rhys's fiction indicts. Crucially, as Carr comments, this interpretative act of foreclosure seems gendered and racialised. This is palpable in the sense of voyeurism as Benstock's prose hovers over Rhys's body as she moves inexorably through the grime of the lower echelons of Parisian society. Ironically, this recalls Mr Mackenzie's admission that he was attracted by Julia's social difference to himself, and that he lived vicariously through her ability to be unencumbered by social niceties. In her stance towards Rhys, Benstock is dangerously close to reiterating patriarchal norms.

Benstock's commentary underscores the fact that the passive body is most obviously culturally intelligible as that which belongs to the weak, the immoral (the indolent person or the prostitute) and the infectious (the ill or the insidious). As Carr explains, elaborating on Ramchand's analysis (1970: 34), 'indolence' and 'licentiousness' were terms used widely in the last two centuries to describe white Creoles. Rhys's 'attack on Englishness and its properties has continued to arouse the fear of moral contagion that association with natives always threatened' (Carr 2012: 14). This suggests that Benstock's account has a corrective function. That is, the fear aroused in some of Rhys's Anglophile critics may be managed by the moralising lexicon they use to condemn Rhys or her protagonists' passive bodies. Carr draws links between this critical management of fear and mechanisms of colonialism and patriarchy. By locating a fault in the colonised subject's body, mind or culture, the coloniser naturalises the oppressed subject's position and shores up his or her own authority. In his important 1952 book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (*Peau noire, masques*

*blancs*), Frantz Fanon describes the colonial's critical gaze and discourse as 'fixing' the colonised subject with inferiority (Fanon 2008: 89). The colonial social system

draws its strength by maintaining this [inferiority] complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race over another; it is to the extent that society creates difficulties for [the colonised subject] that he finds himself positioned in a neurotic situation. (Fanon 2008: 80)

In a process which has important similarities to Fanon's theory, the emergence in the eighteenth century of what Ellen Pollak describes as the 'myth of passive womanhood' (1985) served to compensate for Enlightenment ideas of universal freedom in a context in which women were not free and equal to men: the myth or fantasy 'naturalises [women's] political and cultural inferiority' (Carr 2012: 15).<sup>33</sup>

There is no simple equation between the operations of colonial racism and the workings of bourgeois patriarchy, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to try to map this relationship in further detail, but Fanon's theory and Carr's genealogical analysis are useful for considering how, in a context of intolerance, the passing of negative judgement upon a seemingly neurotic, excluded and unhappy woman (whether an author or her fictional creations) inflicts a certain violence upon her. In the contexts of colonialism and patriarchal capitalism, the affective force of the dominant discourses that surround oppressed subjects (discourses determined by negative affects such as fear, anxiety and shame) often serves to diminish the agency of the oppressed by naturalising their inferiority. This is a central concern in Rhys's fiction. As Carr observes, this process is also at work in the criticism and here we have another reason to counter negative diagnostic readings with another sort of approach.

In many scenes in these novels the act of diagnostically naming the oppressed, marginalised subject as dysfunctional actually constitutes that subject's sense of inferiority. *Wide Sargasso Sea* shows us that 'madness' is a label used to contain subjects deemed inferior and dangerous. The social disapproval of Antoinette's mother

<sup>33</sup> Pollak's book is a relatively early revisionary feminist study of canonical, male eighteenth-century literary figures. In it she distinguishes between 'ideology proper' in that period and 'the social fictions that evolve at once to cover and to enable its effects', arguing that women were subjected to a dramatic containment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, with their value limited to a function of their role in a masculine economy – a situation that was reflected in a contorted fashion in major literary texts which often depicted woman's essential passivity (Pollak 1985: 4).

evolves into a negative diagnosis of ‘madness’ which is used to lock her up, and is then passed on to the husband to serve as a tool to legitimise firstly Antoinette’s removal from her homeland and then her incarceration in Thornfield Hall, resulting in Antoinette’s severe confusion in Part Three. It is the husband’s violent reaction to the otherness he encounters in the West Indies and his deployment of the weapon of oppressors which serves as a cautionary tale for the reader, and not Antoinette’s ‘madness’ or her acceptance of the dangerous sexual passion into which he initiates her. It is not Antoinette’s weakness or irrationality but the husband’s fear and his cruel use of a diagnosis of madness that is the object of Rhys’s condemnation. This same warning is discernible in the earlier novels. The male characters who are seduced by and then turn against the protagonists come to resent these women because of their otherness and voice their disapproval in judgements of the women’s inferiority. To an extent this mechanism implicates the reader’s judgement of the protagonists’ thoroughly different mode of being.

A letter of 1936 states explicitly what much of Rhys’s writing implies – that she understood instinctively and from experience, if not ‘in theory’, how the discursive production of the oppressed subject’s ‘complex’ of inferiority serves to benefit the dominant group and to strengthen the hegemonic system which produces these unhappy subject positions:

persecution maniacs (so called) always have been and usually still are, the victims of persecution. Of course they’re called maniacs. It’s part of the game Society plays – Let’s Pretend that there is no such thing as this petty, leering, unsplendid cruelty. (*Letters*, 31)

These statements resonate with Fanon’s theory of how the black subject’s sense of inferiority is discursively produced by a system which seeks to contain him and to naturalise his inferiority. To an extent, reading Sasha as having a pathological compulsion to suffer repetitively serves to naturalise her unhappiness and to underplay the cruelty that she perceives. It is also to assume, or ‘pretend’, that Sasha could somehow move outside the violence that so dominates the novel. If this violence is, in fact, inescapable then the persecution maniac is correct in feeling persecuted; and psychological fracture, incoherence and irrationality are understandable and maybe even ‘reasonable’ consequences of and reactions to such a situation. If social conditions

are sufficiently extreme (or the ‘game’ sufficiently cruel) then the subject’s relinquishment of behavioural norms and conventional logic may be no more ‘mad’ than anything else; it may, in fact, be an appropriate response, as Abel has argued. If cruelty is inescapable then the artistic choice to focus on protagonists with dangerously fraught inner lives may be read as a means of exposing that which is generally kept hidden. Carr argues that Rhys exposes the effects of the cruelty and violence that forms the ‘underbelly of Western civilisation’ (2012: 16). Rhys writes against respectability and hegemonic structures which tolerate and often serve to conceal social violence. To an extent, the protagonists cause disturbances within the narratives in this way. Their passivity keeps these women in difficult situations in which they suffer, but we might read the ‘spectacle’ that they make of themselves, in visible shows of unhappiness in public spaces, as a counter-hegemonic strategy of passively exposing oppressive power structures. Ironically, manifesting psychic fracture may be one of the least dangerous ways of exposing the cruelty of persecution. It may be a refusal to perform normatively because such a performance serves merely to perpetuate oppression to the extent that it does not disturb the status quo. This is the dynamic that runs through *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. Mr Mackenzie and Mr Horsfield are conscious of (and cowardly in) their acceptance of unfairness; and they are contrasted strikingly with Julia, whose honest disgust at ‘organised society, in which she has no place and against which she has not a dog’s chance’ (*ALMM*, 17), both attracts them and makes these men feel ‘powerful and dominant. Happy’, even as they sense their complicity in the dominant social order which renders life for outsiders like Julia a matter of survival rather than thriving (36).

We might, then, heed Deleuze’s warning that judgement is all too often value judgement that is formed in relation to what is established, and note that the status quo is that against which Rhys’s fiction rails. Her work challenges us to consider the expectations we bring to our readings of major characters, as Savory explains in 1998 in relation to an earlier argument by Molly Hite:

For Hite, as a feminist critic, Rhys’s marginal female character destabilises ‘an inherited narrative structure’, that is, precisely because she is marginal, is not a winner or a solver of problems, she challenges the conventions on which the bourgeois novel is built – conventions assuming ‘free will’ in major characters.

Reading Rhys's texts with assumptions from the bourgeois novel causes problems. (Hite 1989: 23, in Savory 1998: 58)

Marxist theorists have taught us to be attentive to how bourgeois art forms and the novel in particular produce a limited range of subject positions, most usually with the effect of selling the illusion of autonomy in order to conceal the functions and mechanisms of dominant ideologies, and to naturalise an ideological world view. Rhys's last three novels in particular strip us of the illusion of autonomy. Rather than creating protagonists who strive for husbands and financial security (the traditional objects of desire for women), Rhys 'bust[s] the roof' off the myth that happiness is in the hands of the individual, instead depicting women whose scope of existence is determined by oppressive social and political conditions (*GMM*, 33). In so doing, her novels expand the horizon of our 'inherited narrative structures', reminding us that experience is not 'universal' and not everyone desires and orients themselves in the same way.

Theorists such as Ahmed and Halberstam have shown how narratives of so-called good development can serve to reinforce hegemonic values which determine oppressive ideologies and their fascistic structures of thought such as capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, racism, and homophobia. 'Good' development signifies that which is happy, acceptable, generally endorsed and unchallenged, relatively successful or leading to relative success in a material sense. These theorists critique the equation of happiness and success with 'advancement, capital accumulation [and] family' (Halberstam 2011: 89). In this framework, good development describes a mode of being which is acceptable because it is directed towards the 'right' things – those things which, we are told, bring 'happiness', when they also benefit the dominant order. The itinerancy of Rhys's protagonists is not just the sign of their dispossession and a reflection of Rhys's frequent experience of being without a secure home. It is also her refusal to orient her protagonists towards the capitalist principle of property ownership: 'A room with bath? A nice room? A room?...', thinks Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, as she ponders finding a more pleasant hotel,

But never tell the truth about this business of rooms, because it would bust the roof off everything and undermine the whole social system. All rooms are the same. All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, bed, a chair and



perhaps a bidet. A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that's all any room is. (*GMM*, 33)

Sasha is resolutely not directed towards the right things, expending her energy on castigating the 'social system' and its 'wolves', rather than working in line with a false promise of happiness. The protagonists' refusal of normative activity can, then, be read as a counter-hegemonic refusal to invest in projects of self-development or betterment. Rhys's letters occasionally display the vehemence of the author's politics and support this reading. Her excoriation of the middle classes (what Rhys terms the 'soul destroying middle') and their demand that '[e]veryone must be exactly alike' indicates her distaste for the trappings of bourgeois respectability (*Letters*, 89), and Rhys's scathing though realistic attitude to capitalism's promise is also evident in her description of her disagreement with her third husband: 'Max thinks that without money and security nothing can be done. *I do not agree at all!* I know otherwise. All the same the time does come when a *little* money a *little* security a *modicum* of praise does help' (*Letters*, 164).

The absence of good development which is so striking an aspect of Rhys's aesthetic is, I contend, the author's textual refusal of the principle that one should strive to organise one's joyful encounters in accordance with a heteronormative agenda – and it feels bad. In Rhys's narratives there is no positive progression, no steady increase of the protagonists' happiness, no accumulation of wealth, and no forging of life-enhancing and lasting bonds. No obstacles are overcome; instead, there is repetition. We might describe this as an aesthetics of failure. On the one hand, the absence of normative forms of self-making hastens these women's movement into a situation resembling an impasse and suggests an unhealthy deterioration rather than a strategy. In a Deleuzian-Spinozist sense the protagonists dwell in, rather than attempting to overcome, their difficulties. On the other, this absence calls into question our presuppositions about good behaviour. It thereby becomes an important 'pivot for reader-response', alienating many and provoking disapproval from those who are not at ease having such presuppositions challenged, and eliciting appreciation from those who are (Savory 1998: 58). In the terms of Ahmed's arguments, Rhys's rejection of the promise of happiness reveals vulnerability and forms of displeasure as sites of possibility, rather than simply things to be avoided. In a powerful sense, Rhys's novels show us that there is more to life than happiness.

Importantly, the disapproval Rhys's protagonists incur from other characters and from critics indicates the extent to which narratives of good development are a functioning component of hegemony, training us in how to think about those who behave differently.<sup>34</sup> It is, I think, too easy to equate a refusal to aim at good development with weakness, an indifference to life or nihilism. Mr Mackenzie does just this in Rhys's second novel:

The really incredible thing was that [Julia] did not seem to want to get away with it, that she did not seem to understand the urge and the push to get away with it at all costs. He knew, for instance, that she had not a penny of her own. After all that time she had not saved a penny.

Almost he was forced to believe that she was a female without the instinct of self-preservation. And it was against Mr Mackenzie's code to believe that any female existed without a sense of self-preservation. (*ALMM*, 20)

If we cannot fathom Julia, then rather than judging her negatively for her inability to abide by usual norms of behaviour, we would do well to remember that Mr Mackenzie's capacity for understanding her is severely hindered by his 'code', and our reading habits might be structured (and limited) by something similar. If we find Julia 'incredible', then perhaps we should consider that this is central to what the text means – the issue at stake being, perhaps, not the psychology behind the choices made by a fictional construct, but the questions: why do we have the responses we have? What codes determine the judgements and the feelings involved in these responses? If we are disturbed by the protagonists' behaviour, we can contextualise this by looking at how the protagonists cause disturbance within their narratives, and at the fact that this disturbance is met by a will to power that contains disturbing figures in violent ways. It is possible – albeit somewhat reductive – to consider Rhys's novels as a series in which each work explores a different form of disturbance and containment. In this sense, we might say that *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* primarily concerns the request for capital. *Voyage in the Dark* focuses on Anna's relinquishment of control of her body.

<sup>34</sup> I am thinking here of Diana Athill's rhetorically effective (but, to me, highly questionable) opening to her chapter on Rhys in her memoir, *Stet* (2000). Athill's account is typical of the critical approach which equates the problematic behaviour of Rhys's protagonists with the author's apparent inadequacies. It begins: 'No one who has read Jean Rhys's first four novels can suppose that she was good at life; but no one who never met her could know how very bad at it she was' (Athill 2000: 151).

In *Good Morning, Midnight* Sasha makes a spectacle of herself. She cries, repeats, fails at tasks, drinks too much in public and flirts disastrously. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is tremendously complex but perhaps, above all, disturbs through Antoinette's inability and refusal to try to make sense of that which she cannot clearly perceive. As this brief survey indicates, these novels are not primarily interested in particular, innate and essential human weaknesses, but with the ways in which social, political and discursive structures work to keep things as they are – favouring the powerful. In light of this, it makes limited sense to assess Rhys's protagonists and narratives only according to pre-existing codes or conventions. A more creative reading practice is warranted, in which we attempt to consider anew the reasons behind our response to these texts, and trace connections between such reasons and the ways in which bad feeling and disturbance are contained within the novels.

Carr's genealogical analysis, which is central to her elucidation of Rhys's complex textual politics, provides one example of how to attempt this. Rhys criticism since the 1990s has not developed these ideas significantly, and we might question the extent to which this is due to what Johnson and Moran suggest is the waning status of Rhys's credentials as a postcolonial writer (2015: 6). Johnson and Moran refer to several recent studies which develop arguments – quite similar to those made by Carr – which bring together psychoanalytic theory and postcolonial studies in a 'a move that offers exciting new directions for Rhys scholarship' (Johnson and Moran 2015: 5).<sup>35</sup> They draw particular attention to Kelly Oliver's theory of 'social melancholy'. Deploying Fanon (2001: 40), Oliver argues that 'the negative affects of the oppressors' are 'deposited into the bones of the oppressed' (Oliver 2004: xix). As Johnson and Moran note, citing Oliver, this process

engender[s] a pervasive sense of shame that for women in particular often develops into depression, which in turn wordlessly speaks to 'the loss of the self as an active agent and positive force in the world'. Rhys's fiction depicts the very process of this loss and the debilitating state of mind that ensues, and while postcolonial readings of Rhys thus far have tended to focus on the historical and materialist dimensions of her work, this new body of psychoanalytic work points the way to a more holistic approach that brings

<sup>35</sup> See Judith Butler, 1997; Ranjana Khanna, 2003; and Warwick Anderson et al., 2011.

historical and materialist concerns into dialogue with the states of mind they engender. (Oliver 2004: 121, in Johnson and Moran 2015: 5)

Turning to affect in Rhys's writing may serve to bridge some of the schisms in the scholarship on her work such as that between postcolonial and psychoanalytic readings which have generally been kept separate from one another. More specifically, thinking about how the mind and body are affected by power in specific historical conditions may lead to productive ways of approaching the discomfiting degree to which Rhys's work inhabits the zone of indistinction between the private and the social. Ahmed proposes that one of the valuable results of not dismissing unhappiness simply as that which must be overcome is that we might thereby develop our ethical capacity for being affected (Ahmed 2010: 219). Encountering Rhysian affect without assuming that the suffering of her protagonists is simply something to be overcome enables us to open up the critical dichotomy that has rendered Rhysian passivity the effect either of personal or social defect. Rhys's narratives of women who do not resist their vulnerability can teach us things about how power works, how we think about our connectedness and our being in the world which is *always* private *and* social – and how we avoid thinking about it.

Returning to Benstock, we can hear in her account something like a palpable effort to recontain within the realm of the personal precisely that which Rhys insists is also political. In Carr's terms, such criticism functions to 'blot out the darkness of [Rhys's] work' (2012: 16). Carr's phrase conveys the idea of a willed blindness, and recalls Michel Foucault's 1976 analysis in *The Will to Knowledge* of the 'learned discourses on sex that were announced in the nineteenth century' (1998: 55).<sup>36</sup> These discourses were

imbued with age-old delusions, but also with systematic blindness: a refusal to see and to understand; but further – and this is the crucial point – a refusal concerning the very thing that was brought to light and whose formulation was urgently solicited. (Foucault 1998: 55)

<sup>36</sup> This is the first volume of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, originally published as *l'Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir*.

I am not suggesting a resemblance between Rhys criticism – much of which has been feminist – and nineteenth-century discourses on sex. However, from the interstices of Foucault's theory and Carr's meta-analysis a distinct warning can be heard, cautioning us against a too-ready acceptance of the fantasy of the Rhys protagonist as unhappy, passive, without will and lacking agency. This is too complete and overdetermined a picture, and the values and negative affects which circulate in the novels and criticism are too easily read as static things, as fixed qualities, rather than dynamic and constituting processes. The aim in this thesis is to work against this fantasy, but not by moving entirely away from it. The intention, rather, is to occupy the fantasy, paying attention to its function as a '[w]hole series of reinforcements and intensification...carefully tailored to the requirements of power' (Foucault 1998: 72), with the aim of finding something new and interesting about the passive female body within.

There is a lively contemporary feminist debate around what feminists ought to do with the bad feeling produced by oppression, a debate to which Rhys's novels speak. This study's alignment with Deleuze's philosophy necessitates a degree of agreement with Braidotti's Spinozist contention that bad feeling or what she calls negative passion is something to be overcome in a becoming-joyful which is the aim of all life (Braidotti 2006a). I am in complete agreement with her claim that we are in urgent need of 'new and alternative modes of political and ethical agency' (2006a: 2), and although she sees passivity as the absence of such things, I contend that Rhysian passivity can be rethought so it is in line with Braidotti's project. Braidotti's claim that an '[e]thical life pursues that which enhances and strengthens the subject without reference to transcendental values, but rather in the awareness of one's interconnection with others' is, I think, persuasive (2006a: 7). However, Braidotti's defence of an ethics predicated on an affirmation which overcomes all negativity, including vulnerability and pain, strikes me as problematic. Nomadic ethics, for Braidotti, takes negative experience as its starting point and proceeding from a 'Deleuzian-Nietzschean perspective [...] is essentially about transformation of negative into positive passions, that is, about moving beyond the pain. This does not mean denying the pain but rather activating it, working it through' (2006: 12). I wonder if this closing double description indicates a problem. It is difficult to know how a 'working through' would find its place in Deleuze's philosophy given his rejection of psychoanalysis. Even Braidotti's idea of taking negative passions as the starting point of an ethics seems at odds with Deleuze's

refusal of first principles, although her feminist ethics probably necessitates and warrants such a move. I find Deleuze's philosophical celebration of the value of difficulty one of the most compelling aspects of his thought. Accordingly, a nomadic ethics for me would conceive of vulnerability, pain and unhappiness not as the negative *per se*, but as states of difficulty – cognitive and noncognitive, bodily and intellectual – which are valuable as they force thought. Such states would not be overcome, but would be points of becoming. They might even be thought of as the outside of ethical thought. They constitute that which cannot be desired in a desire for living well that is also living ethically among others; that which we seek to minimise in our world but at which our efforts are aimed. This is entirely my suggestion of how a nomadic ethics might allow for the productive capacity of vulnerability and pain. It does not derive from Deleuze. It may be the case that his ethical philosophy does not pay sufficient attention to the dangers of the will to mastery.

Either way, Braidotti's aim of overcoming negative passions is, for me, far too exclusive. I share Ahmed's belief that we can learn much of political importance by paying close attention to how negative feelings, unhappy states and unhappiness itself are produced and circulated. Rather than dismissing these as things to be overcome, we can regard them as evidence in an archive or terms in a genealogy: as things to be thought through. In thinking them through, we can learn how violence is done to the bodies of those deemed inferior, strange or emotional, and we can develop an ethical capacity for being affected by others rather than replicating the desire for autonomy which is so central to capitalist notions of self-development (Ahmed 2010: 115, 219). Crucially, claiming our negative passions can be the means of 'radical disagreement' with the status quo, the promise of happiness and the set of normative associations that we are sold in contemporary life, such as the belief that happiness, strength, autonomy, success and normative activity are all different bricks on the road to the good life (Ahmed 2010: 213). As Ahmed argues, suffering can be our feeling of our disagreement with the good life and it can therefore be a way of doing something against those who subordinate the emotional, the passive and weak and women's bodies generally (2010: 210). One response to this subordination is to show the world that women are strong and active beings. Another is to reveal and insist on the contingency and the power of the negative values that become attached to subordinated individuals, to attributes, feelings and states which are demeaned. Rhys's fiction is an exceptionally potent example of this second response. There is, then, a bifurcation in

my arguments. I theorise Rhys's affinity with the other side of the debate, in which thinkers such as Ahmed argue that we should harness our bad feeling precisely because of its political force; and I propose a philosophical reading in line with the 'affirmative turn', as Ahmed describes the effect of Deleuzian studies like Braidotti's today (2010: 213). The bad feeling that attaches to the passivity of Rhys's protagonists is read as disruptive of the dominant order *and* I propose that Rhys's last novel achieves a 'working through' of negative affect that leads to the affirmation of future communality.

We can sense some of this debate at play in Ngai's claim that ugly feelings such as irritation and paranoia are 'deeply equivocal' and at their heart lies a 'systematic problematisation of the distinction between subjective and objective enunciation' (Ngai 2005: 3, 20). These minor affects involve problems caused by 'obstructed agency' and which are therefore 'charged with political meaning' (Ngai 2005: 3). They are confused feelings of powerlessness which are 'intentionally weak and therefore often politically ambiguous'; though not suited to clear and defined goals and 'forceful/defined action', this unsuitability 'amplifies their power to diagnose situations, and situations marked by blocked or thwarted action in particular' (Ngai 2005: 26-27). Ugly feelings function as 'signs that not only render visible different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical), but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner' (Ngai 2005: 3). Importantly, these problems 'can also be thought of as allegories for an autonomous or bourgeois art's increasingly resigned and pessimistic understanding of its own relationship to political action' (3). The politically urgent task of thinking through the aesthetic and the political together is fraught with difficulty, Ngai argues, and is a 'prime occasion for ugly feelings' (2005: 3).

This is a complicated set of ideas with a high degree of self-referentiality, but sheds light on the equivocality of Rhysian negative affect. Chapter Three considers part of this theorisation in the context of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Sasha's feeling of paralysis in the kitchen girl scene both highlights and seems to compete with the political significations of this text. Some time after her enlivening visit with Serge, Sasha is consumed with misery, orders a drink in a tabac, and guiltily observes the girl doing the washing up in confined quarters. She considers making a stand on the girl's behalf, but does nothing other than think and sit and drink. In a text that is preoccupied with dangerous intolerance and the rise of fascism, this moment of not acting for another who is suffering is anything but merely personal. There is, the scene implies, a

real need for us all to be able to act for others, and this is most difficult and most urgent at times when violent regimes demand that our ethical capacity is inactive. Sasha's passivity is diagnostic: her flaw, her solipsism, is society's. She poses the fundamental questions of political engagement, of how one should act in relation to others: 'Why should I?', 'What can I do about it?' (*GMM*, 89), she asks, thereby enunciating the dilemma of her time. Interestingly, in regards to Ngai's argument, it is extremely difficult to describe the tone in these words and in other parts of the scene. Sasha's exhortation to society to have some 'pity' is impassioned, but her consideration of the girl is strikingly lacking in affect. It is, as Ngai describes Melville's *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (1857), atonal. Yet this is not to say that there is textual indifference towards Sasha's passivity and the absence of her active pity, nor that we do not care about it. As in Melville's novel, there is a distinct meta-affectivity at work here, with our 'perception of an unfeeling feeling produc[ing] a secondary, dysphoric emotion' (Ngai 2005: 83). Our response is dysphoric as any single interpretive orientation is problematic. We cannot simply condemn Sasha for her lack of feeling (because we are aware that there is unexpressed care), and because it is her passivity – her doing nothing – which constitutes a diagnosis of her time, and which thereby does something of great value. In this brilliant depiction of solipsism Sasha's words stand for a regime of utterances, Deleuze's term for the official language of any assemblage. Her statements stand for fascist politics and structures of thought in the late 1930s, and we are caught between reading this scene as depicting a subjective passivity and a collective state of affairs. The scene, of course, presents us with both, and does so in a manner which opens up the 'subjective', freeing it from entropic containment as Sasha's experience, her body, her feelings are determined by objective conditions.

There is, I suggest, a clamour among the aesthetic, the affective and the political in this episode and in other moments when Rhys's protagonists are aware of their passivity, such as when Antoinette asserts in her dream that she would not save herself from her fate even if she could. Attending to this tension, we might consider the texts to be underscoring the conditions of both meaning-making and the production of knowledge itself. In compelling the reader to sense the distinct political and affective, subjective and objective dimensions of the texts, the passivity of Rhys's protagonists appears to reveal ideology at work – what Jameson described, in his essay 'On Interpretation', as the 'constitutive structure in which the empirical textual objects know intelligibility' (Jameson 1981: 97). As we confront the difficulty of interpreting



the behaviour of these characters, when we ourselves in our passivity are implicated in it to the extent that our reading is a passive activity, and as our overdetermined expectations of good development are defied in narratives which depict women criticised for their inappropriate behaviour, the reading process is revealed as an endeavour constituted by dominant ideologies and modes of production which privilege conventional ways of being and knowing over passivity and the absence of certainty. The problems that arise from navigating the affective, the aesthetic and the political in search of stable meaning certainly encourage the reader to consider the ideology of her own reading and her desire for clarity and distinction.

### III. The intolerable in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is by far the most passionate of Rhys's novels and it also refutes this expectation of clear meaning in many ways. The text is full of fury and hatred, but there is also an important thematic key composed of minor affects, among the foremost of which is contempt: the contempt felt by both the husband and Mr Mason for the black islanders is central to the narrative; and Christophine's contempt for Daniel, Amélie and the husband is a vital balancing principle which energises the text's vision of human cruelty and softens the blow of Antoinette's extreme passivity in the novel's second half. Antoinette has a powerful, longing attachment to her home, and there is an early reciprocal, life-affirming passion between her and her husband which makes her 'happy' and 'want to live', and which is absent in the other novels (*WSS*, 77). With brilliant economy, Rhys sketches the passionate physical attraction that the newly married couple share:

'Die then! Die!' I watched her die many times. In my way, not in hers. In sunlight, in shadow, by moonlight, by candlelight. In the long afternoons when the house was empty. Only the sun was there to keep us company. We shut him out. And why not? Very soon she was as eager for what's called loving as I was – more lost and drowned afterwards. (*WSS*, 77)

The husband's unruly desire for Antoinette becomes painful once he finds an excuse to hate her, and he becomes increasingly tormented by the 'giddy change', the 'sickening swing' between 'mad conflicting emotions': from hatred to the desire to

dominate, to his sense of powerlessness and loss, to remorse, temptation and sexual longing (*WSS*, 139, 141). The husband is the most dramatic locus of intelligible affect in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and he tracks the flux of his feeling with an almost-admirable honesty, acknowledging even at the height of his hatred that he is driven by resentment and longing: ‘Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it’ (141).

The husband is unable openly to acknowledge the identity of this lost object. Of course, he desires the secret *of* Antoinette. He wants the ‘alien, disturbing, secret loveliness’ that she ‘hides’ – phrases which suggest his aim of capturing her spirit, controlling her desire, dominating her completely (*WSS*, 73). Yet this ‘secret loveliness’ is the husband’s description of the tropical environment that so troubles him – the land that morphs in his perceptions from being ‘too much’ (59) to being clearly ‘hostile’, ‘threatening’ a ‘green menace’ (123). The lost object, then, appears to be some knowledge Antoinette could have conferred upon her husband concerning the landscape and her ‘secret’ ability to not just survive in this mysterious, overwhelming and threatening place but to profit spiritually from it, loving it ‘[m]ore than a person’ despite her awareness, which she discloses to him, that

It is not for you and not for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else. I found that out long ago when I was a child. I loved it because I had nothing else to love, but it is indifferent as this God you call on so often. (*WSS*, 74, 107)

Antoinette’s secret is her ability to tolerate that which is indifferent to her, and this is precisely that which the husband cannot bear. He can tolerate the landscape’s hostile indifference no more than he can bear the thought that Antoinette is indifferent to him and her passion indiscriminate:

Sneer to the last, Devil. Do you think that I don’t know? She thirsts for anyone – not for me...

She’ll loosen her black hair, and laugh and coax and flatter (a mad girl. She’ll not care who she’s loving.) She’ll moan and cry and give herself as no

sane woman would – or could. *Or could*. Then lie so still, still as this cloudy day. A lunatic who always knows the time. But never does.

[...]

I tell you she loves no one, anyone. I could not touch her. Excepting as the hurricane will touch that tree – and break it.

[...]

She said she loved this place. This is the last she'll see of it. (*WSS*, 135-36)

In this important passage the husband conjures up Antoinette's 'madness' as her passion which entirely exceeds him. Her madness is her lunatic expression of erotic joy that is so different from his, her lunatic refusal that this joy be a response secured only by him, and the lunacy of her joy in a place whose indifference to her only magnifies what he perceives to be the indifference of her passion for him and his general lack of control on the island and in their marriage.

The dynamic between indifference and the intolerable that intensifies as Part Two progresses is potent and viciously ironic. Antoinette's ability to exist in a relationship with that which is indifferent to her becomes the focus of the husband's rising inability to tolerate his lack of control. Rhys's fiction generally explores the experience of the marginalised who do not have control, and in her final novel Antoinette's accepting and measured response to this environmental situation delineates the husband's increasingly giddy attempt to reassert himself as a form of behaviour more akin to lunacy than is hers.

Although Antoinette's acceptance of her lack of control in relation to the island seems appropriate it has, of course, an important alternative and disturbing manifestation in her acceptance of her fate more generally. Her refusal to try to save herself in her dream signals her inability to 'have spunks and do battle' for herself, as Christophine advises (*WSS*, 96). Antoinette is aware of the crooked marriage deal that will disinherit her, but does nothing about it; she is completely unable to follow any of Christophine's advice, despite seeking her help, and the resistance Antoinette offers to her husband once he has betrayed their marriage is exactly the self-destructive, unrestrained and violent behaviour that will allow him to declare her mad. Finally, she offers no active resistance to being taken from Granbois. Antoinette's refusal or inability to save herself is a version of the passivity that we find in all Rhys's

protagonists. It is also, like Melville's *Bartleby*, a preference not to act to save herself and, like the Scrivener's behaviour and like other ugly feelings, it is emotionally illegible, intentionally weak and politically ambiguous. It is hard to know how to read Antoinette's failure to attend to herself in the sense of acting in response to the peril she is in, but following Ngai and our schizoanalytic method, rather than mining her psychology or masochism we should ask: what situation does this failure or 'disattendability' – as Ngai describes it, following William Ian Miller (1997) – indicate or diagnose? My suggestion is that Antoinette's disattendability, her preference to not attend to and resist the danger that threatens her, is an ugly feeling which 'render[s] visible different registers of [the] problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical)' of the intolerable (Ngai 2005: 3). That is, Antoinette's passivity makes visible problems of disgust.

In the 'Afterword' to *Ugly Feelings* Ngai explores disgust – an affect which, though not minor, is politically interesting for several reasons and has generally been overlooked for its opposite, desire, in literary and cultural studies. Disgust is the response we exhibit towards the intolerable. It is a phobic striving away from the disgusting which nevertheless is sometimes paradoxically close to desire as we focus on or even obsess about how to manage our feelings towards the intolerable object. There are several key scenes in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in which the husband feels disgust. On Daniel's insistence that Antoinette 'talks sweet talk and she lies', the husband listens to the 'black and gilt clock strike' and feels he 'must go. [He] must get away from [Daniel's] yellow sweating face and his hateful little room' (*WSS*, 103). The description of the clock underscores the racialised nature of the husband's disgust at the proximity of this 'yellow'-faced man who is related to his wife, and from whom he will shortly hear of her promiscuity with her mixed-race half-brother. When Daniel finally gets around to his direct attempt to extort money, the husband's disgust returns: 'Now disgust was rising in me like sickness. Disgust and rage' (104). He leaves Daniel's house and perceives the 'world' suddenly 'given up to heat and flies' (104). His response to the island frequently verges on disgust at that which is 'too much' to tolerate, an exorbitance which, after Daniel's poisonous words, gives rise to the thought that 'in this damned place' it is 'probable' that Antoinette and Amélie are related (105). That same night, Antoinette gives him the love potion and in the early morning the husband wakes with a 'feeling of suffocation. Something was lying across [his] mouth; hair with a sweet heavy smell' (113). The emphatic orality gives his physical nausea

provoked by the drink a double in his rising disgust at having had passionate sex with Antoinette given his fresh ‘knowledge’ of the intolerable crimes of miscegenation, incest and the lie of her bridal virginity. Too ‘giddy to stand’, the husband falls

backwards on to the bed, looking at the blanket which was a peculiar shade of yellow. After looking at it for some time I was able to go over to the window and vomit. It seemed like hours before this stopped. I would lean up against the wall and wipe my face, then the retching and sickness would start again. (*WSS*, 114)

Obviously legible as the husband’s physical reaction to a noxious intoxicant, this scene of vomiting also encodes a potent racial disgust – the yellow of the blanket recalling Daniel’s appearance – at being too proximate to a poisonous, contaminating, exorbitant otherness. Antoinette’s ‘dark alien eyes’ which are ‘too large’ have, since early in their marriage, disclosed to the husband her suspicious blood-line – ‘Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either’ (*WSS*, 56) – but Daniel’s accusations of inter-racial incest, Annette’s madness and promiscuity, and Christophine’s ‘evil’ practice of Obeah overdetermine an entirely excessive alien otherness that cannot be tolerated. Literally unable to swallow his disgust at the increasing otherness which, as he sees it, has penetrated him against his will, the husband manages his powerlessness by committing to hatred and to indulging all suspicion, however wild: ‘As I watched, hating, her face grew smooth and very young again, she even seemed to smile. A trick of the light perhaps. What else?’ (114). The husband manages his disgust at and fear of Antoinette’s otherness with hatred and negative fantasy, just as racists and other fascists have done throughout history.

Ngai emphasises the use to which disgust has been put by intolerant ideologies, observing that this affect has been the object of a ‘spectacular appropriation by the political right’ which has rendered it ‘a means of reinforcing the boundaries between self and “contaminating” others that has perpetuated racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and misogyny’ (2005: 338-39). This use may, Ngai speculates, be the reason for the asymmetry in the attention given to desire and disgust, with the former utilised in all sorts of cultural studies aiming at tolerance and pluralism, but the latter rarely put to work in leftist agendas. The husband’s disgust at Antoinette’s contaminating otherness is plausibly read as Rhys’s means of writing back to the

painful history of the supposedly disgusting Bertha, that intolerable construct of monstrous, unknowable female otherness in *Jane Eyre* that Brontë locks away out of sight like a dangerous animal. Rhys shows the moment when Antoinette/Bertha *becomes* disgusting for the husband, in an insistence that this attribute is in no way innate but constructed and externally imposed. The disgusting, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, and the fascistic gaze is always likely to find difference disgusting when given the chance. The husband's attempt to 'know' the island is epistemologically inappropriate, and his inability to tolerate exorbitant otherness and his resulting disgust are entirely unoriginal. Yet *Wide Sargasso Sea* is, I think, doing something more nuanced with disgust.

In a complex Marxist-inspired argument, only a few key points of which can be indicated here, Ngai makes a convincing case that the left should not necessarily suppress its own disgust at that which is intolerable, such as existing class structures and expressions of bigotry, and it should also beware the fact that disgust is amoral and therefore 'inevitably prone to uglification by moralists' (Ngai 2005: 339-40). Drawing on Herbert Marcuse's work (1965), Ngai argues that we might mobilise disgust against the repressive tolerance which enables the perpetuation of the existing order of things. This would entail a critique of the political state's pluralism which can serve to drown out the radical potential of forms of dissent that utilise an idiom 'defined by [the] vehement exclusion of the intolerable' (Ngai 2005: 344):

The hegemonic pluralism of both the academy and the larger society is (as [Ellen] Rooney argues) a mode of 'seductive reasoning' that conscripts the appealing rhetoric of inclusivity to *exclude critical discourses of exclusion* – in particular, those which take 'the process of exclusion to be necessary to the production of meaning or community'. (Rooney 1989: 27, in Ngai 2005: 343-44)

This is not an argument against tolerance, but against the rhetoric that uses 'consensus' as a means of positioning dissent as totalitarian or – more common in today's language – extreme. It is also an argument against what Ngai sees as the negative border of tolerance: contempt – that state of tolerating an object because one 'assumes [that] object to be relatively unthreatening, only mildly offensive if offensive at all' (2005: 345). Contempt maintains the object's social 'disattendability': the contemptible

subject remains she who can be overlooked (Ngai 2005: 337). The ‘unsettling proximity’ between contempt and ‘benign tolerance’ is ‘disclosed precisely through the [Lawyer’s] managerial suppression of disgust in Melville’s story’ (Ngai 2005: 337). If Bartleby’s self-disattendability, which takes the form of his preference not to work, eat or survive, is politically ambiguous it is so because we cannot know for sure whether the story depicts an overcoming of his initial social invisibility through his extreme disattendability which makes him insistently visible and in doing so provokes the lawyer’s disgust, or whether it shows this initial invisibility consuming him, becoming internalised so he can prefer nothing in relation to himself. On a third reading, Bartleby’s extreme passivity diminishes his inoffensiveness, rendering him more visible, but not to the conversion point where he becomes a threat. On this view his quiet demise in prison is a complete failure of the objectionable to make itself felt. For Ngai, Bartleby extends his disattendability to disclose the limits of the ‘social inattention’ that practises contemptuous tolerance of that which is deemed offensive but unthreateningly insignificant and the agency of which is thereby diminished.

This is a striking set of arguments for our analysis of Rhys’s protagonists who make themselves visible in a difficult way. Sasha’s tears on the opening page of *Good Morning, Midnight* are a note to the reader that this character will not behave as she ought. Julia acquiesces to being picked up by strange men, but she is too old to be doing so and provokes from one potential ‘suitor’ a gasp of disapproval (*ALMM*, 135). On her weekend break with Walter, Vincent and the latter’s girlfriend, Anna is not content to be patronisingly excluded from their discussion concerning her immaturity and she stubs her cigarette violently onto Walter’s hand in an act that reveals her lack of self-restraint and emotional immaturity but which also utterly refuses the bourgeois, male determination of acceptable female behaviour. In general, the unmarried, unaccompanied presence of these imbibing women in public spaces is, the texts suggest, an affront. They refuse to be categorised as either wife/girlfriend or prostitute, they have no friends, and they insist on their active sexuality, thereby defying the various public positions open to women. In an exception, it is Antoinette’s presence in private that is problematic, but her Creole appearance and her willingness to be initiated into a fevered sexuality serve to make her visibly problematic for the husband.

Encounters in Rhys’s fiction are mostly violent, as her protagonists are met by hostility which manages their difference, forcing their recontainment in socially sanctioned female positions. The exemplary form of this management recurs in Rhys’s

first, third and fourth novels, in encounters which confer upon the protagonists the assignation of undesirable sadness: ‘Pourquoi êtes-vous si triste?’, ask the two Russians in *Good Morning, Midnight* (39), the same question that is posed by strangers to Marya in *Quartet* (118). In *Voyage in the Dark*, the question is voiced accusingly in the negative and in English by Anna in reply to Walter’s patronising attempt to comfort her after they have sex for the first time: ‘I’m not sad. Why have you got this sappy idea that I’m always sad?’ (*ViD*, 33). The ‘sadness’ that is assigned or ‘fixed’ to the protagonists has a negative value – it is an aberration from the norm (the happy woman with a man) and therefore something that must be remarked upon. It is imposed on the woman as a mark of the female melancholy that, whether or not she feels it, is the socially appropriate response to being visibly single and no longer young, assigning a negative value to her unaccompanied female presence which is an implicit challenge to patriarchal society, recapturing her within the male gaze and realigning power in favour of the city’s male and married population. It is not necessary that the men are conscious of this intent. They may intend only to flirt, but this language of flirtation is determined by the language of the dominant order. The Russians’ question causes Sasha’s thoughts to spiral out of control in a series of clichéd images of sadness which concludes in a reductive refrain, ‘sad as a woman who is growing old. Sad, sad, sad... Or perhaps if I just said “merde” it would do as well’ (*GMM*, 39). Sasha ‘internalises’ the sadness the men have imposed upon her; the expletive suggests the violence of the imposition, and her resulting muteness (they ‘walk along in silence’) expresses the sense of inferiority that their words have produced. In these moments when the protagonists’ bodies and negative affects are the focus of disapprobation, Rhys reveals the extent to which negativity is not natural or essential but produced discursively in a contemptuous management aimed at re-establishing their disattendability, or relative inoffensiveness. These women’s passivity – which is also a self-disattendability – serves to make them persistently visible at times, but they don’t have a dog’s chance against the regime of social contempt that awaits those like them; and the performative function of negative naming rapidly assigns to them the appropriate synthetic affect and in doing so diminishes their agency and re-establishes their sense of inferiority and powerlessness. Interestingly, the main examples in Rhys’s first four novels of a character responding to the protagonist with disgust are Lois in *Quartet* and Norah in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. The contemptuous enforcement of another’s



disattendability seems to be practised best by men. They seem better able to manage ‘disgusting’ others than women.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is dramatically different from the earlier novels in this respect: Antoinette manages to convert her irritating presence into a fully-fledged embodiment of the disgusting. Her success is politically ambiguous, like *Bartleby’s*, but the excess of this conversion, its overdetermined nature works, I think, to hold up a mirror to the husband’s violent, imperialist uglification of otherness, forcing him to confront his own ugly inability to manage Antoinette if not his own moral inadequacies. As importantly, her conversion is Antoinette’s means of overcoming her self-disattendability, her own bewildering passivity. In seeking out a love potion, administering it and thereby becoming-disgusting Antoinette claims agency. We might even follow Ngai here, and understand Rhys to be putting forward an argument for the aesthetically intolerable as that which might just effect change in a way in which the beautiful text cannot. Antoinette’s becoming-disgusting and all the other problematic or intolerable elements of the novel which have made themselves so vividly felt in the postcolonial criticism might, I think, be read as Rhys’s provocation to the pluralist aesthetic tolerance of a more or less friendly literary market in which ‘the radical impact of art, the protest of art against the established reality is swallowed up’ (Marcuse 1965: 88-89). Of course, it is Christophine’s assistance that enables Antoinette to claim this agency, as the ex-servant provides the unspecified love potion. Christophine allows Antoinette’s radical becoming-disgusting, which makes it all the more fitting that she has been a primary focus of debate which has centred on whether or not the text can ‘contain’ her. She is the means to Antoinette’s exorbitance, and the problem of the status of both Rhys and the text in relation to Christophine remains an exorbitant one that, in our inability conclusively to define the text’s political allegiance, we might even describe as intolerable.

As discussed in Chapter One, the character of Christophine greatly muddies the always-complicated undercurrents of this deeply political novel. In the opening lines Antoinette cites Christophine’s explanation of the white ladies’ hostility to Annette and this plunges us immediately into an impossibly complex relationship. Christophine’s status is unclear. She is a servant and cook to mother and daughter, and nursemaid to the latter. Given as a marriage ‘gift’ to Annette by her husband, after his death and Emancipation Christophine has become integral to the survival of these women, as Annette explains: ‘I dare say we would have died if she’d turned against us’ (*WSS*, 19).

Antoinette's relationship to Christophine is a heady mixture of childish dependence on a mother substitute, love for a loyal companion, admiration, fear, prideful entitlement and colonial superiority, and the power dynamic between nursemaid and charge is in flux. Sometimes the Antoinette-Christophine relationship appears exploitative and mostly determined by the white Creole girl who cannot comprehend Christophine as a free and equal agent, being capable only of seeing her as someone who exists to serve in unthinking loyalty. This is a troubling depiction of a profoundly complex inter-racial, inter-generational relationship forged in a climate of endless permutations of racial and xenophobic hostility and set against the backdrop of the disintegration and reformation of social structures that followed the Emancipation Act. Though difficult, their relationship nevertheless appears as a moving riposte to the principle of us-against-them that is made possible by Christophine's capacity for loving wisdom. Christophine is endowed with strength, courage and insight missing in all other characters including both Cosway women, and she has an exceptional ability to know things. This contrast is not unproblematic.

In Part One Christophine tells Annette that she is 'crazy in truth' expecting 'clean dress' for Antoinette 'to drop from heaven', stating 'loudly that it shameful. She run wild, she grow up worthless. And nobody care' (22). Christophine accurately identifies Annette's shameful incapacity to be a good mother to Antoinette, but also the 'shame' that Annette feels at being poor which Antoinette internalises, feeling that her mother is 'ashamed' of her and therefore unable to 'speak to' or 'look at' her (23). Similarly, Christophine offers the novel's most accurate and damning analysis of the Emancipation Act, describing the English language and the law as the weapons of the 'cunning' oppressor who has replaced slavery with other forms of violence now concealed beneath the coded veneer of a 'civil' system:

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

Christophine's patois illustrates the new order as a coded chain (represented in the series of similar short clauses) that leads the black community inexorably by the 'Letter of the Law' from which they are excluded, through the legal system to fiscal and then

bodily punishment. Her analysis is vindicated when the husband threatens to have her arrested if she tries to influence Antoinette further. In a series of letters exchanged by the husband, Mr Fraser, the Spanish Town magistrate, and Mr Hill, ‘the white inspector of police’ in the local town, the men hatch a plan to deal with Christophine if she ‘gets up to any of her [Obeah] nonsense’ (*WSS*, 118). Christophine understands the force of their threat of ‘send[ing] a couple of policemen up to [her] place’ (132), and knows she cannot defend herself against their authority which proceeds from an infallible machine of racism, misogyny, legislation and written English, in relation to which she is absolutely powerless. So she leaves: “‘Read and write I don’t know. Other things I know.’” She walked away without looking back’ (133). This is the last we see of Christophine, and the departure is contrasted with Annette’s inability in Part One to remove her family from Coulibri when she knows they are in danger. Christophine effectively organises her life: she chooses with whom she lives, and she leaves when she knows her current situation is unproductive or dangerous (84, 133).

From Christophine’s first meeting with the husband she demonstrates her intimidating intractability:

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, gave Antoinette a little push forward and disappeared into the shadows at the back of the house. (*WSS*, 61)

Christophine’s self-assertion is matched by her composed, generally unemotional demeanour. At most she offers disdain for the dishonourable fiscal motivations of men and the occasional gesture of disgust. In the important conversation between the husband and Christophine in Part Two she confidently stands her ground, speaks in a ‘judge’s voice’, ‘indifferently’ and ‘steadily’ (126, 129, 130). The husband’s composure is as unsteady as his voice which is interrupted by Christophine’s words ‘echo[ing] loudly in [his] head’ (126). He feels ‘hypnotised’ and experiences ‘pang[s] of rage and jealousy’ (130-31), and this is met with Christophine’s unemotional, resolute ability to ‘know’, which reaches its pinnacle in this conversation: she repeats the word twenty times in this passage alone.

Christophine provides balance to the scheming black and mixed-race characters, yet her admirable qualities are not unproblematic. Christophine seems

immune to the negative effects of isolation, choosing to keep the neighbourhood women at arm's length, and she is depicted as having few needs and pride at her lack of dependency. One effect of this idealisation is to render her strength dangerously close to a stereotype of exotic, unknowable female black power. Depending on one's view, Rhys either worsened or merely aired this problem by expressing her worry to Athill that she had made Christophine 'too articulate' – a statement which has given rise to much debate (*Letters*, 297). Christophine is unusually articulate in the sense that she is the only character capable of making insightful judgements of situations. Rather than this being a function of Rhys's problematic depiction of a black woman, I propose that Christophine's talent as an articulate diagnostician works with her lack of affect and her ability to walk away from oppressive situations to suggest Christophine's proximity to the author. The devastating truth of the husband's motivation is revealed by this isolated black woman who has that which Rhys shared – an irrepressible capacity to see and 'know' the violence to which humanity tends, which motors the various systems that determine the plight of the oppressed. Christophine knows the husband's intentions:

You want her money but you don't want her. It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. I know it. The doctors say what you tell them to say [...] She will be like her mother. You do that for money? But you wicked like Satan self. (*WSS*, 132)

She also articulates the fact that Annette was 'drive[n]' to madness, and offers an accurate summation of Antoinette's masochistic love for the husband even after his betrayal which is in stark contrast to his extremely limited capacity for love (129). It is Christophine who voices the anxiety-laden Rhysian facts that we frequently desire against our interests, that we desire to dominate others and to enter into bad compositions with other bodies.

Christophine is not, on my reading, too articulate. Her analysis provides the text's vitality at this point in Antoinette's decline. Instead, our last vision of her through the husband's eyes signals a reason why Christophine is just articulate enough. The husband observes 'a mask on her face and her eyes were undaunted. She was a fighter' (*WSS*, 133). There are no other female fighters in Rhys's novels, and even though we might allow that this is the husband's sexist assessment of a woman's strength relative to the female compliance he expects, it is hard not to acknowledge that his second

description is accurate. Nowhere else in her fiction is Rhys interested in speaking for fighters, and given Christophine's 'mask'-like strength, her exceptional diagnostic ability and minimal affective register, we might reasonably conclude that Rhys was not interested in doing so in *Wide Sargasso Sea* either. While Christophine speaks for Annette and Antoinette, drawing on insight comparable to her author's, we can, I think, conclude that Rhys did not presume to speak for Christophine. I am suggesting that Rhys's interest was in writing for those for whom she could presume to speak, and that in her understanding this group was not lacking a voice but lacking certainty and specifically a boundary between their inner and outer worlds. These are the effects and manifestations of what Ramchand, following Fanon in his 1961 book *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les damnés de la terre*), describes as the 'terrified consciousness' of the white Creole community after Emancipation (Ramchand 1970: 225).

In Christophine's opening description of the Jamaican white women's prejudice against Annette's Creole identity it is significant that the hostility is aimed at Annette's good looks: 'The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, "because she pretty like pretty self" Christophine said' (*WSS*, 15). Christophine's role as interpreter underscores the absence of the mother, whose reclusiveness and alienation from her daughter has been caused by this disapproval. This absence is foregrounded by Christophine's patois which omits the verb 'to be', the suffix from 'pretty', and substitutes 'self' for the reflexive pronoun 'itself'. While Rhys's phrasing suggests itself as an authentic representation of a form of black Jamaican language, the phrase also suggests alienation and difference and, significantly, the absence of a definite subject. There is a mirror image around the word 'like' which suggests that the ladies' gossiping emphasis on Annette's appearance somehow ontologically precedes and excludes Annette herself. Annette's distance in and then absence from the text suggests the self-concealment, the averted gaze, of the ashamed subject. At first able to maintain a show of pride, Annette '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)'; but shame has a corrosive effect and combines readily with other negative affects, and after her disabled son is abandoned (or condemned) by the doctor she 'changed. Suddenly, not gradually. She grew thin and silent, and at last she refused to leave the house at all' (16). In the five years before her second marriage, we are told, the proud Annette became increasingly ashamed of her poverty, but the poverty was a form of protection from the black people who 'did

not hate them' because they 'had not escaped and soon [they] would be dead' for they 'had no money left' (29). Poverty is a mark of her social exclusion, a reason for her son's decline and her reclusiveness and distance from her daughter, the reason for her on-going existence which she decries (death 'would have been a better fate' (19)) and a slow path to death. This opening description suggests the ashamed subject's inability to assert her existence and to maintain her sense of self by distinguishing between the subjective and objective components of her shame.

Verbal violence and the consequent feeling of shame is shown to create a similar sense of evacuation when Antoinette is called 'white cockroach' by Amélie, an echo of Tia's earlier taunt that '[o]ld time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger' (*WSS*, 21). Antoinette tells her husband about Amélie's song

about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all. (*WSS*, 85)

In this disquieting passage Amélie's anti-white hostility causes Antoinette's speech to become soaked in racism, including her own and that of other white Creoles towards blacks, but also the hostility aimed at white Creoles by other groups. There is palpable hatred in these lines, coming from multiple points, effectively illustrating the tangle of racial politics with which the book deals. Its cumulative effect is to displace the facts of Antoinette's identity, replacing them with impotent questions with neither question marks nor answers. The emphasis on place in this passage is important: Antoinette is moved into a state of not knowing in the world, in relation to people and places. Facts are at a remove, as Antoinette herself will be removed from the island. This 'not knowing' is the disorientation analysed by John Su (2015) and Bill Schwarz (2003) among others, and an effect of the general unhomely condition particular to the West Indies in which 'almost everyone [...] has come, or their ancestors have come, from elsewhere. No one is wholly at home' (Carr 2003b: 97). But this absence of certainty is also shame, that 'fundamental affect of reflective knowing-about-oneself, of self-perception, from the standpoint of the others, or the public' (Fuchs 2003: 229).

Amélie's insult creates in Antoinette shame concerning her social and historical positionality and epidermal difference, and this manifests as the displacement of self-knowledge, mirroring the impossible position of the white Creole after Emancipation. In stark contrast to Christophine's unemotional, fighting nature, shame dominates the Cosway women, affecting Annette's ability to move from her house, and Antoinette's ability to be certain about her history and – it seems – to resist her fate. Attending to the text's emphasis on these women's lonely vulnerability, we might see the 'ranks' which Annette and Antoinette increasingly lack as potentially providing some sort of epidermal assurance against the violent over-exposure experienced by mother and daughter. Of course, it is not isolation in an experiential, quantifiable sense that is most damaging for the Cosway women. The situation is highly complex, but to some degree theirs is the shameful isolation of the 'terrified' colonisers, a metaphysical loneliness, stemming from the knowledge that the action in which they and their ancestors have been involved renders them outside the possibility of community.

Moran has recently addressed the relationship between shame and rage, in an argument that identifies a potential in various negative feelings in Rhys's writing. Earlier studies have argued that negative affect in Rhys's work is indirectly subversive to the extent that it exposes the oppressive power structures that determine the protagonists' unhappiness, but Moran argues that the insistence on negativity constitutes direct resistance. Of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, she writes,

Julia may end the novel in a state of cold indifference to suffering that signals her broken and cringing spirit, but the novel itself, in its relentless gaze at the oppressive codes that disallow shame and rage as valid responses to disenfranchisement, basilisk-like forces us to share its fierce and unmitigated desire to annihilate those who would enforce – because they benefit by – such codes. The ending of the novel points forward to *Good Morning, Midnight* in a manner that suggests Rhys's commitment to the creative potential inherent in rage as a weapon against social and cultural shaming. (Moran 2015: 203)

In Rhys's work, Moran contends, shame is frequently sublimated into the less fraught affects of rage and melancholy. But all of these can be shared among acquaintances, and in *Good Morning, Midnight*, in certain 'transformational encounters' – Sasha's friendship with Serge, her response to his paintings of unhappy figures, and her

embrace of the commis – Sasha dares ‘to share the shame of the afflicted’ and is thereby ‘momentarily releas[ed] from her tormented self-imprisoning consciousness’ (Moran 2015: 204). This is mirrored in the communality forged by the creative text itself, and Moran concludes that, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys brought her ‘creative rage to bear on the canonical English literature that excluded, pathologised and marginalised the lives and stories of colonials like herself’ (2015: 205). If Julia’s fate is an insistence on the visibility of a reasonable negative response to oppressive systems which aim to delegitimise such responses, Serge’s art and Rhys’s last two novels testify to the fact that negative affects ‘can forge a profoundly human connection’ (Moran 2015: 204) – a point similar to my reading in Chapter Four of the Van Gogh allusions in *Good Morning, Midnight*. In this fiction negative affect can have a collective function, as well as considerable aesthetic value.

There is a comparable collective function in the last novel as, I contend, Rhys’s search for communality finally comes to a close, but I think the Cosway women’s shame in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is significant for not being shared. This search is riddled by anxiety, and this is, I propose, Rhys’s global affect. The tense relationship between Christophine and the shameful Cosway women is a prime occasion for this anxiety. There is no easy way to read the uncomfortable contrast between the vulnerable, porously shame-filled white Creole women and the stoic, unemotional black women who successfully patrols her borders, organises her encounters and knows like her author. I think that we can see this readerly difficulty as the point itself and, rather than interpreting or solving this bond, we can read it as the nexus of Rhys’s insistence that a meaningful ‘human connection’ among characters and among readers is not a given but, as deCaires Narain argues, must be worked for. Although the text can be the site at which connections are formed, it can also be the occasion of reminding us that the absence of communality is a major part of our world today. On my reading the Christophine problem should not be ‘solved’.

#### **IV. Sad and joyful passions**

Anxiety is involved in Rhys’s search for communality and, as I argue in subsequent chapters, involves a self-overcoming. If we take a Spinozist approach and read Rhysian passivity in economic terms – as a matter of the varying diminution of a force of



existing – we might understand anxiety in this fiction as a sort of objective correlative for this affective movement – as one manifestation of the continuous flux of being.

As Spinoza laid out in his *Ethics* (1677), affects increase or decrease our power to act and to perceive, and accord to an economic logic of action in which what agrees with human nature is joyful because it increases our powers of acting and perceiving, and that which is sad makes us most alienated from these powers (Spinoza 1994: 154).<sup>37</sup> Spinoza's passions are those affects which limit these powers; they diminish the body's 'force of existing' (Spinoza 1994: 197). In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Deleuze reworks Spinoza's distinction between affection (*affectio*) and affect (*affectus*), often rendered into capacity and force respectively. He establishes affect as the continuous variation of one's force of existing: 'passages, becomings, rises and falls, continuous variations of power [*puissance*] that pass from one state to another' (Deleuze 1997: 139). In contrast, the affections are our capacity to be affected at any moment, and this capacity is determined by our body, mind, environment and choices; it is revealed in all our encounters (Deleuze 1988: 27). For Deleuze, it is our encounters that involve 'actions, which are explained by the nature of the affected individual, and spring from the individual's essence; and passions, which are explained by something else, and originate outside the individual' (Deleuze 1988: 27).

Passions are not uniform but exist on a scale of proximity to real action. Joyful passions 'fill our capacity to be affected' (Deleuze 1988: 27) and are those in which the power of another body is in agreement with, and therefore added, to our power. Because we are still separate from our power to act and perceive, the power that we possess is still only a formal power; yet, proportionally, it is increased and we are moved closer to the 'conversion point' of actual joyful action (Deleuze 1988: 27). Sad passions, conversely, move us further away from joyful action and are those we experience when we encounter a body which does not agree with our own, whose 'relation does not enter into composition with ours' (Deleuze 1988: 27). Sad passions 'represent the lowest degree of our power of acting, when we are most alienated,

<sup>37</sup> Describing the textual history of the *Ethics*, Edwin Curley writes that this book is 'not only Spinoza's masterwork, it is also his life's work': Spinoza worked on its preparation for well over a decade, from the early 1660s onwards; the philosopher died in February 1677 and the text was finally published in Amsterdam a few months later, written in Latin and Hebrew, entitled *Ethica, Ordine Geometrico demonstrata*, and included alongside a number of other unfinished works in *B. d. S. Opera Posthuma* (*Posthumous Works*) (Curley, in Spinoza 1994: xx-xxi).

delivered over to the phantoms of superstition, to the mystifications of the tyrant...The sad passions always amount to impotence' (Deleuze 1988: 28).

The shared Latin root of passivity and passion is *passio*, which means to be moved or to suffer, and this perhaps gives us ground for thinking about passivity in Rhys's fiction as a form of Deleuzian passion – as the occasion of encounters which are not determined by the individual. Such a theorisation is useful as it helps us to distinguish between different passivities in the narratives. When Antoinette asks her husband 'Why did you make me want to live?', and explains that happiness 'makes [her] afraid' she is, I propose, articulating passivity as a joyful passion. In her impassioned speech which follows, there is a deathly refusal of actual joyful action, but an equal and opposite refusal to relinquish its possibility and proximity: 'If I could die. Now, when I am happy. Would you do that? You wouldn't have to kill me. Say die and I will die. You don't believe me? Then try, try, say die and watch me die' (*WSS*, 77). Antoinette finds a happy mode of living impossible, and she expresses a death wish here, invoking a simultaneous murder and suicide, but the enunciation of the order /wish for her death is, of course, also the embrace and fulfilment of the couple's sexual passion. It is the erotic insistence on *la petite mort* – orgasm and the woman's total submission to her husband in the sexual act. This death signals a profound passivity which nevertheless is the movement towards joyous, active self-making in Antoinette's embrace of her sexuality. In this novel, more than the other four, the sensation of the proximity of joyful action is palpable.

This is not least due to the force with which Antoinette's fate is described – the inevitability of the fact that she will end up as Bertha in Thornfield Hall, imprisoned in an attic until she finds a final means of escape. Antoinette's fate functions almost as a character in the novel, akin to a ghost or spectre. It makes its entrance three times in the form of Antoinette's dreams. Yet it doesn't just 'appear'; it is also that which, in a sense, accompanies or is part of the narration, somewhat like a chorus or even Nellie Dean in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), telling us how that which has already happened will happen. In this sense, as a virtual character, Antoinette's fate 'acts' on her, enticing her in her passivity (in her dreams) to accept her husband's route to the cold attic in England. Her fate fills her 'capacity to be affected' and is, in a sense, entirely in agreement with her power to act. The novel proceeds as Antoinette's haunting by her fate, her path of living that which is destined, as she moves ever closer to the conversion point of real action – the moment when she lights her match and creates her line of

flight, escaping her husband. Crucially, this conversion point has another aspect involving action which Brontë's Bertha has not already committed. This is Antoinette's new ability on the novel's final pages to look back to her West Indian home and to gesture to the possibility of a female communality which breaches racial divisions. This is precisely what *Jane Eyre* precludes. In Deleuze's Spinozist terms, we might describe the novel as a tragedy of joyful passions.

The concept of joyful passion can be used to unlock other key moments in the earlier novels. Sasha's embrace of the commis is clearly instigated by the man but, as I argue in Chapter Four, enables her to conjoin her resignation and faith in humankind and affirm everything, thereby moving her closer to action. As argued in Chapter Six, Anna's masochistic encounters with Walter initiate what will become a schizophrenic proliferation of connections in which she is enmeshed and which is, at least, not the cold, isolated passivity of her birth in England in the novel's opening pages. Clearly, though, sad passion (as a purely destructive passivity) also permeates Rhys's fiction. This is the deathly calm beneath the surface described by Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* as both an omnipresent threat and nihilistic solution. Sad passion is a form of psychic-bodily paralysis which occurs when the protagonists reach the limit point of their tolerance to suffering. Julia's descriptions in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* of being 'smashed up' and of having her back 'broken' by heartbreak convey the paralysis and self-alienation of sad passion, in which one is moved ever further from agency (*ALMM*, 38, 78). Yet we need not exercise moral judgement when we encounter these moments of weakness. Actions and passions are not good or evil, for Deleuze and Spinoza; they are simply good or bad as they increase or diminish our power to act – and, crucially, even then, consideration needs to be taken of something larger, perhaps something like one's 'subjective disposition' (Deleuze 1997: 119). This thesis attempts to rethink passivity in Rhys's fiction by focusing on the subjective disposition of her writing. This disposition encompasses a passionate denunciation of intolerance, a preference for intuitive and rhizomatic relationality and an acute attention to the politics and potential of feeling. This study maps the ebb and flow of action, certainty, desire and passion, looking at the various things that this movement does in her novels and – in the following chapters – it identifies concluding scenes of self-overcoming which involve an intense passage between states. The subjective disposition of Rhys's texts drives them towards a final dramatisation of something strikingly akin to Deleuze's understanding of affect as the continuous variation of one's force of existing.

Critics who bemoan the inability of Rhys's protagonists to act in ways which would prevent negative encounters might, perhaps, be overlooking the possibility that Rhys is interested in exploring life as a process of encounters. The mysterious conclusions of her novels raise questions concerning encounters, encouraging us to ask: what is Sasha feeling or becoming at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight*? What is happening as Julia enters her twilight in-between time at the end of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*? What is the tenor of life at the end of *Voyage in the Dark*? Where will the 'passage', the final word of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, lead (WSS, 156)? These endings give rise to a proliferation of various affects. Following Deleuze, though, I suggest that these conclusions can be read as the protagonists' becoming as they enter zones of indistinction and move from one affection into another. Rather than doing nothing, her protagonists' passivity is Rhys's means of conducting a subtle exploration of life as transformation. Yet this need not prevent us from asking if there is a discernible overall tenor of life in this process of change.

Johnson and Moran state that it is difficult to extract one dominant problematic feeling from the dense, sargassum-like tangle of negative affect in Rhys's fiction. This is presumably behind their respective arguments that Rhysian indifference is a form of death drive, and that shame and rage are often inextricable. This chapter has looked at disgust and shame and shied away from indifference, and has considered affect in its circulating, constituting, disruptive and economic guises. However, I contend that there is a low-level but potent anxiety that constitutes the global affect in Rhys's last four novels. Its most obvious manifestation is the acute anxiety surrounding the encounter with others in Rhys's fiction. This is thematised most explicitly in *Good Morning, Midnight*, in Sasha's need for armour when in public, but it is also a narrative principle in the other novels. In *Quartet*, Marya is plagued by the idea that the Anglo-Americans in Montparnasse are gossiping about her affair with Heidler and contrasting her immorality with Lois's bourgeois respectability. Julia is tremendously anxious about her return to her family, and although a melancholic anaesthesia drowns this anxiety out after her mother's death, it is transferred to Mr Horsfield, who feels a short-lived but intense anxiety about helping Julia. In *Voyage in the Dark* Rhys creates a textual anxiety surrounding the matter of Anna's fall into prostitution which remains active through to the end. It is impossible to say definitively that Anna has become a prostitute. She accepts money from men but never clearly requests it in exchange for sex. Anxiety runs throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, from the opening paragraphs in

which social allegiances and racial distinctions are so knottily problematised, to Antoinette's pre-wedding anxiety, to the gradual build-up of tension between the husband and Christophine, and Antoinette's anxiety-soaked dreams. In this last novel a major male character is finally allowed nearly a whole section to himself in which to voice his excessive anxiety, stemming from his inability to 'know' and therefore master his wife and her home.

This chapter and the last have attempted to demonstrate that there is a highly evident anxiety in Rhys criticism which matches this textual concern. This is evident in the debates concerning the endings of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Good Morning, Midnight*. It is most apparent in the questions hanging over Rhys's racial politics. This critical anxiety is more or less submerged, ranging from questions of how theoretical terms should be used when discussing Rhys's fiction, to the worry addressed in Chapter One concerning how we can place her work and account for competing concerns. It is, of course, evidenced in my study which is a somewhat anxious attempt to justify the rehabilitation of a highly risky term. I turn now to four different yet connected 'scenes' of anxiety in Rhys's novels (and I mean 'scenes' in a wide sense to signify important culminations towards which the texts work), across which we can trace problems concerning the protagonists' stance towards others, their complicity in their suffering and authorial agency. I turn first to an exploration of *Good Morning, Midnight*, a novel in which anxiety is not overcome but, on the contrary, develops into a style of failure.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **A world alone, 'late October, 1937': Rhys's impasse**

This chapter explores failure in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Its subjects are Sasha's non-conformity, the novel's community of outsiders and Sasha's individualism. The chapter concentrates on the various difficulties Sasha experiences which, I argue, are largely but not solely a result of the climate of her time, in the broad sense of the ethical temperature of the late 1930s in Europe. The analysis begins by focusing on the issue of conformity and the intolerance experienced by Sasha and the numerous other marginalised and dispossessed individuals who populate the novel. It then turns to Sasha's individualism, which is an intrinsic aspect of her self-destructive passivity and

which is read here as her most profound failure. The final section considers how this unsympathetic characteristic relates to the text's encounter with the failure of words and art – an encounter which is a distinction of much modernist literature. This is not a reading of the modernist credentials of Rhys's fourth novel as there is already plenty of excellent work on this subject. Instead, the concluding section offers some thoughts on how we might read failure in *Good Morning, Midnight* as its 'style' in the sense intended by Deleuze in his 'aesthetics' or – as the question of whether he does in fact develop an aesthetics has been contested – his writing on literature. Style, for Deleuze, is the means by which a writer pushes language to its limits. Significantly, the striking resonance between Deleuze's concept of style and modernist engagements with failure indicates Jean-Jacques Lecercle's proposition that Deleuze's approach to the art of language is, in an important sense, modernist (Lecercle 2010: 122-157). While establishing failure as Rhys's style in *Good Morning, Midnight*, this chapter therefore also aims to provide further ground for my claims that the temperament of Deleuze's thought is, in certain respects, close to that of Rhys's writing, and that his approach to modernist literature can profitably be used as a model for reading her difficult narratives.

### **I. Violent regimes, conformity and a 'communality of the excluded'**

Rhys's fourth novel is set in a Paris fraught with the danger, violence and paranoia that nationalist fascism engendered in Europe in the late 1930s. Threat and violence do not simply constitute the background to Sasha's ten day trip. They determine what she does and does not do, her attitude to every encounter and her feelings towards the fabric of the city itself. Accordingly, the opening lines depict Sasha's experience of her hotel room in terms of an aggressive challenge, and the city's housing, rather than signifying safe dwelling, is just another entity threatening to assault her:

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. Frowning and leering and sneering, the houses, one after another. (*GMM*, 28)

Sasha seems paranoid but, as Carr points out, the ‘paranoia [Rhys] evokes is not just [...] that of a “psychological type”, but of an epoch’ (2012: 53). The epoch in question saw the rise of fascism in Europe and beyond, and the systematic targeting of Jews and other groups who were perceived to be different. Sasha’s paranoia, anxiety and confusion are not just attributes of a damaged psyche. As Carr argues, to ‘read Rhys’s continental fiction as divorced from this political context is as mistaken as it would be to ignore the impact of colonialism in her Caribbean stories’ (2012: 55).

Rhys’s title indicates the importance of this political context, suggesting the threat of another world war which was widely sensed at the time in which the novel is set, ‘late October, 1937’ (*GMM*, 76). It also evokes the ethical vacuity of the conflicting ideologies of Stalinism and fascism, both of which gained insidious momentum from the mid-1930s. As I argue in the next chapter, this conflict is a ‘blind spot’ in this novel, made present but invisible in the ‘Exhibition’ which Sasha and René visit in Part Four.<sup>38</sup> The uncharacteristically specific dating of the action and Rhys’s placing of the characters at the Trocadéro (137) identifies the Exhibition as the ‘Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne’, the world fair which took place in Paris from 25 May to 25 November 1937. The Exposition was most notable for the fact that the Popular Front government headed by Léon Blum – who was, himself, Jewish – gave central stage to Germany and the Soviet Union and these nations produced monumental pavilions that stood, dwarfing all the others, opposite each other in an ominous architectural confrontation that foreshadowed the ideological conflicts of the Second World War. Rhys took a trip to Paris during the autumn of 1937 and while there visited the Jewish artist Simon Segal, a friend on whom the character of Serge is based.<sup>39</sup> Rhys’s treatment of the Exposition works with her characterisation of Serge and René to mark the textual concern with anti-Semitism.

The violence of which Sasha is acutely aware reflects the pervasiveness of the violence that infected Europe and beyond at this time. In Britain this was embodied by Oswald Mosley who, in 1932, founded the British Union of Fascists which engaged in increasingly brutal marches and propaganda throughout the decade. The Spanish Civil War, alluded to by René (*GMM*, 63), raged from 1936-1939. At the same time, Stalin’s

<sup>38</sup> See page 139.

<sup>39</sup> Segal wrote to Rhys in November 1937, expressing his hope that she likes his painting of a man with a banjo, and confirming that her payment of two hundred francs had been received. Segal signs the letter ‘votre ami’, just as Serge does in the novel (BL, MS RP 6206: 2 Oct 1996).

purge trials were conducted and the atrocities of the Nazi regime became increasingly visible. Although politics is not discussed directly by Rhys's characters, and Sasha ponders the 'rather strange' fact that the Russians 'sheer off politics' (41), many aspects of the text work together to suggest the fraught climate of Europe in the late 1930s. The novel's proliferation of marginalised immigrants signals the rapidly changing map of Europe between 1937 and 1939. The fragility of the bond between Serge and Sasha evokes the danger of anti-Semitism. Part Four, in which Sasha finally concedes to René's advances, suggests the absence of a stable alternative to violence: even the possibility of romance leads to a violent sexual assault. The novel conveys a pessimism, suggestive of that in Louis-Ferdinand Céline's 1932 novel, *Journey to the End of the Night* (*Voyage au bout de la nuit*), and at times Sasha seems on the verge of misanthropy.<sup>40</sup> However, Rhys attributes this to René instead, and imbues Sasha with an instinctive, trusting warmth towards Serge, thereby giving this novel its tenuous hope. Serge serves a crucial function in this text, being the single source of joy for Sasha in the present time of the novel.

Rhys's depiction in *Good Morning, Midnight* of the effects of fascistic intolerance on marginalised individuals is complex. Carr's analysis of this novel emphasises the connections Rhys makes between different forms of discrimination. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's theory of the ambivalent Jewish experience of assimilation, Carr observes that Rhys 'writes of women who, like the assimilated Jews [in Bauman's account], are unfailingly recognised as alien' (2012: 34). This is, I think, a central problematic in the novel. Sasha tries to conform, but as her 'futile efforts to convince waiters that she is *une femme convenable*' demonstrate, her attempts to fit in are 'doomed' (Carr 2012: 34). Sasha consequently recognises the futility of her efforts and rages against the demand for conformity. As was the case for Kafka in Bauman's analysis, the ambivalence of this position of difference for Sasha is paradoxical, bringing, as Carr writes, both 'impotence and insight' (2012: 34). On the one hand, in momentarily wanting to conform, this protagonist is a victim forced to play a losing hand. On the other, Sasha's awareness of her difference and her disdain for conformity are the conditions by which she 'could be among the first to see through the modern dream of uniformity, the first to shake free from the modern horror of difference, the

<sup>40</sup> The titles chosen by Rhys for her third and fourth novels seem almost too close to Céline's title for the similarity to be incidental. Carr posits that Rhys may have been writing back to this greatly admired and widely denounced French writer (2012: 91).



first to assault point-blank the modern religion of intolerance' (Bauman 1991: 156, in Carr 2012: 34-35). *Good Morning, Midnight* chronicles Sasha's vacillation between these positions of incisive observer and victim – it 'follows [her] swings between resistance and defeat' (Carr 2012: 35).

While this oscillation characterises all the protagonists in Rhys's novels, Sasha's is the most dramatic and it marks both her difference – her refusal and inability to conform and accept society's demands – and weakness.<sup>41</sup> It plays out metonymically in her relationship with René, whom she repeatedly rebuffs and accepts until he gains entry to her room and attacks her. This is Sasha's version of the costly and mostly unhappy precarity which characterises the Rhys woman's way of life, and which for Sasha, as for Marya, Anna and Antoinette, has a violent end. Rhys's protagonists are all Darwinian failures. They do not have the drive necessary to thrive and become nurturers; they play no part in a community. Instead, their passivity is a lack of social fitness that propels them into dangerous situations.

In a revealing letter of 1936, Rhys frankly admits her own Darwinian incapacity. 'For as a well trained social animal I'm certainly not the goods', Rhys writes, commencing an apologia in which she denies that being poorly adapted to the everyday 'battles' of social existence is proof of dysfunctionality (*Letters*, 30):

I admit that the properly adapted human being enjoys the battle, I even admit that it can be done charmingly wittily and with an air. [...] But I do not admit that because I am badly adapted to these encounters I'm therefore a mental deformity – I could fight in a big battle – or accept a great cruelty – or be cruel myself – but the little petty day by day snips and snaps – why should I be crazy if I say that I don't think it's worth it – that it takes something from one that is necessary to me – a certain how shall I say single mindedness. (*Letters*, 31)

Rhys's admission both involves a persuasive argument against conformity and indicates the acute problems that she experienced as a 'social animal'. Whether great or petty, the conflict and competition involved in social existence evidently detracted from something vital for Rhys and while this vital thing, which she hesitates to

<sup>41</sup> This attribute generally defines the protagonists of Rhys's short stories as well. There are notable exceptions, such as the stories 'Tigers Are Better-Looking' (1968) and 'Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers' (1976), both of which have male protagonists.

describe, may be the writer's ability to contemplate and compose in peace, this letter and her writing generally suggests that 'single mindedness' for Rhys meant the ability and the will to think for oneself. It is not simply that the pressure to conform requires a more or less significant expenditure of energy and the repression of individuality, nor just that it implicates one in dominant power structures. When, in the awareness of authorial statements such as this denunciation of social competition, we share Sasha's intense perception of social conflict and observe her vacillation and her unhappy story arc, the sense emerges that the need to conform and the effort to prove one's relative social superiority limit one's ability to be oneself and to be true to one's desires, feelings and instincts. These demands prevent one from thinking freely. While this is obviously an extreme proposition in general terms, in the context of European politics in the late 1930s we may perhaps understand this as an anti-fascist position in the broadest sense. Laura Frost makes a related point in her chapter on the political function of unpleasure in Patrick Hamilton and Rhys's fiction:

Even as Hamilton's and Rhys's narratives are unconstructive, noncathartic, and fiercely individualistic, their implicit critique of the consensus that they see as the basis of contemporary vernacular pleasure can be read as an argument against the political regimes whose enforced conformity gained frightening power in the mid- to late thirties. (Frost 2013: 206)

It is possible, then, to improve our understanding of this text by replacing an emphasis on Sasha's inability to appear well-adjusted with attention to the expression of Rhys's belief in the value of non-conformity and to the political relevance of this belief in the context of the novel's historical setting. Sasha's relative lack of respect for the norms of social behaviour is, I contend, one of the principal textual strategies by which Rhys affirms the value of individual difference in what Carr has described as 'one of the great anti-fascist novels of the thirties' (2012: 25).

Sasha's risky non-conformity is evident in her first encounter, a few short paragraphs into the novel, during which she is admonished for crying in public and thereby letting 'everybody see' how unhappy she is when the decorous thing to do is to conceal negative feeling (*GMM*, 10). Significantly, the tune that prompts Sasha's tears is called 'Gloomy Sunday', the title of a notoriously depressing song composed in 1933 by the Jewish Hungarian composer Rezső Seress which, by 1936, had caught

the attention of American producers who promoted it as the ‘Hungarian Suicide Song’, so-called for its supposed effect of causing listeners to take their own lives. Even if Rhys’s song title is an unintended allusion to this infamous piece, which seems unlikely, its name nevertheless suggests a depressing piece of music. The woman who disapproves of Sasha’s visible sadness giggles at the melancholy song; in contrast, Sasha’s tears are a far more natural, appropriate response to the music. As this early incident demonstrates, Sasha’s behaviour and the demands of the world of the novel are at odds.<sup>42</sup> To attempt to conform is to play society’s game, but the rules dictate that she will always lose and her presence will be increasingly unacceptable. In a crucial moment in Part Four, Sasha stalls in her application of make-up, and claims passivity as her response to this impossible situation:

Well, there I am, prancing about and smirking, and suddenly telling myself: ‘No, I won’t do a thing, not a thing. A little pride, a little dignity at the end, in the name of God. I won’t even put on the stockings I bought this afternoon. I won’t do a thing – not a thing. I will not grimace and posture before these people any longer. (*GMM*, 128)

Of course, Sasha immediately acts against her own decision and continues her preparations for meeting René, another individual before whom she must perform. She counts her little remaining money and decides on a safe amount to bring with her, enough to get her home ‘in case [they] quarrel, in case he turns nasty’ (*GMM*, 128). Sasha correctly predicts René’s violent response to her final noncompliance in their sexual game, and in the deeply unpleasant scene in which he attacks her we can, again, sense the coincidence of misogyny and fascist and nationalist intolerance to those deemed to be different.

Serge is the antidote to René. Although his friendship with Sasha is cut dramatically short he is her compatriot in suffering. The historical position of foreign Jews in Paris in 1937 was a dangerous one. The city saw a significant rise in French anti-Semitism due to a complex set of factors that included Nazi support in France, 13propaganda, anti-communist fear and fear of another war, frustration at

<sup>42</sup>A similar argument about discrepant realities in Rhys’s fiction is made by Bill Schwarz in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (2003). See page 139.

unemployment rates, and the high numbers of immigrants into France from Russia and Germany. The close of 1937 saw the publication of Céline's book-length pamphlet, *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (*Trifles for a Massacre*), in which the famous novelist accused communists and Freemasons but above all 'vermicular, persuasive' and 'war-monger[ing]' Jews of driving the country towards another 'massacre' with Germany:

It's the Jews of London, Washington and Moscow who are blocking a Franco-German alliance [...] I don't want to go to war for Hitler, I insist, but I don't want to wage war against him for the Jews [...] Rather a dozen Hitlers to an all-powerful Blum. (Céline 1937: 180, in Riding 2011: 21)<sup>43</sup>

Céline's essay was extreme but espoused a not atypical feeling; according to Alan Riding, *Bagatelles pour un massacre* had sold eighty thousand copies by the time Céline produced his next 'pamphlet' in 1938 (Riding 2011: 22). The display of Serge's art which so delights Sasha in Part Two is a positive, alternative exhibition to the city's politically problematic world fair, as Jess Issacharoff argues (2013). Serge clearly stands for some sort of possibility.<sup>44</sup> Equally however, and as Issacharoff suggests, we can read the privacy of Serge's display as indicating the threat posed to him by an increasingly hostile Paris: he is even more starkly isolated than Sasha, their meeting confined to his studio, and despite the strength of the instinctive bond with Sasha his character occupies only a few pages in Rhys's text. Signalling the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in this period, the strongest indications of the political danger faced by Serge are the implications of a story Serge himself recounts and Delmar's criticism of his 'friend'.

Serge's story of a 'mulatto' 'Martiniquaise' with whom he had briefly shared a building in London is a profoundly unpleasant tale of racism, xenophobia and

<sup>43</sup> On the request of Céline's estate the 'pamphlet' remains out of print today. The translation of *Bagatelles pour un massacre* offered above is that given by Alan Riding in his study of life in Paris under the German occupation (Riding 2011). Alice Kaplan (1995) provides a very useful account of Céline's idiosyncratic use in this text of Jewish and anti-Semitic sources. The information in this chapter concerning fascism in Paris in the 1930s draws on these accounts, on studies by Vicky Caron (2005) and Karen Fiss (2009), and on Rhys criticism on this subject, such as that by Emery (1990) and Carr (2012).

<sup>44</sup> Maren Linett (2005) and Issacharoff (2013) both explore in detail the possibility for which Serge stands arguing, respectively, that his Jewish identity figures an essential alienation, which is more generally the experience of modernity and of single women in the metropolis, and that he presents the potential of an alternative, transnational community beyond the political boundaries constituted and demanded by the 1937 world fair and Nazism – the two dominant historical elements of the novel.

misogyny (*GMM*, 79-81). The woman had been traumatised by her neighbours' relentless racial hatred, and for two years had been unable to go outside in daylight. Finally, a child's instinctively cruel jeer at the woman's body odour and unwanted presence ("I hate you and I wish you were dead", the child said' (81)) had rendered her 'at the end of everything' – incoherent, like 'stone', drunk and suicidal (80). Looking at the woman, Serge says, was like 'looking down into a pit [...] I had all the time this feeling that I was talking to something that was no longer quite human, no longer quite alive' (80). Given the historical backdrop against which Serge tells the story, his astonishing depiction of the effects of sustained, venomous racism is surely an indictment of fascism, that 'religion of intolerance'. Furthermore, as Carr notes (2012: 67), Serge's story underscores the similarity between apparently distinct forms of intolerance by connecting the narrator's Jewish identity, the Martinican woman stuck in an unhappy marriage in a virulently racist London and Sasha, his audience, who has already recounted a remarkably similar tale of experiencing the debilitating and dehumanising effects of hateful persecution by her own family, presumably because of her refusal to conform to norms of femininity. Recalling in disturbingly dissociative language the time she received a small bequest which provided the excuse for a family member to tell her she should have drowned herself in the Seine, Sasha remembers:

Well, that was the end of me, the real end [...] Saved, rescued and with my place to hide in – what more did I want? I crept in and hid [...] to be left alone. No more pawings, no more prying – leave me alone... (They'll do that all right, my dear.)

'At first I was afraid they would let gates bang on my hindquarters, and I used to be nervous of unknown people and places.' Quotation from *The Autobiography of a Mare* – one of my favourite books... (*GMM*, 37)

In the 'symbolically and politically linked experience' of Sasha, Serge and the Martinican woman, writes Carr, 'Rhys suggests the common workings of fascism, racism and bourgeois patriarchy, the persecutory power of the modern religion of intolerance [...] Like a diaspora of the dispossessed, this novel evokes a communality of the excluded' (2012: 67). Yet, while Serge's story evokes a communality of the oppressed, Sasha's feelings concerning any such bond between her fellow sufferers,

even in this scene in Serge's studio, remain highly ambiguous at best. Her moment of happiness with Serge has great narrative potential, but it is noticeably brief and punctuated by her sterile interactions with Delmar. Most importantly, situated between the painter's conjuration of the possibility of communality and his written statement of friendship that closes Part Two is a scene in which Sasha evokes and categorically denies the possibility of a union of the oppressed that might allow for positive change. It is, I suggest, through both Sasha's inability to identify with others and the shape of her narrative that Rhys inscribes a fatal social fault which renders communality an impossibility in the novel's present.

This impasse can be sensed even in Serge himself. He describes his past awareness of the cruel eyes of the Martinican woman's neighbours yet he admits to not trying to help her. He is blind to his own betrayal by Delmar, a Russian emigrant and so also one of the excluded. Delmar is Sasha's means of introduction to the artist but is, in fact, an entirely untrustworthy 'friend', who speaks about Serge caustically, accusing him in terms strikingly similar to those used in Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda. He accuses Serge of caring for nothing and nobody, of living in squalid conditions, being 'mad' and of the 'extreme Left' (*GMM*, 57, 85–86). One prominent example of Nazi propaganda, the vicious exhibition 'Der Ewige Jude' ('The Eternal Jew') which opened in Munich in November 1937, represented the central terms of German anti-Semitism and purported to show with scientific accuracy the innateness in Jews of a predilection for poor living standards, a tendency to madness and extreme selfishness, and claimed to reveal a Jewish–Bolshevik conspiracy.

Of course it is significant that Serge's art is formally experimental. His portrait of a 'double-headed, 'double-faced' man 'with four arms' clearly suggests Cubism (*GMM*, 91), and his art generally has a 'debased' subject matter. It thereby fits within the Nazi category of 'degenerate art' which was denounced in the famous companion Munich exhibition of that name ('Entartete Kunst'), held from July 1937. Serge's association with African and Afro-Caribbean culture, created through his African masks 'straight from the Congo' (76), his tale of the 'mulatto' woman and even the allusion to the 'Cuban cabin' (77), also seem to allude to the Nazi-forged association between Jews and other races they deemed inferior – again something espoused in the

‘Ewige Jude’ exhibition.<sup>45</sup> Serge’s numerous ‘misshapen’ figures might be read as a sort of objective correlative for the painful reality of the political persecution of Jews and many other groups in the 1930s. We can also read Rhys’s intricate detailing of Serge’s art as signifying the spread of German fascism to France, and Delmar’s anti-Semitic tirade, of course, supports this reading. The artist’s studio is, in a sense, occupied by Delmar’s latently hostile presence, and the artist’s disappearance, right at the centre of the text is highly significant and sinister: Part Two closes with Sasha’s sad toast to Serge’s letter, which confirms his friendship but also signals cessation. Coming right at the centre of the narrative, Serge’s disappearance suggests that the fault in the concept of communality is directly related to the text’s historical moment, is thematically central and at the heart of Sasha’s predicament.

I have focused so far on Rhys’s inscription of social and political problems of the time in which *Good Morning, Midnight* is set, and traced a number of the ways in which we can contextualise Sasha’s swings between two contrary states and thereby open up the politics of Rhys’s narrative choices in this work. I turn now to the negative pole in this situation – to Sasha’s failure, her defeat through an insidious individualism in what I propose is the one of the most important and complicated scenes in Rhys’s fiction.

## **II. ‘What can I do about it? Nothing. I don’t deceive myself’:**

### **Sasha’s failure**

Sasha’s individualism, her near-exclusive focus on her own needs, and her engagement in social relations without the active aim of building positive lasting relationships, might possibly be excused as a sort of survival strategy. Put simply, if she cannot depend on the kindness of strangers or familiars – and Serge is the only character to offer her any sort of disinterested companionship – then she might do well not to direct her efforts towards communal goals. The problem with this reading is the scene in Part Two in which Sasha observes the suffering of the ‘kitchen girl’ and concludes that she cannot act for her. This is an unusual episode in Rhys’s fiction as there are few moments in her narratives where her protagonists are challenged – by the situation, or by themselves – to act for another. Of course, given the historical context of *Good*

<sup>45</sup> Issacharoff’s essay traces the links between Serge’s art, the novel’s ‘Exhibition’, the Paris Exposition of 1937, and these two Nazi exhibitions.

*Morning, Midnight*, Sasha's conclusion is absolutely inexcusable. Her individualism mutates into or, for this is uncertain, is revealed as indifference and social irresponsibility.

There are earlier, less awful moments of defeat throughout the novel in which Sasha indulges in an angry and solipsistic abnegation of agency. In an early example, Part One concludes with her fantasy about the callousness of the hotel staff – she imagines they would offer no help if she fell ill – which segues directly into Sasha's claim that she wants only to 'lie in bed all day, pull the curtains and shut the damned world out' (*GMM*, 68). This is a fantasy of anaesthesia and escape comparable to that which we also find in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. Clothes and make-up provide the 'armour' Sasha needs in order to encounter the outside world; and alcohol and the interests of Paris, its men (sometimes) and its entertainments (notably, the cinema) provide distraction from her bleak awareness of the state of things. In allowing her to momentarily forget her profound unhappiness, these potential causes of pleasure ward off the complete emotional collapse that threatens her. They are all tools which allow a minimal level of engagement with the world and the people in it. However, Sasha's desire to just 'lie in bed all day' is clearly melancholic, conveying what Julia Kristeva describes as the 'learned helplessness' of 'depressive retardation' – when the depressed individual slows down because neither fight nor flight are an option (Kristeva 1989: 34). Rhys's three middle novels offer powerful depictions of the physical exhaustion of depression, the gravitational pull of this all-consuming state and its desolate field of vision. At the close of Part One, as Sasha succumbs to this depressive lethargy, her angry fantasy permits her acknowledgement of her melancholy desire to avoid having to think of others.

Yet depression is not, on my reading, the main problem in *Good Morning, Midnight*. If we can identify one dominant concern in the text, it is neither the bleak state of Sasha's inner life, nor the moral decay and incipient violence that characterise the society that Rhys depicts. In my opinion, the major problem concerns how, at times, Sasha is infected by these attributes of the external world, resulting not in her depression (which in a sense is a reasonable reaction to the wrongs of this world) but in the failure of her own ethical capacity. Rhys weaves an intricate web of ills in this work, and while we can (as I have suggested) read Sasha's non-conformity as a legitimate symbolic response to the fascist and totalitarian demand for its opposite, as well as an expression of Rhys's belief in self-determination, Sasha's inability to identify



with fellow sufferers ironically reflects the fear and hatred of otherness which is at the core of the religion of persecutory intolerance. Angier argues that this inability on Sasha's part is the reason behind her dramatic 'rejection' of René, her 'brother doormat' (Angier 1990: 404), and certainly this may be a reason for her hesitancy in accepting his advances. However, her failure to more readily accept this man pales in comparison to her failure to identify with another woman whose suffering resembles her own. Sasha's desire, at the end of Part One, to drown out the thought of others ominously foreshadows the tragic moment of her ethical failure near the conclusion of Part Two, when her unwillingness or inability to identify with this woman is used to reason that she need not act for others.

In her musings about the girl's existence, Sasha makes 'revolution' (change realised through communal action) visible only then to refuse it absolutely. First, there is recognition: 'I know her. This is the girl who does all the dirty work and gets paid very little for it. Salut!' (*GMM*, 87). Then there is acknowledgement of the girl's suffering, and Sasha defends her own 'lack' of sympathy: 'How can she stay in that coffin for five minutes without fainting? ... Sorry for her? Why should I be sorry for her?' (87). She then justifies this position. The kitchen girl's 'strong hands sing the Marseillaise' and when the order of things changes, she will be duly admired: 'when the revolution comes, won't those be the hands to be kissed? Well, so Monsieur Rimbaud says, doesn't he? I hope he's right. I wonder, though, I wonder, I wonder...' (88). Sasha pays her bill, asks for directions to the cinema, meditates in an impassioned monologue on people's lack of thought and pity, orders another Pernod, and then, in noting her relief that the girl's work is almost finished, questions whether she should act for her:

It has just occurred to me that if I weren't here the door of her coffin might be kept open. *Might* be. Not that I would have gone away if it had occurred to me before. Why should I? The hands that sing the Marseillaise, the world that could be so different – what's all that to me? What can I do about it? Nothing. I don't deceive myself.

That's settled. I can start on the second Pernod. (*GMM*, 89)

Despite making the girl the figuration of change (and therefore hope), and despite her diatribe on people's lack of thought, Sasha refuses to work in any way for the chance

of communal resistance. She remains sitting, observing the girl's suffering, and blind to the similarity of their lives.

This passage is highly complex and works on numerous levels. Sasha seems to be disavowing her feelings. There is an extended sequence of references to possibilities of change which clearly therefore *does* hold significance for Sasha. Similarly, her question concerning her sympathy for the girl is more plausibly understood as evidence of a genuine sympathy on which she cannot act than as the complete lack of care. Sasha seems to be trying to 'deceive' herself into believing that she is callous and wholly pessimistic. The fact that she is getting drunk during this episode, and is preoccupied with planning her distracting excursion to the cinema reinforces the sense that Sasha is trying to avoid a truth here rather than exposing one. Following the subtle yet tragic logic of this scene and Sasha's fraught claim that she is 'trying so hard to be like' others, the most important truth that Sasha evades is that there is a similarity between the kitchen girl's suffering and her own which is all the more reason why she should act to help the woman. The girl's 'dirty work', for which she gets 'paid very little' and which takes place in the torturous confines of a small, stinking 'coffin' (*GMM*, 87) is a worst version of Sasha's past employment in Mr Blank's emporium. Both women have been on the receiving end of a brutal, patriarchal capitalism. Instead of identifying with the girl, Sasha passively observes her, which signifies the class division that separates them but also recalls the terrorising gaze of Mr Blank, aligning her with the girl's oppressors in the later situation. Accompanying Sasha's refusal or inability to identify with the girl is the former's troubling indifference to the 'world that could be so different'. Sasha claims to be unmoved by the possibility of change. Of course, the two problems are related. Belief that change is possible is a motivation to work with others for that change; and belief in solidarity makes hope and political commitment far more tenable.

It is not, then, that Sasha is presented as being wholly without the capacity to care for her fellow human being. The tone in which she dismisses the problem ('[t]hat's settled') suggests a disturbing suppression of feeling which seriously complicates our attempt to locate clear meaning. The sequencing of Sasha's various statements also makes this scene particularly puzzling. Sasha first details the problem of ethical responsibility (she identifies the problem of the girl's suffering and considers what she could do in response), only to disavow the problem dispassionately, and then immediately to evoke it again in her passionate plea for people's understanding which is also a diatribe against people's general tendency to neither think nor have 'pity'. We

can read this series of movements as another example of Sasha's vacillation, but this example has a particularly destabilising effect for the reader. It becomes impossible to ascertain Sasha's true feelings about the ethical question of how and when we should act for others. Similarly, we cannot dismiss the possibility that she desires a different order of things, just as we absolutely cannot affirm her desire for change.

One way of reading this passage is to shift our focus away from the representational schema and consider, instead, the ways in which Rhys is working against the language of communication. Read in the terms of such an agenda, Rhys's complication of Sasha's passivity appears as that which 'enables style to *minorise* the standard dialect of communication, to counteract its attempts at stabilisation through good sense and common sense and lets it move towards its limits' (Lecerle 2010: 152). Accordingly, rather than trying to infer a fixed meaning concerning this character's innate deficiency and her internal struggle, we can usefully probe the ideas concerning both meaning itself and the possibility of communication that Rhys is presenting in Sasha's ethical vacillation. Lecerle's description of Deleuze's concept of style as that which deterritorialises language might be usefully applied here, and there are several ideas in his phrasing which resonate with Rhys's scene. First, nearly the entire scene is silent, with the exception of Sasha's requests from the waiter for more alcohol. Her ethical rumination and her plea for people's thought and pity are just that – thoughts. Sasha is not communicating to anyone other than the reader. On Harrison's reading, Rhys protagonists' inhabitation of silence is generally positive: these characters occupy a space of speaking back to a male language of dominance (1988). However, we can equally read the dominance of silence in *Good Morning, Midnight* as an indication and symptom of a general linguistic malaise. Given the problem that Sasha has in identifying with the kitchen girl, and Rhys's severance of the Serge plot, we can read Sasha's silence as an effect of a communication which has somehow gone wrong. The faulty exchange of meaning between individuals in the novel is, I think, a symptom of the social and political problems of the text's time – that is, of the last years of the 1930s. Just as the sequence in this scene is devoid of what we might describe as ethical progression, with Sasha's observation of the girl not leading to any form of productive action nor, I think, even to any feeling or thought that increases Sasha's well-being or capacity for life, so communication is repeatedly shown to be faulty. Serge's declaration of friendship should be the beginning of a new kind of relationship but instead marks an end. Mr Blank mispronounces the French noun 'la caisse', resulting

in Sasha's dismissal from the job (*GMM*, 23). Once outside his office, Sasha thinks too late of her perfect retort to Mr Blank, but this response is as redundant in its silence as her sad 'salut' to Serge's letter, which should be an affirmation but is transformed into an ironic gesture that both signifies an end and hangs on in the text as a ghostly sign of what their friendship could have been. Finally, Sasha's evocation of Rimbaud's revolutionary poem 'The Hands of Jeanne-Marie' ('*Les mains de Jeanne-Marie*') which is a paean to the brave struggles of the female communards of Paris in 1871, while a form of communication across texts, in a sense does nothing.<sup>46</sup> The lines of verse she alludes to are hopeful and signify the possibility of action and should, most obviously, help her summon the courage to act; yet they appear in her silent meditation which has a contrary orientation. As importantly, despite Sasha's failure to act for the kitchen girl, her allusions omit (or avoid) the fact that failure is thematically central to Rimbaud's poem, as it is to his poetic vision generally: his poem ends with the failure of the revolutionaries, symbolised by Jeanne-Marie's capture and her gruesome punishment. Not only does the allusion not encourage Sasha to act, but her understanding of it seems to be flawed. The significance of this omission is heightened when we consider that Rimbaud was, for a period of Rhys's writing career prior to 1946, one of her favourite writers (*Letters*, 44-45). The allusion is, I think, a self-conscious and oddly playful signal of Sasha's tragic failure really to think and to act. Significantly, work is required of the reader in order to unpick the contradictory dynamics of this scene. Just as communication both within *Good Morning, Midnight* and across texts is problematic, communication between author and reader is frequently rendered through difficulty, hence we are confronted with an 'impasse' at the beginning of the novel, and Sasha's vacillation as she ponders the kitchen girl indeed 'counteract[s]' the 'stabilisation' that enables us to determine the meaning of this scene.

These problems of communication and the destabilisation of the meaning-making process which characterise this crucial episode make sense as Rhys's attempt to write differently, beyond the representational realm in which signifiers are transmitted and decoded in a shared, stable system. Rhys, of course, had solid reason

<sup>46</sup> The composition of the poem is generally dated to between 1871 and early 1872. Jeanne-Marie's hands symbolise revolution and real political resistance, but as Martin Sorrell explains, the revolution and resistance Rimbaud evokes are poetic as well as political: 'Driven by his nature and experience, [Rimbaud's] imperative became to reject the old life and to find a new way of being – utterly lucid, rigorously honest – and to be attained by new love' (Sorrell, in Rimbaud 2001: xv).

to attempt this in the years between 1936 and 1939, when she was writing the novel. The impasse with which she presents us on the first page is a challenge to the reader, as it makes us question our ideas of plot development, but it is also, surely, an acknowledgement of the writer's predicament when words cease to be an abundant, comfortable and effective tool with which she can create work that is commensurate with the present state of things. Rhys's impasse encapsulates the modernist ailment whereby writers encounter the failure of their medium. In 1915 Henry James described how this failure was occasioned by the horrors of the violence of the Great War:

One finds it in the midst of all this as hard to apply one's words as to endure one's thoughts. The war has used up words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated like motor car tires; they have, like millions of other things, been more overstrained and knocked about and voided of the happy semblance during the last six months than in all the long ages before, and we are now confronted with a depreciation of all our terms, or, otherwise speaking, with a loss of expression through increase of limpness, that may well make us wonder what ghosts will be left to walk. (James 1915: 4)

It is difficult to grasp how the 'loss of expression through increase of limpness' described by James might have been experienced by writers in the late 1930s, as the horrors of the brutal regimes of Europe signalled the onset of another world war and our failure to learn from history. It is equally difficult to grasp how such an experience might in any clear sense characterise 'late modernist' writing, given the many problems and questions this phrase raises. Yet in *Good Morning, Midnight*, in her preference for silence over productive communication, and for style over representation Rhys makes palpable the impasse of the 'loss of expression', when words themselves have been 'used up' and have lost their 'life'. Sasha's failure – as she observes the working girl, refuses to recognise any similarity in their situations and decides she need not act on her behalf – can, I think, be read as an objective correlative for just this linguistic failure. When situated historically the protagonist's engagement with the questions of whether she can and should attempt to effect change and her bleak and confusingly wrought decision can be read as Rhys's expression of her experience of a dangerous linguistic enervation.

Crucially, however, failure in this scene in Part Two is not limited to the

linguistic realm. Sasha's meditation on the question of action is interrupted by a lengthy internal monologue in which she castigates social intolerance towards those who are different and people's general lack of thought. This is one of the most damning critiques of human inadequacy in Rhys's writing:

Please, please, monsieur et madame [...] I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try [...] Every word I say has chains round its ankles; every thought I think is weighted with heavy weights. Since I was born, hasn't every word I've said, every thought I've thought, everything I've done, been tied up, weighted, chained? And, mind you, I know that with all this I don't succeed. Or I succeed in flashes only too damned well... But think how hard I try and how seldom I dare. Think – and have a bit of pity. That is, if you ever think, you apes, which I doubt. (*GMM*, 88)

Sasha's words convey the burden of using the language of masters and the extreme effort required to think in this situation. The task of using the language of the oppressor and the act of thinking itself are made intolerably difficult by the demand for 'likeness' that they both involve. The entire passage is about the 'weight' of conformity. The palpable effort involved in 'trying [...] to be like' others is counterpointed by the idea that thinking is what requires real effort, just as the fleeting glimpses of Sasha's successful conformity throughout the novel are countered by the 'flashes', here and elsewhere, which represent original thought. In this passage Sasha describes conformity in the terms we have already identified in Rhys's letter of 1936: it comes at the expense of the individual's ability to really think, in the most important sense of the term; and flouting the social dictum of conformity endangers one in all sorts of ways. Sasha is condemned to the awareness of three continuous, conflicting and depleting processes: her fleeting desire for conformity comes at the expense of being able to think originally, costs her great effort, and inevitably results in failure. The passage dramatises the cost of being a 'Savage Individualist', as Rhys described herself in a letter of 1963, which, she notes, is a 'very expensive thing to be' (*Letters*, 275). It also constructs thinking in a Nietzschean-Deleuzian light, as that which involves both great effort and conflict. The emphasis on thought ironically underscores the fact that Sasha's ability to think is also compromised, as she cements her inability to identify with the other woman. Even while there are flashes of visionary thought in this scene, Rhys's

dramatic exposition of Sasha's predicament insists on the real, worldly consequences of a failure to really think. The scene carries the powerful political message that change and even resistance both require that people learn to think.

To conclude this chapter, I turn to the questions of how we can understand this difficult form of thought that Rhys seems to demand, and how we might read her style in a way that accounts for both linguistic failure and the effort required truly to think and yet moves beyond the impasse which is central to the novel's vision.

### III. A style of failure

In the conclusion to his lively and illuminating study of Alain Badiou's and Deleuze's philosophical readings of literature, Lecercle explains that while both philosophers develop their own versions of modernism – Badiou's more 'twisted' than Deleuze's – both also depart from 'what is thought to be the main characteristic of modernism, the idea that the specificity of art resides in its language': instead, for these thinkers, 'such specificity resides not in language but in ideas' (2010: 201). We might perhaps leave aside the claim concerning the defining characteristic of modernism and use the assertion about the philosophers' modernism to think about how the thought or ideas of *Good Morning, Midnight* might operate beyond the regime of representation. To rephrase, if the depressing failure of thought both evidenced and derided by Sasha is tied, as her monologue suggests, to language as a form of representation (and Sasha's emphasis on likeness supports this notion), then what might language be doing and in what other sort of failure might it be involved if we look beyond representation?

The most explicit statement in Deleuze's work on the relation between philosophy and literature occurs in *What is Philosophy?* in which Deleuze and Guattari set out their aesthetic proposition that art has its own kind of thought, distinct from the thought of philosophy and the thought of science.<sup>47</sup> In their chapter 'Percept, Affect, and Concept', towards the end of the book, they develop this claim, arguing that whereas philosophy produces concepts, art produces affects and percepts. For Deleuze and Guattari the thought of art occurs in the realm of sensation not representation. The problems with this unreasonable, sweeping proposition are significantly mitigated by the philosophers' predominant focus on twentieth-century literature. Their aesthetics develops in accordance with key principles of Deleuze's philosophy, notably his

<sup>47</sup> Page references to *What is Philosophy?* are hereafter referred to using the abbreviation *WP*.

monism, and his logic of the outside, according to which life is revealed to the extent that we grasp the fact that all processes strive towards their limits.<sup>48</sup> Deleuze celebrates literature for its ability to reveal in sensation not a particular experience or opinion but Life itself. Sensation, as blocs of affects and percepts that exist as independent composites, bears witness to this immanent power of spirit: it reveals the ‘nonhuman forces of the cosmos’ (*WP*, 183).<sup>49</sup> With great effort, the artist manages an exhausting ‘athleticism of becoming that reveals only forces that are not its own’ (172). This last statement returns us to Deleuze’s aim to work against doxa, or common sense and established modes of thinking. The writer’s task is not to convey her opinion or recount her life but to reveal the force of newness itself: ‘sensory becoming’, write Deleuze and Guattari, ‘is otherness caught in a matter of expression’ (177). The Deleuzian writer, then, works against representation, to overcome opinion and doxa and to reveal Life (which they also call chaos). This is why, as Lecercle explains, the ‘work of style’ is to make ‘language forego meaning and strive after silence: silence is the limit towards which language strives, and the means and medium of such striving is style’ (2010: 151). In Deleuze’s aesthetics style deterritorialises language. Working in the opposite direction to that of doxa and meaning, style pushes language to its limit, to the point of its failure.

The discussion of linguistic failure above positioned Sasha’s silences and the novel’s uneasy communication at the impasse of the loss of expression, but these textual features still remain, to an extent, within the realm of representation. What stylistic operations in *Good Morning, Midnight*, if any, accord with Deleuze’s idea of procedures which deterritorialise language? What in Rhys’s style takes us into the regime of the sensible or that of ‘dissensual sensation, behind *doxa*, that [which] is beyond common sensory experience’ (Lecercle 2010: 196)? And what ‘dissensual sensation’ does Rhys’s style create? What is the style of Rhys’s literary thought? These questions are at the heart of the close readings in the following chapters of this thesis. Chapters 5 and 6 concentrate on a minorisation that destabilises ideas about desire and complicity. There are numerous times when Rhys’s syntax becomes intensive and transforms into what Deleuze describes as ‘formulas’. The final three words of the text

<sup>48</sup> There are formulations of this key concept throughout Deleuze’s writing. It is, for example, central to *Difference and Repetition*. Ansell-Pearson gives a very interesting elucidation of the idea in *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze* (1999: 84-5).

<sup>49</sup> In my use of key terms from Deleuze’s philosophy I follow the spelling in the cited translations.



form a notable example. They hollow out our understanding of the difference between affirmation and negation, acceptance and rejection, finality and ‘irredeemable ambivalence’ (Carr 2012: 81). Yet as I have argued, vacillation is a major feature of Rhys’s style in this work and thinking through Deleuze’s aesthetics we can view this as a manifestation of ‘continuous variation’, an idea which is central in Deleuze’s writing on literature.<sup>50</sup> Sasha’s swing between resistance and defeat is a formal device that exceeds the representational regime in which it does, nevertheless, also work. The text is concerned primarily not with the development of story, character or theme, but with its own variations. The ceaseless swings of Sasha’s mood, tone and orientation to others, the text’s shifts from past to present, the variation of the mode of the writing (one moment realist, the next symbolic or approximating the Surrealist), and the continuous movement between repetition and novelty (the novel begins with what may or may not be ‘[q]uite like old times’) are manifestations of the continuous modulation which, I think, is one of the most important features of Rhys’s style in *Good Morning, Midnight*. This stylistic operation works as a matter of disequilibrium on the level of both form and content. It disassembles the idea of the integrated, self-determining individual subject, and it allows Rhys’s prose to attain to the impersonal, ‘digging’ beneath her story and the realm of representation, ‘cracking open [...] opinions, and reaching regions without memories, when the self must be destroyed’ (Deleuze 1997: 113).

The final few paragraphs of Part Two see Sasha read Serge’s letter and then unroll and survey his painting of a ‘man standing in the gutter, playing his banjo’ (*GMM*, 91). As the scene plays out the prose starts to ‘undulate’, presumably as the effects of numerous glasses of Pernod and ‘a bottle of Bordeaux’ hit Sasha and she becomes ‘almost as drunk as [she]’d hoped to be’ (90). The syntax assumes a lurching quality, what Deleuze describes as ‘rolling and pitching’, as Sasha’s inebriation becomes ‘intensive’, transferring ‘from the form of content’ to the ‘form of expression’ so the line of words itself seems to stumble back and forth (Deleuze 1997: 111). When the painting is ‘unroll[ed]’, the painted figure ‘stares at [Sasha]. He is gentle, humble, resigned, mocking, a little mad. He stares at [her]. He is double-headed, double-faced.

<sup>50</sup> This idea is discussed most explicitly in Deleuze’s 1993 essay ‘He Stuttered’ in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, published in the same year ([*Critique et clinique*] Deleuze 1997: 107-114). I argue in the next chapter that at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight* this stylistic operation transforms into a ‘coupling’ of sensation, an idea also inspired by the chapter ‘Percept, Affect, and Concept’.

He is singing “It has been,” singing “It will be”. Double-headed and with four-arms’ (*GMM*, 91). Firstly a series of descriptors pours out which charts the variation of the image itself – the banjo-player is a sort of anti-Mona Lisa, his expression is un-fixed, un-graspable – as well as Sasha’s fluctuating attitude to the painting, to Serge and to life. Then the lines begin to return to aspects of the painting already observed, to expressions already used, as the descriptors ‘double’ on themselves, but with variation, so the past becomes the future and the five-part series that described the painted man is followed by the four-part series of Sasha’s recollection: ‘I stare back at him and think about being hungry, being cold, being hurt, being ridiculed’ (91). The rhythm of the prose in this short section is remarkably effective, as the mostly very short clauses accumulate through a syncopated use of conjunctions, ellipses, dashes, commas, full stops, series of descriptors of varying lengths and repetition-with-variation. The rolling and pitching becomes angrier (‘[t]his damned room’) until Sasha’s entire past seems, momentarily, to be encompassed within her current drunken haze, an achievement expressed in a final pattern with a fragile symmetry that is contorted by the concluding ellipsis: ‘It’s all the rooms I’ve ever slept in, all the streets I’ve ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms...’ (91). Rhys’s prose undulates just as we can imagine Sasha swaying, imbibing, repeating and circling back on herself till her double-vision transitions to drunk unconsciousness.

Language in *Good Morning, Midnight* involves neither a stable system nor balance. Instead, as in Deleuze’s understanding of language, there is ‘perpetual disequilibrium’ and the desire to break away from the given (Deleuze 1997: 110). For Deleuze, the great writer creates zones of vibration in language by choosing and connecting terms not according to a binary logic (such as the principle of mutual exclusivity), but by making inclusive choices and forming reflexive connections: this is ‘creative stuttering’, which ‘makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium’ (Deleuze 1997: 111). Two coterminous processes occur. Constant variation and various other stylistic operations of disequilibrium create sensation; and language is pushed to its limit. In these two processes the thought of literature is revealed.

As we can see at the end of Part Two, the constant variation in this text inclines to a sort of destructive culmination. Sasha’s desire to be drunk seems clearly related to

the obligation under which she put herself to consider whether to act for the kitchen girl, and it is legible as her desire to be free from empathy altogether. Yet as the variation throughout the novel evidences, Sasha does care, and her intoxication is equally legible as that which helps her cope with her pleasure in Serge's statements of friendship (both his letter and his painting) in the awareness of the many interpersonal failures in which she has been involved. Her desire for alcohol is both the desire not to care and the desire for that which helps her cope with caring. The affective state into which Sasha is immersed at the end of Part Two, then, might be described as the feeling of being stuck, by which I mean not paralysis but the situation of both wanting and not wanting to proceed with an ethical life. While we might, of course, read this critically as weakness of will in the place of what should be moral fortitude, we can take a more generous approach to this text, and understand Sasha's inactivity, her drinking and her passive undulations as embodying a staunchly political message. We can read in the conclusion of Part Two what is, in my opinion, central to the thought of this text: its staging of the fact that the ethical life is necessarily difficult, that it requires great effort and vigilance and that good action should not be taken for granted.

This chapter has examined questions of conformity, communality, Sasha's failure, Rhys's style and how we might think about the thought of her texts in terms of sensation. I turn now to an exploration of how failure in *Good Morning, Midnight* might be read as Rhys's line of flight. The necessary difficulty of the ethical life has a correlative in the violence involved in the act of thinking, and Rhys's fourth novel does more than dramatise the failure of thought at certain moments. In this work there is a drive to think the failure of thought, a drive which also reveals a profound dissatisfaction with the given order of things.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The death drive of *Good Morning, Midnight***

This chapter aims to account for various moments of danger in *Good Morning, Midnight* which involve epistemological and visual occlusion and which culminate in what appears to be an ambivalent form of destruction at the novel's conclusion. These dominant features of Rhys's narrative are read through key ideas in Deleuze's book,

*Difference and Repetition*, and are modelled as facets of a textual death drive which works in terms of the will to encounter that which cannot be recognised – namely, the unthinkable limit of thought.<sup>51</sup> The beginning of the chapter sets out a reworking of Deleuze’s complex model of a death drive, in tandem with an exploration of how his critique of representational thought might be used to understand Sasha’s isolation and uncertainty. The argument then moves to further historical contextualisation, focusing on the function of the Exhibition in *Good Morning, Midnight*, and considers the politics of Sasha’s inability to recognise violent sights. The final section considers how Sasha’s final encounter might work as an engagement with the unthinkable that pertains to literature and art more generally.

The model used in these argument is not Freud’s death drive – the theory he formulated in 1920, which had evolved from his observation of an unproductive compulsion to repeat into his concept of a drive of life that ‘aspire[s] to an *old* state, a primordial state’ of the lifeless, ‘from which it once departed, and to which via all the circuitous byways of development it strives to return’ (Freud 2003a: 78). Rhys’s fourth novel is marked by a proliferation of negative repetitions which brings the narrative close to the terrain of Freud’s delineation of a compulsion to repeat that outweighs the pleasure principle. Sasha suffers a bewildering compulsion to repeat negative experiences, exemplified by her three-part self-contradiction, ‘[n]ot the Dôme. I’ll avoid the damned Dôme. And, of course, it’s the Dôme I go to’ (*GMM*, 60). The novel is replete with three pairs of mothers and daughters, various pairs of men, including a pair of untrustworthy sexual partners, numerous stories which repeat tales already told and motifs which recur throughout. Also marking a certain affinity with Freud, in Rhys’s novels the sense that the protagonists are fated to repeat unhappy experiences is accompanied by a sense of their return to a ‘prior state’. This is frequently coextensive with the protagonists’ inertia, and a certain childlike quality that Marya, Julia, Anna and Antoinette have; and there are journeys of return in the four later novels. However, the protagonists do not die within these narratives. Even at the end of *Voyage in the Dark* Anna’s death is not a narrative fact as such. It can be difficult to encounter Rhys’s women who, in David Plante’s words, have a ‘great dark space’ in the place of comprehensible, reasonable motivation (1984: 40). In *Good Morning,*

<sup>51</sup> Page references to the 2004 Continuum edition of *Difference and Repetition* are hereafter given using the abbreviation *DR* where necessary.

*Midnight* the reader is faced with an almost unremitting bleakness and epistemological opacity in which there is no clear explanation for the protagonist's self-destructive repetition. The end point of this text's death drive is unclear, and I suggest that it is the simultaneous obscurity and excess of the passion in the novel's final scene which so negatively affects some readers.<sup>52</sup>

The concluding scene of *Good Morning, Midnight* dramatises an encounter which seems somehow comparable to death, yet in which ambivalence and epistemological difficulty are of central importance. The scene also suggests possibility and an opening up, signalled by Sasha's triple affirmation. The text's 'drive' is entirely at odds with Darwinian survival and Freud's pleasure principle, but if we consider the shape of the narrative, its punctuation by various blind spots, Rhys's critique of intolerance and Sasha's mysterious and bivalent fate, then Deleuze's exploration of a form of thought that involves both destruction and creation suggests itself as a particularly apt set of ideas with which to approach this difficult novel.

### **I. Rhys, *Difference and Repetition* and another death drive**

Deleuze's philosophy is dedicated to the tasks of critiquing the privileging of identity and opposition which forms the logic of established western thought, and thereby restoring difference into thought. His death drive in *Difference and Repetition* is part of his project of identifying ways in which difference – in the form of the radically new – is generated, and developing the Nietzschean proposition that real thought is creative because it involves thinking beyond that which is established. Deleuze uses the concept of a death drive in his other writing – for example, in *Anti-Oedipus* and his 1969 work, *The Logic of Sense (Logique du sens)* – but its configuration and use differs significantly from work to work. My arguments here refer solely to the idea as it appears in *Difference and Repetition*.

Deleuze's death drive is a difficult concept, and at times he is wilfully obscure in its deployment. It operates as a sort of figuration of or metaphor for the dissolution of the self in involuntary memory, which Deleuze argues is a form of repetition that allows a unique encounter with 'pure' time. This encounter is Deleuze's paradigm for the nomadic subject's experience of its own creative evolution. The death drive, then,

<sup>52</sup> I am thinking here of Angier's introduction of her own 'death' in her readings of what she sees as Rhys's increasingly indifferent protagonists as Rhys comes increasingly to indulge the 'death of love' (1990: 383).

is legible as the affirmation required in thinking time in the awareness of the subject's absolute non-identity, and in thinking the future as a multiplicity which will lead to the subject's further differentiation. The death drive presupposes the 'dissolution of all previous identities and their novel transformation' (Ansell-Pearson 1999: 82). This is the thinking of being itself as the excessive task of affirming the '*all* of chance' (*DR*, 142).

One of the most striking things about the death drive in *Difference and Repetition* is that Deleuze does not use it explicitly in his third chapter, entitled 'The Image of Thought', in which he puts forward a view of thought as a violent encounter with the unthinkable and the unrecognisable, which, of course, we could readily understand as an encounter with a sort of death. The death drive would be an obvious concept with which to tackle such things in his proposition of a new style of philosophy. However, perhaps it would be too obvious for a philosophy driven by the desire to unsettle thought. Despite this, the death drive lingers on in 'The Image of Thought', resonating with the spirit of the argument, its descriptions and style. This, I propose, gives us grounds for extending Deleuze's death drive into his critique of representational thought in order to develop a reading of Rhys's critique of common sense that sheds light on the various blind spots in her fourth novel.

In 'The Image of Thought' Deleuze critiques the transcendental method of establishing a doctrine of the faculties, based on its error of 'tracing the transcendental from the outlines of the empirical' (*DR*, 181). In place of Kant's transcendentalism, Deleuze proposes that the limit of any given faculty must be acknowledged to be at the heart of any attempt to think that faculty through: the 'transcendent exercise', he writes, 'must not be traced from the empirical exercise precisely because it apprehends that which cannot be grasped from the point of view of common sense' (180). The aim is 'to avoid any explanandum or transcendence that would function as a condition for *what is*. The question of philosophy, for empiricism, is not to account for the condition or meaning of the given but to respond to the given' (Colebrook 2000b: 113).<sup>53</sup> The Deleuzian philosopher responds by creating concepts as 'intervention[s]', or responses to particular problems or situations (Colebrook 2000b: 114).

<sup>53</sup> The question of Deleuze's transcendentalism is one of the central points of debate concerning his philosophy. For example, Daniel W. Smith contends that providing the conditions of the production of the new is one of the two bedrocks of Deleuze's project in a reading which sometimes seems quite contrary to Colebrook's (Smith, in Deleuze 1997: xi-lv).

We might, then, understand Deleuze's logic of the outside, his aim to think through the limit of the faculties, as a sort of death drive which self-consciously, constantly threatens to over-reach itself:

Each faculty must be borne to the extreme point of its dissolution, at which it falls prey to triple violence: the violence of that which forces it to be exercised, of that which it is forced to grasp and which it alone is able to grasp, yet also that of the ungraspable (from the point of view of its empirical exercise). This is the threefold limit of the final power. Each faculty discovers at this point its own unique passion – in other words, its radical difference and its eternal repetition. (*DR*, 180)

Art, argues Deleuze, can help us with this risky task of pushing the faculties to their limits. Marcel Proust pushes memory to its limit, and Lewis Carroll does the same with sense. Specifically, the unmediated intensities of affects and percepts, those 'free or untamed states of difference in itself', that are produced in certain works of art raise sensibility and imagination to 'the level of the transcendent exercise' where these faculties encounter their limit, forcing us to confront that which can only be imagined but which is also 'empirically unimaginable' (*DR*, 181). Style, as the continuous variation, stuttering, or fragmentation, releases these states of pure difference or unmediated intensities.

For some artists, such as Antonin Artaud, the aim of writing is to engender thought in language by pushing the language of schizophrenia to its limit (*DR*, 184). Sasha's exhortation to 'think, you apes', suggests and dramatises a severe diminution of the possibility of thought. Applying a logic of the outside to this novel, what faculty (if any), might we ask, does Rhys bear to its limit? What is her equivalent to Proustian reminiscence, Carroll's nonsense, Artaud's schizophrenia? Extrapolating from Sasha's failure identified in the previous chapter, and taking into account the impasse with which Rhys begins this work, I suggest that Rhys is pushing the ethical faculty of literature to the 'extreme point of its dissolution' – the point at which words fail because they do not lead to the action that is required. This, I contend, is the unthinkable event, the encounter with the nonrecognisable, to which the text drives itself.

In the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze argues that the concept of a '*Cogitatio natura universalis*', a universal concept of an untroubled 'I

think’, is a travesty of philosophy because it presupposes a certain Image of thought involving an upright nature on the part of thought, a good will on the part of the thinker, and the fact that everybody knows what it means to think – a common sense (*DR*, 166).<sup>54</sup> As long as this remains a universal given, difference will be subordinated and represented ‘through the identity of the concept and the thinking subject’ (335); thought will operate in terms of identity, opposition, analogy and resemblance; and the task of restoring difference to the thinking of thought will remain out of reach. This argument gives us a means of reconsidering Sasha’s radical uncertainty and her failure, sometimes, to think as evidence of Rhys’s healthy scepticism about thinking in general. Sasha repeatedly denounces established, respectable thought which operates in terms of an established ‘sentimental ballad’ and which she names cliché: ‘Everything in their whole bloody world is a cliché. Everything is born out of a cliché, rests on a cliché, survives by a cliché. And they believe in the clichés’ (*GMM*, 36). Rhys presupposes neither an innately good thought, nor a good will on the part of those who think, and Sasha’s inability to include herself in her own scepticism reinforces the sense of the accuracy of this stance. Instead of possessing self-awareness, Sasha is profoundly uncertain in regards to her knowledge, perceptions, desires and feelings: ‘Am I disappointed?’, she wonders, ‘[a]m I vexed?’ (*GMM*, 128–9). It seems that Sasha does not take as a given what is meant by ‘self, thinking, and being’ (*DR*, 164).

Sasha also seems to understand the role in representation of common sense. For Deleuze, this shared stance denotes the ‘subjective’ presupposition of the principle of identity, which we use to judge the self a supreme, enduring entity in relation to which the ‘object’ or the other is always the opposed and inferior. We do not need to look hard to find a comparable objection to common sense in *Good Morning, Midnight*, a novel concerned with how marginalised others are persecuted and deemed inferior because of their difference. Common sense, as Deleuze describes it, is ‘a subjective principle of collaboration of the faculties for “everybody”’ which contributes to the Image of thought the ‘form of the Same’ (*DR*, 169). There is no good ‘collaboration of the faculties’ for the benefit of ‘everybody’ in Rhys’s final interwar novel. There is instead a dramatic disparity between Sasha’s vision and analysis of the world and the perception of those she encounters. With the exception of Serge, she encounters nobody

<sup>54</sup> I retain the single capitalisation in the phrase ‘Image of thought’ in order to reinforce its specific sense in Deleuze’s critique.



who is 'likeminded', and the fellow feeling between Serge and Sasha is undermined by an insurmountable difference which sustains the gulf between them. Despite this camaraderie, Sasha kisses the unlikeable Delmar, and her visit with the artist concludes on a monetary transaction, prompted by Serge's initial scepticism and Sasha's embarrassed insistence; their buyer-seller relationship epitomises the fundamental difference between them as well as the mechanics of oppositional negation which determines the mood of this novel.

For Deleuze, rather than being an act which adheres to a pre-existing Image, thinking is a violent encounter with nonrecognition because it is an encounter with the limit of thought, with that which is not yet established and which therefore cannot be recognised and can only be sensed: the 'form of recognition', Deleuze asserts, 'has never sanctioned anything but the recognisable and the recognised; form will never inspire anything but conformities' (*DR*, 170). Thinking the 'new – in other words, difference – calls forth forces in thought which are not the forces of recognition, today or tomorrow, but the powers of a completely other model, from an unrecognised and unrecognisable *terra incognita*' (172). Sometimes Sasha's inability to think and to comprehend is just that – an inability. At such times the thought of the text and Sasha's thought are distinct. At other times the protagonist's inability to recognise seems to be productive and corresponds to Deleuze's affirmation of an encounter with something which can only be sensed. In these moments Sasha's thought coincides with Rhys's stylistic procedure, which plays out by way of convulsions, for probing the limits of the literary text.

## **II. Violent encounters and an Exhibition of blind spots**

In an essay on Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff, Emery argues that these writers are invested in writing against the 'European epistemology of the visual – sight as the dominant way of knowing' (1997: 259). Emery proposes that forms of representation predicated on the imagination as 'image-making process' are bound to 'an image-producing and consuming global capitalism' and seem 'also inseparable historically from the "imperial eye" or "commanding gaze" of colonialist practice and discourse' (1997: 261). She reads these Caribbean women writers as inscribing a 'counterdiscursive revision' of narrative devices which 'figure' visuality (Emery 1997: 264). This revision – in which, for example, the device of *ekphrasis* is 'extended' to

‘excess’, or its absence rendered a ‘significant present’ – serves to expose ‘the constitutive processes of the colonialist imagination’, and also creates ‘resistance to it, renewing vision for subversive and newly creative purpose’ (Emery 1997: 262). Extending and twisting this argument, I propose that *Good Morning, Midnight* presents a counterdiscursive refiguration of the dominant Western epistemological presupposition that Deleuze names the Image of thought.

This refiguration is dramatised in Sasha’s lack of common sense when confronted by her tyrannical employer, Mr Blank. In assigning him this name Rhys is parodying his inability to see and comprehend Sasha in a humane manner: there is a capitalised unthinking ‘Blank’ where his compassion should be. His form of rationality allows him only to see Sasha as an inferior other whom he can terrorise and exploit, and Rhys’s epithet is a pithy indictment of the lack in the comprehension of people like him. He derides Sasha’s nonsensical response to his demand and calls her a ‘helpless little fool’ (*GMM*, 24), but her nonsense and her inability to make sense of his mispronounced demand to find the cashier serve to make him see her and she becomes a visible irritant rather than remaining an invisible cog in his capitalist machine. Her nonsense stalls his business (his cheque is not delivered), is her means of escape from the oppressive situation and subverts the capitalist, imperialist ethic of mastery that Mr Blank embodies. Her nomadic subjectivity is generally a matter of navigating and surviving this mastery, but here it becomes a matter of affirming a different act of thinking.

The fact that Sasha’s utter uncertainty is more pronounced than that of Rhys’s other protagonists can be explained by the pernicious propaganda which was a dominant discourse in Europe in the late 1930s. Her uncertainty can be construed as the effect of being subjected to violent misrepresentations of reality which are designed to mislead. There is an emphasis on visuality and representation in this fourth novel which works alongside Rhys’s linguistic scepticism as the author’s response to the dominance of propaganda generally – the euphemistic signs of patriarchal imperialism, capitalism and war; and certain facets of the text mark out the insidiousness of Nazi propaganda specifically. The most notable marker of propaganda is the Exhibition which is occupying the city. It seems to threaten Sasha, invading her unconscious in the nightmare of Part One, and it is thematically linked to her excruciating awareness of her tendency to make an exhibition of herself in public. It is a symbolic site which

carries a number of contrary significations.<sup>55</sup> It is at once a spectral and spectacular construct for Sasha, supporting various psychic dichotomies such as desire and fear, reality and fantasy. Above all else the Exhibition signifies the ‘coexistence of discrepant realities’ which Bill Schwarz understands to be the ‘principal object’ of Rhys’s narratives (2003: 22). In Rhys’s fiction,

the inner subjective life of her protagonists never seems to be reconciled with the diktats of the given world. Much of her inventiveness as a writer derives from her capacities to craft a narrative which in itself dramatises and makes evident the workings of these discrepant realities – social and subjective – in all their textured, phenomenological everydayness. (Schwarz 2003: 21)

The 1937 Paris world fair exhibited a sense of unreality in dramatic fashion. It took up the centre of Paris, displacing the ‘real’ city, and replacing it with structures that purported to represent foreign cultures, while omitting virtually all representation of French society as it was in 1937 – fraught with social conflict.<sup>56</sup> The Exposition did promote peace – albeit somewhat ironically, relegating the Star of Peace to the Place du Trocadéro outside the Exposition’s perimeters. The Exposition also and more elaborately promoted a ‘world view’ – an internationalism predicated on the illusion of global cooperation, a supposedly universalist gaze which incorporated everyone, and a truly modern, ethnographic appreciation of other cultures which manifested itself in a mania for classificatory systems and often quaint and Orientalist exhibitory practices. It did so, however, against a background of an increasingly dominant xenophobic and anti-Semitic sentiment in Paris. The view from the esplanade or ‘promenade’ (as Sasha calls it) at the Trocadéro’s Palais de Chaillot was the principal viewpoint of the Exposition, and from there the spectacle of Stalinism and Nazism confronting one another was unavoidable (see Figure 1). The opposition of the German and the Soviet pavilions, situated on either side of the Exposition’s main axis, running between the Palais de Chaillot and the Eiffel Tower, dominated the Exposition’s main space, its

<sup>55</sup> Christina Britzolakis’s 2007 essay focuses on Rhys’s inscription in *Good Morning, Midnight* of the intersection of capitalist and imperialist practices, patriarchy, fascism and modernist discourses and argues that this intersection coalesces in the Exhibition.

<sup>56</sup> My analysis of the political significations of the Exhibition is informed by the accounts of French fascism cited in the previous chapter and by studies of the 1937 world fair by Britzolakis (2007), Linda Camarasana (2009) and James D. Herbert (1995).

principal view and the discourse surrounding it. Newspaper reports on the world fair frequently focused on this spectacle of confrontation. A weak message of peace and a modern ‘world view’ formed the stage on which totalitarianism foreshadowed the disaster of the Second World War.<sup>57</sup> The Exposition inadvertently laid out in visual terms the human propensity for self-deception, and our predisposition to accept (and enjoy) the discrepancy between reality and the image of reality with which we are confronted.

On the one hand the Exhibition in *Good Morning, Midnight* is a metonymic figuration of Sasha’s confusing experience of discrepant realities and unreality, standing for this experience on a metropolitan scale and thereby giving public expression to that which is more commonly the relegated phenomenological experience of marginalised others. On the other hand a powerful textual erasure suggests something quite contrary. In Part Four, Sasha and René go to the Exhibition’s main viewpoint – the Trocadéro’s promenade – and stand ‘looking down’ at the fountains shining in the lights (which we see in Figure 2 below). Their illuminated night time view would encompass the Eiffel Tower in the distance, flanked by the two pavilions, separated by the fountains (137). This is the spectacle that Sasha wants to see before she leaves (*GMM*, 136). Yet, taking in this view, Sasha only sees the fountains. The text blanks the sight of the totalitarian standoff in what seems to be an authorial comment on the monumentality, the contrivance and the violent content of the dominant spectacle.

This strange moment indicates the human tendency to feigned myopia – an unwillingness of the social consciousness to see what is coming, which was tragically evident in the late 1930s. It appears as a willed blindness on Sasha’s part and a textual manoeuvre: like Mr Blank, the Exhibition is assigned an anonymous or blank value. There are no signs other than the date and the naming of the Trocadéro which give it either an identity or content. The fountains that preoccupy Sasha serve as a veil, distracting her from that which is either side of them, and distracting us from asking why Rhys has evacuated the scene of its explicitly political content. The text allows neither the reader nor the characters to see that which it seems to want us to see: the spectacle of totalitarianism and the sight of an event which demanded a willed self-delusion. The scene presents a revision of the form of dominant visuality exemplified

<sup>57</sup> Issacharoff also focuses on the tragic visual irony of this situation (2013: 113).

by totalitarianism and, in particular, fascism, which dictates what is seen and imposes a grand vision that operates according to the logic of an ‘imperial eye’.



*Figure 1. The view by day of the German and Soviet pavilions in Paris, 1937. The area they flank was, and still is, named Place de Varsovie. By permission of the Bureau International des Expositions.*



*Figure 2. The view of the Palais de Chaillot by night, 1937. The column behind, with the star on the top, was named the Peace Column (it does not exist anymore). By permission of the Bureau International des Expositions.*

Sasha responds strangely to the Exhibition, and becomes transfixed in a moment of aesthetic rapture by its ‘cold, empty’ beauty (*GMM*, 137). There is an intense sense of isolation in her response which nevertheless involves strong desire. Despite and because of René’s company her encounter with the Exhibition is hers alone. She is spurred to go to it by his anti-Semitic remarks about Russians in Paris. ‘Jews and poor whites. The most boring people in the world. Terrible people’, says the gigolo (137), and Sasha responds,

For some reason I am very vexed at this. I start wondering why I am there at all... I want to get away. I want to be out of the place [...] I want to go by myself, to get into a taxi and drive along the street, to stand by myself and look down at the fountains in the cold light. (*GMM*, 136-37)

When standing at the viewpoint Sasha seems intensely gratified: ‘Cold, empty, beautiful – this is what I imagined, this is what I wanted.’ Her rapture seems to depend not on the vision itself but on a correspondence between her expectations and the reality of the Exhibition – on having imagined and desired correctly, and on having her desire fulfilled. The Exhibition appears as a surrogate for Sasha, standing in the place of a desired person. Unlike René, with whom there is always discord, the Exhibition meets her desire. Yet this is true only to the extent that she ‘imagined’ and ‘wanted’ cold, empty beauty. Her disengagement with the scene and the sense of self-disengagement suggested by her lifeless (‘cold’, ‘empty’) imagination and desire is underscored by her detached assessment of one of the buildings: “‘The building is very fine,’ I say, in a schoolmistress’s voice’ (*GMM*, 137). This passage seems to dramatise what Walter Benjamin described as the modern predicament of self-alienation which fascism exploits. Concluding his famous 1936 essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, with which Rhys may have been familiar, Benjamin argues that fascism sees its ‘salvation’ in rendering politics aesthetic, giving the masses ‘not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves’ (2008: 1108). For Benjamin, ‘all efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war’ (2008: 1108). This may have been all too clear for the visitor to the 1937 Exposition, with its spectacle of the Soviet and German pavilions unequivocally presenting architecture and the art held within as ideological confrontation. The vision would have convinced at least some visitors of the imminence of another war and the threat posed to the world by the

realisation of the Futurist slogan cited by Benjamin at the end of his essay: '*Fiat ars – pereat mundus*', let art be created, let the world perish (2008: 1108). It is likely that Rhys interpreted this spectacle as an image of violence when she visited Paris in November 1937, and there is good reason to assume she was sensitive to what Albert Speer's swastika-adorned pavilion represented.

Sasha's strange response to the spectacle of totalitarian confrontation calls to be read in the light of the novel's concern with ingrained intolerance towards difference, and Rhys's rejection of dominant visualities and epistemologies. To those willing to perceive it the spectacle symbolised the likelihood of another World War and Albert Speer's monument figured racial hatred as political project, and this presence on the main axis of the Paris Exposition may have signalled, for Rhys, a sort of triumph over the city she so loved.<sup>58</sup> The evacuation of Sasha's gaze suggests more than just self-alienation. Unlike René who dislikes the Star of Peace and delights in conflict, thereby being a suitable citizen for the diktats of fascism, as Benjamin understood it, the absence in Sasha's view from the Promenade suggests a refusal to see a politics of hatred and intolerance made aesthetic. Balancing this focus on fascism, the text's refusal to address this spectacle directly also signals the refusal of the politicisation of art. Sasha's aesthetic rapture then works as the opting out of the terms of representation on offer to her, binding as they do the aesthetic to the political, and both, here, to virulent racial hatred. This narrative blanking is the text's refusal to incorporate what cannot and should not be understood – Sasha's paranoia turned into a 'cold, empty' blindness which nevertheless has a symbolic, psychic and ethical function.

Deleuze writes that

recognition is insignificant only as a speculative model. It ceases to be so with regard to the ends which it serves and to which it leads us. What is recognised is not only an object but also the values attached to an object. (*DR*: 171)

This later moment of unseeing vision seems to speak back to Sasha's blank-hearted employer as well as to the values associated with the Exhibition. The blind spot in the

<sup>58</sup> Although in 1937 only a symbolic triumph, within a little over a year after *Good Morning, Midnight* was published in April 1939, Paris was occupied by Hitler's troops.

Exhibition can be read as the denunciation of the three main elements of the Image of thought: the ‘image of a naturally upright thought, which knows what it means to think’, an ‘in principle natural common sense’, and a ‘transcendental model of recognition’ (*DR*: 170). On this reading, Sasha’s detached ‘schoolmistress’s voice’ that underscores her nonunitary subjectivity, René’s anti-Semitism and his relegation of the Star of Peace to something ‘mesquin’ (petty or mean), and the nature of the blanked spectacle itself constitute Rhys’s version of the refusal of the first two elements. Thought is not a given, and collaboration is only for the benefit of a violent world order. The world of this Exhibition allows no room for difference except as that which is, at best, secondary, relegated to categorised representations of the exotic ‘other’, and at worst that which is unacceptable for the totalitarian state. Recognition of any sort would be the adoption of an epistemology according to a model of dominant visuality and the denigration of difference. Sasha’s refusal to see the Exhibition is an *almost* laying bare of the third element, the model of recognition which ‘remains sovereign and defines the orientation of the philosophical analysis of what it means to think’ (*DR*: 171). This is a moment of passive resistance, as Sasha refuses to orient her thought solely towards identity and opposition, analogy and resemblance. There is adequate reason to judge Sasha’s aesthetic response a philosophical one rather than as just the failure of a faculty, although failure is sometimes the condition of the act of thinking:

it is not a question of saying what few think and knowing what it means to think. On the contrary, it is a question of someone – if only one – with the necessary modesty not managing to know what everybody knows, and modestly denying what everybody is supposed to recognise. Someone who neither allows himself to be represented nor wishes to represent anything. Not an individual endowed with good will and a natural capacity for thought, but an individual full of ill will who does not manage to think, either naturally or conceptually. (*DR*: 165-66)

This passage describes Sasha’s position accurately: she has struck many critics as an idiot ‘full of ill will’ who cannot or will not see what she ought to do. Yet this visual negation is, I contend, the text’s modest death drive – its means of refusing dominant structures of thought, and Rhys’s refusal of the culture of her times.



The culmination of this Deleuzian death drive in *Good Morning, Midnight* is Sasha's bewildering affirmative embrace of the commis at the end of the novel. This act moves the text away from its critical orientation, away from a 'not managing to think', as indicated by Sasha's final affirmation, '[y]es – yes – yes...' (*GMM*, 159). My reading of this much-debated ending is not far from those critics who have viewed Sasha's acceptance of the sinister neighbour as the internalisation of fascism, but I cannot disallow the affirmative impulse in the embrace. Thinking through Deleuze's death drive alongside his elaboration with Guattari of literary affect gives us a means of reconciling the contrary dynamics which play out in Rhys's conclusion.

### **III. 'The enormous effort, under which the human brain cracks. But not before the thing is done'**

The end of *Good Morning, Midnight* dramatises a death drive in a fairly straightforward way. The commis stands for real horror. His white dressing gown, which connects him to the father figure in Sasha's nightmare, and the strange simile likening him to the 'priest of some obscene, half-understood religion' align him with the cult of Führer worship contrived by Hitler (*GMM*, 30). The commis is an incestuous amalgamation of fascist tyrant and victim (a 'poor devil of a human being' (*GMM*, 159)), father and lover, ghostly and substantial. Importantly, he is different from all the other characters in the novel in that he is rendered with no attempt at realism, is a highly symbolic construct and inhabits these boundary confusions. Sasha's acceptance and her affirmation seem clearly self-destructive and, on one reading, her act seems to dramatise Deleuze and Guattari's central argument in *Anti-Oedipus* that fascism is the desire which we all have for destructive power. The death drive is, in one sense, the inevitability which attends her embrace – an act which is a repetition of her disastrous acceptance of René on the landing in the dark. There are several other incidents which preordain this final act, most powerful and disorienting among which is Sasha's nightmarish daydream in Part Two during her fleeting moment of happiness with Serge, when she envisions the 'dreams that you have, alone in an empty room, waiting for the door that will open, the thing that is bound to happen...' (83).

Yet explaining the embrace as Sasha's acceptance of her desire for destructive power does not account sufficiently for various other textual elements such as the sense of 'effort', of Sasha's willing something, which is so palpable in the final pages, the

various dramatic shifts in register and voice, the intensification of imagery and the emphasis on sight in the conclusion. However, the most vivid description of ‘death’ in the concluding pages is Sasha’s repetition of Serge’s paeon to Vincent Van Gogh, and this serves as a sort of catalyst which enables these various elements and contrary dynamics to work together.

Serge’s veneration of the great post-Impressionist signals another 1937 exhibition. A rather unusual show devoted to Van Gogh was held in the new Palais de Tokyo as part of the Paris Exposition. Part of an experimentation with the educative function of different kinds of exhibitions intended for the masses, this exhibition included not just Van Gogh’s paintings and drawings but also an unusual ‘extra room containing documents, newspaper clippings, photographs of the places Van Gogh had worked [...] and panels with texts pertaining to the painter’s life and philosophy’ (Blühm 1999: 72-73). Rhys may have visited this or discussed it with Segal. In their meeting in Part Two, Serge admits he

cries about Van Gogh. [He] speechifies about ‘the terrible effort, the sustained effort – something beyond the human brain, what he did.’

Etcetera, etcetera...

When he gives me a cigarette his hand is shaking. He isn’t lying. I think he has really cried over Van Gogh. (*GMM*, 79)

In Part Four, during Sasha’s faltering attempt to recompose herself after René’s attack, and while expressing her desire for René’s return, she repeats Serge’s words, with a variation which signals the ‘crack’ of death:

‘But why the gesture of not taking the money? I argue. ‘It was simply ridiculous. You know you’re regretting it already. Go back and get it. You could walk in, you could say “I forgot something”, take it and walk out again.’

Come back, come back, come back...

This is the effort, the enormous effort, under which the human brain cracks. But not before the thing is done, not before the mountain moves.

Come back, come back, come back...

He hesitates. He stops. I have him. (*GMM*, 157)

It is impossible to know rationally what the repetition of Serge's words means in this context. On the one hand, the 'effort' is that exercised by Sasha as she wills the return of René in order to seduce him so she will no longer have to bear her loneliness. On the other, we have little reason to think that Sasha believes that she can *actually* will René back. She retains sufficient capacity for lucid articulation for us to dismiss loss of sanity as an all-encompassing interpretative solution. René's aggressive pursuit and assault when Sasha changes her mind, and his boast of having participated in gang rape might be grounds for assuming that the 'thing' that has to be 'done' despite the lethal effort it involves is the act of willing his return in the knowledge that he will do her harm.<sup>59</sup> The 'thing' might be Sasha's affirmation of her masochistic submission and self-defeat; it might be her acknowledgement that she needs bonds of connection even if those bonds will destroy her. Yet if this is the case, Serge's sublime appreciation of Van Gogh makes little sense, other than in terms of a final sublimation of all that was good for Sasha into a death wish. I propose instead that the allusion to the Dutch colourist, like Rhys's notable use of Rimbaud at an earlier key moment in the novel, provides us with the means of understanding the text positively if we look to what Sasha's evocation of Serge's admiration of this painter after René's attack does.

The allusion brings Van Gogh into presence in a sort of *poiesis*, as the text brings itself forth, in these concluding convulsions, in its relation to his creativity. Van Gogh emerges in his struggle to create his paintings, alongside Serge's intense and true response to this, a response which allows Sasha to believe him. To understand this making-present we can turn to the correspondence between Rhys's text and Van Gogh's art. In Van Gogh's beautiful and tragic letters in the 1880s to his brother, sister and a few friends, the artist describes how he found 'consolation' for life's suffering in his powers of creation as he learnt to express feeling and sensation in colour. However, the act of creation, as he responded intensely to the colours of the French landscape, involved an increasingly heightened emotional response which caused the increasingly dangerous physiological attacks that plagued him (Van Gogh 1996: 394, 481). Breaking the two allusions down, we can see four things being brought into presence. There is the 'enormous effort' made by Van Gogh to create art; and there are his

<sup>59</sup> Pinning Sasha to the bed, René describes a 'very good truc' for women who flirt without intending to satisfy the man's desire: "'in Morocco it's much easier. You get four comrades to help you, and then it's easy. They each take their turn. It's nice like that.'" He laughs loudly' (*GMM*, 152). Among the most violent moments in Rhys's oeuvre, René's sadistic misogyny is overlooked surprisingly often. Cf. Angier 1990: 379, 394.

magnificent paintings, in which colour expresses feeling and sensation. Thirdly, there are blocs of sensation – or what Deleuze and Guattari also describe as a ‘monument’ of affect – in these paintings, which endure to this day, and to which Serge responds with such intensity (*WP*, 164). Finally, there are the passionate responses of the two characters: Serge’s rapturous feelings for Van Gogh’s work, and Sasha’s belief in Serge’s feelings. Both responses suggest a significant degree of consolation for the suffering of these two characters.

My description of the enduring power of Van Gogh’s art here draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s theorisation in *What is Philosophy?* of blocs of sensation which are independent of the material of the art work. In this conceptualisation, the artist ‘creates blocs of percepts and affects’, and ‘the only law of creation is that the compound must stand up on its own’ (*WP*, 164). The painter ‘shatter[s] lived perceptions into a sort of cubism, a sort of simultaneism, of harsh or crepuscular light, of purple or blue, which have no other object or subject than themselves’ (*WP*, 171). We see this in Serge’s passionate words in Part Two which evoke a monument of sensation that is independent of Van Gogh and the three individuals in Serge’s studio, and which also affect Serge and Sasha, providing a consolation for life that the reader also feels, as we appreciate Sasha’s one moment of happiness in the novel. For Deleuze and Guattari the painter deals mainly with percepts but the writer ‘invents unknown or unrecognised affects and brings them to light as the becoming of characters’ (174). She ‘uses words, but by creating a syntax that makes them pass into sensation’ she ‘wrest[s] the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion’ for a people yet to come (176). This is the practice of ‘fabulation’. Put simply, this independent and new sensation produced in a work of art exists for future generations more than it does for the present. This sensation will assist future generations to speak a better language. In Van Gogh’s words, true art endures, to be appreciated more meaningfully in the future, and it consoles.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, For Deleuze and Guattari, art will ‘raise’ future generations to ‘the height of the earth’s song and the cry of humanity’, constituting ‘tone, health, becoming’ (176). Art as a ‘monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly

<sup>60</sup> Both sentiments are repeated in Van Gogh’s letters, and his claim about appreciation has proved truer, presumably, than he could have imagined.

resumed struggle' (*WP*, 176-77). Great art increases the possibility of revolution, offers consolation for the failure of this event, and memorialises the possibility of bonds established among a people.

Van Gogh largely avoided making explicit political statements, much as Rhys did, but his work is 'revolutionary' in its interested and beautiful depictions of land workers and the poor, in his experimentation with technique, his refusal of the rules of the Paris schools, his use of colour to move beyond representation but in resistance to abstraction. Serge's tearful response to Van Gogh enables him to empathise with Sasha's inclination to cry, and this is the means through which they bond: 'This is where he starts getting hold of me, Serge [...] "I often want to cry"' he says' (*GMM*, 78). Serge's response to Van Gogh's art in Part Two is therefore central to the text's refusal of nihilism and misanthropy. The 'persistent sensations that embody the event' of Van Gogh's art that Serge perceives are, surely, those sensations involved in the struggle to create in the face of material deprivation and social persecution and at the greatest possible expense. Serge's Jewish identity and the style of his art will, we can infer, increasingly endanger him in a manner not wholly dissimilar to the danger in which Van Gogh was increasingly caught as he frightened his neighbours, navigated hospitalisations and pushed his creativity to its limit. Yet Sasha is no artist. What 'event', then, is embodied by her sensations in Part Four as she recalls Van Gogh's 'enormous effort'? What are the 'bonds', if any, that are installed as the 'mountain moves' and Rhys's novel concludes?

Near the beginning of their chapter, 'Percept, Affect, and Concept', Deleuze and Guattari note that an artistic 'method is needed' to 'wrest the affect from affections' in order to create a compound of pure sensation. They itemise a range of such methods: 'vibrating sensation – coupling sensation – [and] opening or splitting, hollowing out sensation' (*WP*, 168). Undoubtedly there are others, but the previous chapter's analysis of Sasha's vacillation gives us a strong indication that the coupling of sensation is Rhys's method for wresting sensation from words in a heightened manner at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight*. From the moment that René unpins Sasha, steals from her and leaves, the mode of her expression becomes dramatically unstable, with different registers of voice and thought accumulating, interrupting one another and repeating with slight variation. Despite this instability, two dominant feelings are expressed. There is a feeling of a lingering confidence in humanity: 'I don't want to see him go... He might say something. He might say good night, or good-bye, or good luck or

something’, Sasha thinks, as René rifles through her bag (*GMM*, 154). Clearly, this lingering confidence is not simply beneficial. It has already been responsible for Sasha’s disastrous relinquishment of her defences against René. Nevertheless, it persists to the closing lines in which the commis becomes just ‘another poor devil’ – his sins, the words imply, no worse than most. In stark contrast Sasha also feels a debilitating resignation. Considering her happiness just a short time ago, the distraught Sasha first tries to establish temporal connection between the two dramatically different feelings, asking ‘[w]ho is this crying? The same one who laughed on the landing, kissed and was happy’, but her resignation erupts and prompts her to sever herself from any remaining hope: ‘This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other – how do I know who the other is? She isn’t me’ (154). Although this recalls Rimbaud’s famous formula, the recollection is surely ironic. His revolutionary spirit would warrant affirmation rather than damning denial. Sasha’s lingering confidence, if it were active here instead, might lead her so far as affirming ‘I am the other, and the other, and the other’ *ad infinitum*.

Sasha’s faith in humanity gives her a future-orientation, producing the future tense that rises up in the two paragraphs which chronicle Sasha’s imagined, animated encounter with the figure in Serge’s painting:

He’ll stare at me, gentle, humble, resigned, mocking, a little mad. Standing in the gutter playing his banjo. And I’ll look back at him because I shan’t be able to help it, remembering about being young, and about being made love to and making love, about pain and dancing and not being afraid of death, about all the music I’ve ever loved, and every time I’ve been happy. (*GMM*, 155)

This morphs into a delirious mythical vision which begins by surveying the wrath, debasement and death of the gods. The situation is bleak, ‘Madame Vénus se fâchera’, ‘Phoebus Apollo is walking away from me down the boulevard to hide himself in la crasse’ and ‘even Jesus is dead’ (*GMM*, 156). Yet this state of affairs suggests a lingering Nietzschean faith in humankind’s capacity to manage things ourselves, once we cease to look to higher powers for comfort and answers. This faith is conveyed in the multitude made present through the unclear ‘hum of voices talking’ which sounds only like ‘[f]emmes, femmes, femmes, femmes’ (156), as well as the fact that the vision is a reworking of the words of the elder of the two Russians who Sasha meets in Part

One, ‘the more alive of the two’ who insists that Madame Vénus is angry and with whom she feels some affinity (41). The Part Four vision matures into the surreal, still mythical image of the ‘enormous machine, made of white steel’ with ‘innumerable flexible arms’, at the end of each of which is either ‘an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara’ or a light: ‘The arms that carry the eyes and the arms that carry the lights are all extraordinarily flexible and beautiful. But the grey sky, which is the background, terrifies me’ (156). This vision couples the two dominant sensations powerfully. The white steel suggests Sasha’s submissive admission of the ‘beauty’ of fascism, of its politics made aesthetic, but there is also a beautiful, resilient, ‘flexible’ and apparently unruly energy to this machine, signalled by its cosmetic femininity. This is no simple war machine. It dances to an ‘accompaniment’ of ‘music and song’ with which Sasha is familiar, despite the terrifying, grey background (156). This machine also evokes a multitude, through both the numerous arms and eyes, and through the music and dance which, in Rhys’s fiction, most often involve shared experience.

The vision does not end optimistically though. One voice seeks to abolish the other, in a deathly demand for complete conformity: ‘Damned voice in my head, I’ll stop you talking’ (*GMM*, 157). This fascistic signal is reinforced by the reiteration of René’s violently misogynistic insult to Sasha earlier in Part Four when she was still refusing to have sex with him and jokingly tells him she is a ‘cérébrale’. He tells her that she is mistaken, that she is ‘stupid’ and, whereas she won’t admit her desire for him, the *cérébrale* is

a woman who doesn’t like men or need them [... and] doesn’t like women either. Oh no. The true *cérébrale* is a woman who likes nothing and nobody except herself and her own damned brain or what she thinks is her brain [...] a monster. (*GMM*, 136)

After the attack Sasha repeats this as she imagines René’s disgust as he walks away from her hotel: ‘Sale femme. Ridiculous woman [...] You don’t like men, and you don’t like women either. You like nothing, nobody. Sauf ton sale cerveau. Alors, je te laisse avec ton sale cerveau...’ (157). At this point it is entirely unclear what the dominant feeling or sensation is. Sasha is castigating herself for her resistance to René, and we might therefore see some lingering belief in the gigolo’s goodness. Yet the imagined insult (literally, ‘dirty brain’) also designates the ethical corruption of the fascist project

itself, and the effect of its inclusion here is to elevate that which is deemed inferior or ‘dirty’ – namely, those who are different in race, health or belief and, of course, the independent, intelligent, sexually active woman. This sense is immediately reinforced by Sasha’s subsequent response-fantasy, as Sasha imagines her dirty brain as a ‘monster... The monster that can only crawl, or fly... Ah! But fly...’ (157). Sasha may be a monster alone, when resigned to humanity’s cruelty, but that may be preferable to being among those whose twisted immorality and extreme cruelty depend on the demand for total ‘cleanliness’.

A few lines later, Sasha evokes Van Gogh’s ‘enormous effort’, after which the diversity and magnitude of the registers become slightly less extreme, and she continues to will René’s return, now with a degree of imagined success. Significantly, her voices continue to try to determine her ‘sale cerveau’. She tries to quiet them: ‘Don’t worry about that – no more sale cerveau’ (*GMM*, 158). She reassures the phantom René that she is not hysterical, but ‘cried like that because [he] went away’ (158). The ‘sale cerveau’ is aligned here with a resigned individualism, but Rhys immediately reverses this, positioning it as that which houses Sasha’s belief in people: ‘(Or did I cry like that because I’ll never sing again, because the light in my sale cerveau has gone out?)’ (158). Finally, the door opens, Sasha lies ‘very still, with [her] arm over [her] eyes. As still as if [she] were dead’ (159). The commis enters and the prose shifts into the strange affirmative mode that continues throughout the final paragraph: ‘I don’t need to look. I know’ (159). Although bewildering, it seems that the ‘great effort’ determines the movement into this affirmative register, given that it is only after its articulation that the vocal variation diminishes, Sasha gets ‘hold’ of René in her fantasy, the tenor of her angst lessens, and she seems to walk him step by step back to her room until her door is opening.

I propose that Sasha’s ‘effort’ is the work of authenticity needed to rid her of the sense of opposition between resignation and faith. The coupling of faith in people and resignation in the closing pages of the novel reaches fulfilment, and the two feelings finally commingle, becoming diffuse in this final paragraph. A sort of phenomenological ethics is achieved in which the ‘importance’ of everything that happens is affirmed without resorting to a transcendental criterion or dualisms: the colour of the commis’s dressing gown is ‘very important’, and it is a blessed relief that ‘he doesn’t say anything’ (*GMM*, 159). His invasion of Sasha’s room and body signals the end of her hatred, and an act for ‘the last time’ which warrants a triple affirmation.



We can no longer sense either resignation or faith in these words. Instead, the event that they embody is figured or made present. We cannot look to Van Gogh's creation to locate this event, but we can heed his difficulty and look to the text's various exhibitions and the difficulty of thinking which Rhys inscribes with such passion. Sasha's affirmation of her embrace of the dangerous commis, as she 'look[s] straight into his eyes' is, I contend, Rhys's acknowledgement that art in her time must proceed in the awareness of its own failure to prevent the rise of totalitarian regimes and the world's descent into another war. The 'enormous effort, under which the human brain cracks' can be understood as the need to create art both in the knowledge that such creation requires confidence in humanity (after all, for whom would her novel be, who might buy and read it, if not those who might understand and learn and feel better as a result of reading it?), *and* in the resigned knowledge that humanity is failing itself once again and consuming itself with its fascistic lust for power. Rhys begins *Good Morning, Midnight* with an impasse. She concludes it with an encounter with the impassable which is at the centre of a creative process. This is an encounter with the limit of art and the outside of thought, achieved through a stylistic commitment to affect. Returning to *Difference and Repetition*, Sasha's embrace of the terrible blank commis works as an encounter with nonrecognition that affirms the 'work' or 'genitality' of the thought of literature: the literary text brings itself into presence as it is 'forced to think its central collapse, its fracture, its own natural "powerlessness" which is indistinguishable from its greatest power' (*DR*, 184-85).

By paying attention to the monument of affect in the closing pages of *Good Morning, Midnight*, as well as to the text's drive to this moment, its historical context and Rhys's refiguration of dominant forms of representation, we can read the death drive in this fourth novel as the task of learning which affects the entire individual, as Rhys thinks through both the failure of literature to bring about positive change and the possibilities for fabulation in these conditions. There is no possible gesture to a future people in this work, no possibility of communality other than the fact of the text itself. There is instead an intense focus on the text's present, on its events – the spectacle of the world's descent into another world war, the rise of fascism and Stalinism, a totalitarian spectacle at the heart of a major centre of the art world. While doing many other things, Sasha's repetition stands for history's repetition. Unfortunately, history is still repeating itself. We can learn a great deal from Rhys's 'enormous effort' to create by looking directly at the presence of fascism. We would do well to look to the same

thing today. We can at least be comforted by the art that exists both to console us and to help us speak a slightly better language, and which might just lead us closer to a better world.

In a 1979 interview for *The Paris Review*, Rhys recalled her attraction to Paris in the 1920s, describing it in typically understated terms as ‘a very interesting place’: ‘Whenever I had some money I’d shoot back to Paris. Paris sort of lifted you up. It’s pink, you know, not blue or yellow; there’s nothing like it anywhere else’ (1979: 234 [2008: 210]). There is nothing pink about Paris in *Good Morning, Midnight*. A few pages into the novel Sasha addresses the city to which she has returned: ‘Paris is looking very nice tonight... You are looking very nice tonight, my beautiful, my darling, and oh what a bitch you can be! But you didn’t kill me after all, did you? And they couldn’t kill me either...’ (*GMM*, 15). The incipient violence here is a signal to the reader, as is the following reference to a moment thirteen years earlier when Enno and Sasha ‘waited for a couple of hours to see Anatole France’s funeral pass, because, Enno said, we mustn’t let such a great literary figure disappear without paying him the tribute of a last salute’ (15). The city did not kill Sasha, but the reference to the death of the writer who bears the nation’s name indicates that, conversely, Sasha might in a sense outlive its capital. Anatole France died in 1924 which is the year that Rhys’s literary career was launched with Ford Madox Ford’s publication of ‘Vienne’ in his December issue of the *transatlantic review*, which placed the newly named Rhys alongside luminaries such as Ford, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway and Havelock Ellis. In 1924 she adopted Ford’s suggested pen name and, in a number of senses, *became* Jean Rhys. For a time in the 1920s, Paris was the centre of Rhys’s world, a European surrogate home and the birthplace of her artistic identity. It was one of the most important centres of the Western art world of which she was a new member. It was one of two places which served as both literary origin and inspiration for Rhys – the other being Dominica. ‘When I say write for love’, Rhys explained to Francis Wyndham in 1959, in relation to *Good Morning, Midnight*, and not being able to reconcile herself to writing for money,

I mean there are two places for me. Paris (or what it was to me) and Dominica, a most lovely and melancholy place where I was born [...] Both these places or the thought of them make me want to write [...] ‘Midnight’ was Paris revisited for the last time. The war killed it. (*Letters*, 171)

The sad song (*'Gloomy Sunday'*) on the first page of the text joins together in a poignant allusion to the city in which Sasha hears it and the island on which Rhys grew up. Dominica, the name derived from the Latin for Sunday and marking the day on which Columbus first saw the island, is yoked to Paris by the sad song, a 'tribute', perhaps (like that paid to Anatole France), to both of the places Rhys most loved and to the fact that both had become irrevocable. These allusions to literary origins, to 'my beautiful, my darling' Paris and to death in the novel's opening pages suggest that the book's title has a personal resonance: they invite us to see the significance in this text of the author's encounter with the source of creative lineage when that source no longer holds and now manifests the dissolution of creativity. Sasha's embrace of the commis is, I contend, Rhys's intuitive and ethical affirmation of the necessary task of seeing and writing about the Paris she loved in the process of transforming from 'morning' into 'midnight', and the author's confrontation with the fact that art had not prevented the rise of fascism, Stalinism and the other violent regimes that were expanding in the 1930s. It is possible, also, to read this embrace as Rhys's acknowledgement of the possibility that artistic visions of change and even faith in the redeeming power of art may in fact be useless forms of self-delusion.

Rhys may not have wanted to see this failure, and Sasha does not see at the Exhibition; she embraces René in the hallway in the dark, and she keeps her arm over her eyes while he attacks her. Difference is never easy to encounter, and the change in Paris that Sasha witnesses and considers is painful; this pain is possibly greater than that attached to her memories of the past. On the final page, however, she needs to see. She first *envisions* the return of a man: 'I don't need to look. I know', she thinks (*GMM*, 159). Yet really looking may be the writer's only task, especially when the sight is difficult: the 'difficult thing is the only worth while thing', Rhys wrote in 1963 (*Letters*, 241). Accordingly, Sasha looks:

I take my arm away from my eyes. It is the white dressing-gown.

[...]

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...' (*GMM*, 159)

The novel's conclusion dramatises Rhys's refusal of the Image of thought. The destruction affirmed by Sasha, to which the text is driven, is the dangerous encounter with that which cannot be thought, that which involves thinking the failure of the faculties of art, but which also 'perplexes' the soul and 'forces it to pose a problem' (DR: 176). A significant aspect of *Good Morning, Midnight* is that this perplexity does not just concern the protagonist. It is the novel's insistence and it concerns the reader: how we see, read, feel and think.

## Chapter Five

### **The absent maternal inheritance and Julia's becoming-child in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie***

We turn now to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature, in the first part of an extended discussion which spans this chapter and the next and which encompasses *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. A central argument in the following readings is that in Rhys's novels, albeit to a varying degree, patriarchy, capitalism and imperialism are inescapable. These are her 'machinic assemblages', comparable, perhaps, to those power structures in which Kafka's protagonists are entrapped (bureaucracy, the judiciary, capitalism and maybe even, if we follow Deleuze and Guattari, a nascent fascism). This chapter explores the need to face this inescapability in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. After delineating the concept of minor literature developed in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* the chapter proceeds to an analysis of oppressive desire in Rhys's second novel.<sup>61</sup> The problem of masochism is explored, using Savory's incisive reading of the 'Caribbean subtext' of Julia's narrative (1998: 57-84). The emphasis then shifts, and a schizoanalytic approach is taken up, as it is argued that Julia's return to her mother conceals a non-Oedipal drama. The final section explores Julia's problematic 'becoming-child' – her insistence on a childlike realm that is beyond the systems of power against which she rages, the effects of which the novel maps with great precision.

<sup>61</sup> Hereafter, page references to the 1986 English translation edition of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* are given using the abbreviation *K*.

## I. Rhys and minor literature

It is useful to begin with terminology. The term ‘assemblage’ as used by Deleuze and Guattari has its roots in the ‘German word *Komplex* (as in the “Oedipal complex”)’ (Buchanan 2015: 383). This reminds us that the assemblage does not signify something mechanical, even though material objects can be part of it, but is a lived relationality, a “‘living” arrangement’ that shapes human behaviour (Buchanan 2015: 385). A central proposition in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* is that power affects us by being proximate: ‘Power is not pyramidal as the Law would have us believe; it is segmentary and linear, and it proceeds by means of contiguity, and not by height and farawayness’ (K, 56). This idea is useful for reading Rhys’s fiction. The assemblage is our lived experience within a network of power relations which affect every aspect of our lives, to such a degree that our experience is inseparable from our environment and from the experience of those near to us. Embodied subjectivity is inseparable from objective determinants such as language, society and political regimes; experience is always shared, never simply individual. Assemblages consist of desire, ‘machines’ – the latter term denotes anything that involves a conscious or systematised production – and statements which are always collective. In contrast to the assemblage, the machinic assemblage denotes a social situation which is overdetermined by power structures (such as capitalism) that, together, incorporate everything and everyone, and in which we invest our desire to the extent that we are not actively working to dissolve them. We might think of machinic assemblages as the political reality of our lives that exceeds us. For Deleuze and Guattari, one of the most important features of Kafka’s writing is its prognostic function, as the author listens to the future, senses social changes and the new machinic assemblages which were emerging in his time. Kafka’s fiction is enthralled to the question, ‘*when can one say that a new assemblage is coming into view?* – diabolical or innocent, or both at the same time’ (K, 83). The prognostic function of Rhys’s fiction is not clear, but this chapter explores how her third novel kicks into gear the author’s faltering search for the possibility of affirming communality in the future – a search which eventually involves what might be understood as a sort of prognostics.

Rhys’s excoriating treatment of the exclusionary and oppressive mechanisms of social life, and the firm emphasis she places on problems stemming from the

maternal relationship have generally been dealt with as distinct problems, and the latter – like the ‘father problem’ in Kafka’s fiction – has, naturally, mostly been read through psychoanalytic theory. This chapter proceeds in the light of the schizoanalytic critique of the general exclusion of the political in psychoanalysis, with the aim of showing that these two Rhysian themes are, in fact, inseparable and are better understood as her inscription of a desire that is individual but also collective and political. I propose, in short, that the ‘mother problem’ in Rhys’s novels be considered in an expanded sense as the maternal dimension of the political problem of desire. The maternal relationship in the novels discussed in these two chapters is not merely inseparable from the socio-political: it actually stands for the latter. Childhood desiring scenes in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* that involve the mother serve as the prototype for subsequent political desiring scenes.

In *Anti-Oedipus* and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* Deleuze and Guattari argue that psychoanalysis works to conceal the fact that desire constitutes the social field and invests itself in capital, and is therefore that which determines both subjugation and the possibility of revolution: ‘We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire [...] *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else*’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 31). To resist the Oedipalisation of desire – its reduction to the familial sphere – a schizoanalysis is required which replaces the focus on a self-contained ego with an exploration of how desire and ‘affects or drives form part of the [social, political] infrastructure itself’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 71). Schizoanalysis maps the ways in which desire reinforces and creates possibilities for escape from the established and oppressive order of things. This chapter and the next argue that Rhys’s ability to confront the problems of retrograde desire and complicity in her writing is a condition for her capacity to engage productively with the question of how to write against the order of things when one is writing in the language of masters. This is the question described by Deleuze and Guattari:

How to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one’s own language? Kafka answers: steal the baby from its crib, walk the tightrope. (*K*, 19)

Rhys's answer is surprisingly similar. Confronting the limitations of language is, I propose, one of the ways in which Rhys maps desire and orients her texts towards an escape from the given. This is the first element of Deleuze and Guattari's tripartite definition of a minor literature. It is followed by the propositions that minor literature is always political and is a collective assemblage of enunciation (*K*, 16). We can see in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* a becoming-minor, as the two texts work towards the realisation of these criteria. The orientation of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is more doubtful.

Deleuze's literary analyses mostly focus on writers who are 'problematic [...] from the perspective of an adult-morality' and who wear their 'perversions' on their sleeve, as it were, rather than concealing them (Lambert 1998: 21). As touched upon in my introduction, this is a good reason for taking a schizoanalytic approach in reading Rhys's problematically passive protagonists. Kafka's 'perversion', for Deleuze and Guattari, is his desire for distance, typified by his preference to remain a bachelor. Kafka's writing exemplifies minor literature because it concerns the impossibility he experienced of living and writing in a 'language that is not [his] own', and yet this impossibility is absolutely not Kafka's alone. On the contrary, it is the 'problem of immigrants, and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of minor literature, but also a problem for all of us' (*K*, 19). Kafka speaks his problems 'for all of us': how to reveal the ways in which language is oppressive and how, despite these operations, to work against them and create a language which makes possible the conditions for positive change? Kafka's situation is shared by us all to a greater or lesser extent, yet his desire for solitariness is testament to the fact that the conditions of a truly minor language are not yet possible.

Deleuze opens his 1993 collection *Essays Critical and Clinical* with the provocative proposition, '[t]he shame of being a man—is there any better reason to write?' (1997:1), a question that speaks to Kafka's predicament, and which means not that we should write to work through our neuroses but that we should write to confront the limitations of language and write against its inadequate, oppressive and stifling representational functions. This involves acknowledging that our language is the language of the privileged few against the unprivileged many, but writing anyway. Shame at our complicity in forms of power which oppress, exploit and control should, Deleuze suggests, drive writers to experiment with language in such a manner that ways

out of the current situation (which is linguistic and non-linguistic) might become visible. This is Kafka's shame. I find something comparable in Rhys's third novel.

*The Trial* (*Der Prozess*, 1925) famously concludes with the brutal murder of K, and an astonishing statement which fuses complicity and resistance, submission and anger, and which gives life itself to the affect: 'It was as if the shame would outlive him' (Kafka 2000: 178). Shame is one of the most fascinating affects precisely because of its capacity for denoting both the objective and the subjective genitive. K may feel shame at his own inadequacies or for the inadequacies of mankind generally and his murderers in particular. Kafka's inscription of the inseparability of complicity and resistance is, I think, the reason why Kafka's work epitomises minor literature for Deleuze and Guattari. This problematic is at the heart of their chapter 'Proliferation of Series' in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, and its initially strange celebration of the manner in which Kafka 'accelerates' the proliferation of 'segments'. This celebration echoes Deleuze and Guattari's infamous Nietzschean proposition in *Anti-Oedipus* that schizoanalysis should aim to further 'accelerate the process' of capitalism's reterritorialisation, to accelerate the 'movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialisation' brought about by advanced capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 261). Understood as a proposition of political philosophy, their suggestion in *Anti-Oedipus* is problematic. However, in a literary context in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* it can, in my opinion, be read as an affirmative statement of the power of literature to change things. To see it this way, we need to grasp the extent to which, in this philosophy, our complicity with oppressive forms of power is absolutely inescapable. The conditions for revolution are not yet possible because capitalism has invaded everything. There is no 'Outside the Machine', to borrow the title of Rhys's vehemently anti-establishment 1960 short story, and so there is no longer a pure 'revolutionary desire that would be opposed to power, to the machines of power' and therefore 'no way to draw a firm distinction between the oppressors and the oppressed' (K, 57). We all comply with the status quo *to an extent*: we are always part of both camps, to varying degrees. This proposition is what makes Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis an exceptionally useful tool for understanding *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* – novels which chart the protagonists' becoming through acts of resistance and submission, through their oppressive (paranoiac) and radical (schizoid) desire.



The solution proposed by Kafka, on Deleuze and Guattari's reading, is that all forms of desire must be seized in an 'all-too-possible-future', in the hope that ways of escape will be made clear (*K*, 59). This act is Kafka's shameful proliferating of desire as both paranoid and schizoid desire in an immanent experimentation which aims to diagnose and anticipate, to free new patterns, and – potentially – to reveal and thereby overcome his own libidinal investments of the social field. In *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys deterritorialises the maternal function with similar effect. The maternal inheritance is political, it plays a causal role in the protagonists' fates, and the severance of the maternal line is subject to reiteration. This severance enables the proliferation of different forms of connection forged chaotically by the two contrary forms of desire. This is Rhys's minor experimentation and it leads to a form of self-overcoming. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, however, despite the severance of the female line, Julia's rage remains an impotent form of critique because the text is unable to confront sufficiently its own use of the language of masters.

## II. Deterritorialising the maternal inheritance

Many critics have argued that the unhealthy behaviour of Rhys's protagonists is most explicable as the result of a problematic maternal bond: Gardiner (1978) and Kloepper (1989) are notable examples. Rhys's texts forge a strong link between the absence of a nurturing mother figure and the protagonists' childishness, lethargy and, sometimes, a submissive self-involvement in un-joyous sexual encounters with more or less exploitative men. The behaviour of these women suggests an early life deprived of nurturance and social education, in which there has been no safe maternal containment to allow healthy psychic development, in which little worldly advice is forthcoming, no stable positive female role models offer themselves, and financial support is minimal and always threatening to vanish. The young protagonists are infantilised by exploitative men, a procedure which seems to stand, warped, in the place of nurturance and care, and operates as a delimiting, violent objectification and political control. It seems causally related to their inability to move into a secure and re/productive female maturity.

In addition to the lack of nurturance there is also an absent material inheritance in the three novels discussed here which contributes to the protagonists' vulnerability and which is subject to a curious reiteration. When there is an inheritance of any sort,

as in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it is a curse. The reputation of Annette's madness and licentiousness is inherited by Antoinette, as is the legacy of the mother's status as the 'widow of a slave-owner, daughter of a slave-owner' (*WSS*, 27). In another severance of the female line the protagonists' reproductive function is disabled. Two protagonists are involved in scenarios of failed motherhood. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* Julia recalls the death of her infant child and this loss is described in terms of inevitability, weakness and her lack of will. More dramatically, Anna's narrative chronicles her fall into a life of promiscuity and unwanted pregnancy, a process which concludes in her termination and which I describe as Anna's becoming-unmother. My use of the term 'inheritance' refers to the material and the psychical, to that which the mother or mother figure literally withholds and to the lingering and self-perpetuating consequences of this withholding, and to the presence of a female line in the most general sense of female transmission and tradition.

The absent maternal inheritance has a political function in Rhys's novels. The thorny maternal bond in Rhys's fiction grows through a violently patriarchal social order in which women's bodies are objectified to an extreme degree.<sup>62</sup> Both older and younger generations are imprisoned in stultifying social roles, and regulatory notions of acceptable behaviour and appearance are constant ideals against which all female deviation is negatively assessed, a situation embodied by Hester in *Voyage in the Dark* and Annette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Equally, Julia's mature relationship with her mother and Anna's with her stepmother and her unhappy reproductive fate are largely determined by capital. These are primarily relationships of power. Anna's becoming-unmother starkly lays bare this reality: money from her family is withdrawn and she becomes pregnant after engaging in deeply unequal sexual relationships in which she receives money for sex. This leads inevitably to her unwanted pregnancy. This is the negative sense of my proposition that in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark* the absent maternal inheritance is deterritorialised. The standard function of the relationship is changed: it becomes a relationship of power which renders the protagonist unfit for self-care and therefore without 'a dog's chance' in an uncaring, sharply divided and exploitative society (*ALMM*, 17). Crucially, in both the second and third novels, an unpleasant encounter with the mother or mother-substitute in which

<sup>62</sup> Gardiner's 1978 essay provides an illuminating analysis of this situation.

the female line is severed forms a narrative turning point and marks the protagonists' decline.

When Anna meets her stepmother in Part One of *Voyage in the Dark*, she is informed by the older woman that she is being cut off financially. This severance seems symbolically tied to Anna's separation from Walter Jeffries after their disastrous country trip in the following chapter. This, in turn, sets off a depressive decline in which Anna spirals emotionally and becomes involved with a series of exploitative individuals most of whom want to use her for sex. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* there is a clear intensification of Julia's unhappiness which stems from her fruitless return to the family home. The combined effect of her visit to her dying mother, her humiliating encounters with her sister and uncle, and the compounded, almost paralyzing isolation she experiences during the funeral rituals pushes Julia closer to death – to that which is threatening her from the first page: hence, in the late 'Staircase' section of Part Two, Julia's state of death-in-life finally assumes a haptic quality when she imagines Mr Horsfield's hand is the hand of 'someone dead' (*ALMM*, 120). Prior to her mother's death, Julia cares enough about her sense of self-worth to refuse Mr Mackenzie's final cheque and to ensure the proprietors of her hotel do not hear her return with a male companion. After the funeral, Julia's noisy return to her hotel with Mr Horsfield results in her being asked to leave, and the final pages bring her face to face with Mr Mackenzie once again, only for her to shock us as well as him by her brazen, out-of-the-blue request for a large amount of money: 'Lend me a hundred francs, will you?' (138). In a brutally unadorned sense, the severance of the maternal line and the absence of an inheritance unfits Julia for self-care.

Julia remembers her mother's love altering suddenly for the worst with the arrival of a new baby:

And then her mother – entirely wrapped up in the new baby – had said things like, 'Don't be a cry-baby. You're too old to go on like that. You're a great big girl of six.' And from being the warm centre of the world her mother had gradually become a dark, austere, rather plump woman. (*ALMM*, 77)

Julia recalls the painful awareness of the loss that replaced intimacy, and her mother's indifference: 'she had asked innumerable questions, which her mother had answered inadequately or not at all, for she was an inarticulate woman. [...] Austere' (*ALMM*,

76). These words convey an unarticulated sadness predicated on a loss of shared sense-making. The final adjective describes the arid realm into which the mother and daughter's linguistic relationship has moved, and the one-sidedness of the communication underscores the fact that the consequences of this shift are starkly imbalanced. Quite simply, the mother stops teaching her daughter. Julia's silence is significant in this novel; by the time of her meeting with Mr Mackenzie on page 22, she has spoken only three lines to the hotel maid. She is unable to tell Mr Horsfield that her mother has died despite the significant time they spend together. These silences and her mother's linguistic austerity work together to establish the facts that Julia has a limited access to language, and the power of language plays a central role in her unhappiness.

The reference to the mother's austerity is painfully sad, but it also positions the scene as a prototype. As in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* scenes of sexual desire have their prototype in early desire for the mother who withholds affection and thereby exercises power at her daughter's expense. The second novel chronicles episode after episode in which Julia requests money from others and is judged accordingly, and these follow the primal scene in which the mother refuses to give to the daughter the capital of conversation and knowledge and instead voices negative judgement on her. This pattern is self-consciously played out between Julia and Mr Horsfield: "They force you to ask – and then they refuse you. And then they tell you all about why they refuse you. I suppose they get a subtle pleasure out of it, or something." Mr Horsfield said: "Subtle pleasure? Not at all. A very simple and primitive pleasure" (*ALMM*, 65). There is a tragic sense running through Julia's narrative that she is getting too old to make such childish monetary requests of people, that her requests are therefore increasingly unsuccessful and the occasion of a characteristic *Schadenfreude*. Mr Horsfield's attraction to Julia is inseparable from his awareness that he will soon need to sever their acquaintance because she will ask too much of him.

Julia's insistence on enacting these scenes of financial request seems somewhat masochistic: why, we might ask, does she not try to get a job? I read her as being without the psychological and material means to sell herself successfully as employable, and therefore as having no recourse but asking family and ex-lovers for money. Nevertheless, several readings of masochism in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* shed light on this novel that is so largely devoid of hope. Julia is deeply unhappy and

does remarkably little to better her situation in a profoundly exploitative sexual marketplace; she willingly exchanges her body for very little money in transactional encounters in which she experiences virtually no pleasure. Dell'Amico argues that these requests are contractual utterances in what is Rhys's most clearly masochistic novel (2005). Dell'Amico uses Deleuze's idiosyncratic 1967 formulation of masochistic demonstrativeness in 'Coldness and Cruelty' to argue that Rhys's 1930s protagonists are involved in a disruptive masochism which cannot be entirely distinguished from female complicity but which is not identical to it.<sup>63</sup> As Dell'Amico explains, Deleuzian masochistic theatres 'are orchestrated by the victim and pertain to a deflation of the punitive powers of the law: the goal is to find and groom a torturer whose punishments are denied as pain and experienced as pleasure instead', and the process 'resolves as an outwitting and dis-avowal of the law by, again, experiencing repression/punishment as pleasure' (2005: 64). We can use this model of desire to understand Julia's return to her mother: her choice to go back to her family can be read as a Deleuzian-masochistic redress to Maître Lagros's termination of her payments from Mr Mackenzie, in which she had no say. The return to London can be read as a disavowal of the capacity of Lagros's law to render her a victim without agency, and an active seeking-out of pain that can be articulated as pleasure. Julia experiences another Deleuzian-masochistic pleasure in being judged and rejected by her sister but thereby forcing her sister to recognise that Julia's individualist choices have allowed her a certain freedom that the dutiful and devoutly class-bound Norah lacks. We can even read Julia's strange moments of apparent ecstasy during her mother's cremation as a masochistic or 'unspeakable' pleasure at the pain of finally losing her mother – a reading suggested by Kloepfer (1989) and Savory (1998: 63) who note that Julia's feeling that 'some essence of her was shooting upwards like a flame' is an identification with her mother's body in the funeral rite (*ALMM*, 94).

Although persuasive, I find Dell'Amico's reading of a disruptive masochism generally too strong a model of resistance in Rhys's fiction. I find the self-destructive tendency of her protagonists passive and 'quantitatively' weak, reactive rather than active, not a wilful choice of a path that could easily be avoided but an acceptance of the validity of vulnerability in certain circumstances and a function of a politically driven narrative strategy. I am also not positing desire as that which is for either a good

<sup>63</sup> Deleuze's essay was originally published as 'Le Froid et le cruel', in *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*.

or bad object. Desire in *Voyage in the Dark* works as that which co-exists in two contrary states. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* this is not yet clearly an aesthetic principle, but rather than reading Julia as desiring her own destruction, I follow Savory's contention that Julia seeks to dull her feelings with various forms of 'anaesthesia' and escape (1998: 73). My focus on passivity rather than masochism also aims to steer away from interpretations which rest on the concept of a self-enduring, stable self or ego that is there in the first place, before it self-destructs. Dell'Amico's analysis rests on her delineation of processes in which the ego overcomes the super-ego, and her analysis is consequently at odds with the terms of this thesis. There are surely other strands of Deleuze's essay on masochism which could be deployed in reading Rhysian passivity, but my concern is with interrogating subjectivity as becoming in order to work against the victim paradigm which is still dominant in the criticism. For this reason I find the usual concept of masochism and Deleuze's reformulation of it of no great help.

Having said this, Savory's arguments concerning sadomasochism in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* are very useful for the connections they draw between the biographical facts of Rhys's abuse by the family acquaintance, Mr Howard, her difficult relationship with her mother, the various social, political and psychological dynamics which run through her second novel and the 'Caribbean subtext [that] is so buried in this novel that critics have often had trouble finding it' (1998: 73). For Savory, sadomasochism is not *the* defining framework or impulse of the text, but one of a number of important concerns and dynamics. The rest of this section draws on several of these which are particularly useful for my reading of the absent maternal inheritance, most important among which is the childlike.

In Savory's analysis, Rhys's account of sexual abuse sheds crucial light on what her second novel is doing: 'What fundamentally shaped Rhys's sense of sexuality and gender is clearest in the draft manuscript narratives of Mr Howard (BEB), which together form a story intertwining gender, sexuality, race and nationality with colonialism' (Savory 1998: 61). Although Rhys avoids writing the abuse explicitly into any published text other than the harrowing 1976 short story 'Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose', many critics have identified its influence across the novels and, as Savory notes, Julia's sexual encounters replicate the sadomasochistic dynamics that Rhys laid out in her account in the *Black Exercise Book* (1998: 65). The history of sexual abuse is a nexus for the tensions between capitalism, desire, gender and

sexuality that we find in Rhys's fiction. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* especially, sexuality is about 'power and trade, and thus is connected to Caribbean racial and economic history' (Savory 1998: 68). This is clearest in the profoundly disquieting links between the masochistic female, the prostitute and the Caribbean slave that is forged in the second and third novels.

In the most explicit appearance of this connection in the earlier novel, Norah recalls how she was inspired by her identification with a slave in Joseph Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly* (1895):

The slave had no hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky, no other water, no other forest, no other world, no other life. She had no wish, no hope, no love... The absence of pain and hunger was her happiness, and when she felt unhappy she was tired, more than usual, after the day's labour. (*ALMM*, 75)

Norah explicitly views herself as a slave to her mother, being led by this passage to think that her 'life's like death. It's like being buried alive. It isn't fair' (*ALMM*, 75). Obviously, this identification is deeply problematic. Norah's equation of her labour with the suffering of slaves is made in a desire to trivialise the history of slavery and to efface both the suffering of slaves and the very reality of slavery – its racial, economic, geographic, political and sexual determinants. This is the disingenuous identification of a fascistic desire, evidencing a craving for more power that destroys Julia's capacity to care for those with less. Rhys's characterisation of this sister generally paints the same picture. Norah is not sympathetic, and she begrudges Julia that which she herself does not have (and which she does not even desire): the ability to refuse, to a certain extent, social dictates concerning femininity. Norah is the embodiment of seething *ressentiment*, and Rhys clearly suggests that she is as enslaved by her bourgeois need to belong to the class of the 'good' and 'respectable' as she is by her mother's need for care (98). However, the novel's Caribbean subtext and Julia's extreme dependency on destructive sexual relationships and her clearly diminishing use value mean that the Conrad allusion resonates well beyond the jealous sister's limitations. There is a strong association between Julia's severely restricted existence and slavery:

Julia was not altogether unhappy. Locked in her room – especially when she was locked in her room – she felt safe [...]

But on some days her monotonous life was made confused and frightening by her thoughts. Then she could not stay still. She was obliged to walk up and down the room consumed with hatred of the world and everybody in it – and especially of Mr Mackenzie.

Then she would feel horribly fatigued and would lie on the bed for a long time without moving. The rumble of the life outside was like the sound of the sea which was rising gradually around her. (*ALMM*, 9)

There are striking similarities between this description and the Conrad excerpt, and the simile in the final sentence even creates the idea of an ocean journey which, when set in relation to the slave's monologue, suggests the Middle Passage. There are similar associations in *Voyage in the Dark* but they are far more problematised. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* it is as though Rhys knows the association between white female sexual submission and Caribbean slavery is impossible to justify, but cannot help herself from creating it anyhow and the link just sits in the text, unclear, challenging the reader to find her own adequate explanation.

My understanding of Rhys's writing does not allow me to read this association as evidence of what Gregg claims is Rhys's racist imagination (1995). Rather, in the vein of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, I contend that we can view this association as Rhys's badge of shameful perversion. It is an event, of sorts, which obstructs the possibility of an easy and definitive reading and makes it evident that in the world of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* we cannot tell the difference between the oppressor and oppressed. Julia's existence is a symptom of the unjust, uncaring and exploitative ethos of patriarchal capitalism. She is a victim but also a vehicle for the text's fascistic desire for a profoundly destructive identification: the link itself suggests the positing of a simple binary between all the oppressed and all the oppressors which functions to perpetuate the dominant order rather than destabilising it. This link-allusion compound – a double reference involving the desires of both sisters – indicates the coexistence of contrary desires, and Julia's ethical capacity is shown to be only marginally superior to that of her sister, a difference of scale (the narrator's implicit likening of Julia to a slave as opposed to Norah's articulated identification) rather than kind.



Significantly, this textual perversion is expressed at a remove. Julia is likened to Conrad's slave, but it is only when we reach the passage later in the novel that we are able to see the similarity to the earlier one. In a sense, then, this lets Julia off the hook. The reader might well overlook her perversion entirely. The text's confrontation with its own complicity in fascistic structures is not explicit. It is as the Caribbean is in this novel: submerged. It is the text's attempt at accusing itself of using the language of mastery, but there remains an evident and fearful hesitation in its so doing. This difficulty corresponds to the central difference between the language of the two sisters. Julia generally speaks, however vaguely, in an attempt to express a degree of truth whereas Norah's language, like her body and her behaviour, is entirely regulated by the code of respectability. This situation is dramatised in Norah's physical response of 'disgust' at her sister's excoriation of the faults of the respectable: Norah 'felt very giddy. Now the blood ran up to her own face. There was tingling in her finger-tips. She thought: "She's disgusting, that's what she is. She's my sister, and she's disgusting"' (*ALMM*, 98). The suggestion is that Norah cannot adequately process and respond to Julia's words in language and so physiological response takes over. In this rising blood pressure we can also, perhaps, sense the text's own repressed desire to commit to its staging of a confrontation with its complicity.

All relationships in Rhys's novels are political in the sense that they involve power, inequality and capital. Savory states that 'the way [that] money is used both reveals and further defines human relationships, whether they be sexual or familial' (Savory 1998: 71). This is the central problematic in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. The absent maternal inheritance on the mother's death is a replication of the primal rejection, and the handing over of money plays out in all of Julia's subsequent, unsuccessful sexual relationships. This absence is a legal rejection (a refusal to recognise in law Julia's rights to receive any bequest) and as such is a counterpoint to Legros's notice of termination of Mr Mackenzie's allowance. Late in the novel Julia tells Mr Horsfield about her formative relationship with Mr James:

He was a sort of god to me and everything he did was right. Isn't one a fool when one's a kid? But sometimes I used to pray that he'd lose all his money, because I imagined that if that happened I'd see him oftener. And then I'd imagine myself working for him, or somehow getting money to give him. (*ALMM*, 125)

In all the sexual relationships in Rhys's novels stark financial inequality problematically determines the dynamic, the woman always has the losing hand and the man always abuses his privilege. We can imagine Julia's wishes – which in one respect seem distinctly sadomasochistic – as those of the 'kid' for her mother's attention and gratitude, and for her younger sister, her rival for her mother's attention, to get lost. The other important aspect of this passage is its evocation of *Jane Eyre*, as Julia proceeds to compare her desire to that of a friend who 'used to pray that the man she loved might go blind [...] so that he might be entirely dependent on her, d'you see?' (*ALMM*, 125). The power dynamic between Jane and Rochester throughout most of Brontë's novel is not dissimilar to that in which Rhys's protagonists are caught when they are involved with men. Brontë makes this inequality the difficulty that the strong, Christian yet angry Jane must weather. In her second novel, Rhys attacks it as a structural problem which cannot be overcome but can merely be avoided.

In Rhys's later novels the difficulty of these always-political human relationships is offset to a degree by the protagonists' passionate attachment to place. Anna's descent is due to homesickness as well as heartbreak at Walter's rejection, Sasha is mourning her beloved Paris, and the failure of Antoinette's marriage is largely due to the husband's jealousy of her attachment to her island. Their love of place sustains these women and opens up the vision of the novels, preventing it from being excessively inward-looking. Yet, as Savory observes, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is without this balancing principle (1998: 81). Julia lacks a solid territory of her own as much as she lacks an assured voice. Certain detailing and motifs work, in addition to the allusions to slavery, to secure the presence of the Caribbean in this text: the mother's Brazilian birthplace, from which she was 'transplant[ed] as a plant' might have been, is evoked in the dying woman's delirious reference to '[o]range-trees' (*ALMM*, 76), which is mirrored in greater vagueness by Julia's own daydreams of 'a dark-purple sea, the sea of a chromo or of some tropical country that she had never seen' (9). These position the mother at a difficult remove from the longed-for homeland of her youth, yet Julia has no such love for any location and is therefore at a double-remove. She has only an antipathy toward England in general which suggests the colonial distrust of the motherland (a striking feature of Rhys's literary terrain) and – above all – a not belonging. Julia is without a home and a place of family. In this, she is further removed from her mother's capacity for taking root in a place, evoked

disturbingly in the simile of plant transplantation. Julia's mode is the nomad's movement from city to city, room to room, adapting well or poorly, depending on her environment.

Erica Johnson reads this lack of attachment as a drive to escape the present. She argues that spectrality and an intricate use of animal and machine imagery work as a collective function of Rhys's 'scepticism about human beings' which is fictionalised in narratives that pit her protagonists against extreme 'antipathy' from those they encounter (Johnson 2015: 209). Her protagonists' response is, Johnson argues, to form a 'profound identification with non-human agencies [...] as though to escape or at least extend their subjectivities beyond the limits of their own imperilled bodies, and to enter into an affective state that Rhys repeatedly refers to as "indifference"' (2015: 209). I also see a strong urge to escape in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, but for me this is Julia's desire to escape to a state of childhood. She describes this herself as the 'same feeling a boy has when he wants to run away to sea' (*ALMM*, 39-40). The novel as a whole supports the protagonist's problematic insistence on an unobtainable state which is somehow beyond the indifferent reality of the world in which she lives. I read the childlike as the text's major ontological code that vies for dominance with indifference. Julia resorts to this 'place' because she has no attachment to a worldly location and like an unhappy child's imaginary world might be, the childlike is a place of isolation which temporarily shuts out the reality of human relationships and which is therefore 'beyond' the political.

### III. Becoming-child

In using the term 'childlike' I am indicating the text's proliferation of references to childhood and the childlike as well as Julia's immersion in memories of her youth. Julia is caught up in an insistent becoming-child: she is strikingly immature and the novel is dense with references to Julia being like a child – surprisingly more so than in *Voyage in the Dark*, in which the protagonist's youthfulness is a major plot determinant. This immaturity works in various ways. It manifests as a defect. Julia's belated craving for her mother's recognition, the intensity of her fear that she will not receive this in kindness (she 'felt a sort of superstitious and irrational certainty that if that happened it would finish her' (*ALMM*, 69)), and her mirror-checking obsession with her appearance all signal her lack of maturity. As a counterpoint, she is marked as childlike

by men who infantilise her and who are attracted by her immaturity. Julia's ability to sometimes remind Mr Horsfield of a child magnetises him and after they have sex he rhapsodises about her youthful waif-like appearance, rather creepily enjoying the sight of her arm 'hanging down the side of the bed. It looked so pathetic, like a child's arm. He said: "Julia, your hand is so lovely it makes me want to cry"' (112). The childlike is also sometimes projected onto others: Julia's mother suddenly starts wailing 'disconsolately, like a child' (71), and Mr Horsfield notes Julia's youthfulness – '[i]t's the easiest thing in the world to imagine you a kid' – before feeling its contagion: 'Do you know what you've done for me, Julia? You've given me back my youth?' (117). Most frequently, however, the childlike is something which Julia considers and feels in relation to both strong psychic and bodily feeling. That is, the childlike is most often a state of intense affect.

During her first visit to the cold-blooded Uncle Griffiths Julia castigates herself with the statement that it is 'childish to imagine that anybody cares what happens to anybody else' (*ALMM*, 61), and after crying at her mother's funeral, Julia repeats the accusation in a different form: 'When you cried like that it made you feel childish. You could be comforted quite childishly' (95). The childish here is an un-cynical state of imaginative, intense feeling in which comfort is a possibility if not a given. The childlike is attached to Julia's extreme mental and physical fatigue which, though sometimes close to both inertia and indifference, is most redolent of the exhaustion of the young child. Following her mother's death, Julia determines that she is feeling 'ok' but 'only very sleepy, horribly sleepy, as a child would be after a very exciting day' (90). At the funeral, a 'feeling of rest crept from her knees upwards to her eyes. The clock ticked: "You're young yet – young yet – young yet"' (101), and shortly afterwards,

[a]s she walked, Julia felt peaceful and purified, as though she were a child. Because she could not imagine a future, time stood still. And, as if she were a child, everything that she saw was of profound interest and had the power to distract and please. (*ALMM*, 101)

Here the comparison denotes the atemporal consciousness of the child who cannot think ahead. This attribute is shown as an attraction as well as that which makes life difficult for Julia: her lack of calculation exerts a clear, attractive force on the worldly

Mr Horsfield and Mr Mackenzie, both of whom feel, at least fleetingly, a certain admiration for Julia's impractical attitude to life:

Mr Mackenzie's code, philosophy or habit of mind would have been a complete protection to him had it not been for some kink in his nature – that volume of youthful poems perhaps still influencing him – which morbidly attracted him to strangeness, to recklessness, even unhappiness [...] Mr Mackenzie began to think about Julia Martin. (*ALMM*, 18-19)

Yet Julia's childlike unworldliness is not simply myopic recklessness (as we might describe Anna's inability to look ahead in *Voyage in the Dark*). The important late chapter in Part Two entitled 'Childhood' follows the chapter in which Julia and Mr Horsfield have sex, the former in a grief-stricken state and the latter in complete ignorance of her pain. Julia's sad inability to share marks not just her distrust of people but also her immaturity. As Savory writes, '[m]ature vision has to include a sense of other people. Julia looks back rather than forward, her consciousness centered on her own responses' (1998: 64). Suitably, then, 'Childhood' plunges us into a meditation on this titular time which opens with a description of a state in which potential is inseparable from a self-centred evasion of responsibility:

Every day is a new day. Every day you are a new person.

Julia felt well and rested, not unhappy, but her mind was strangely empty. It was an empty room through which vague memories stalked like giants.

She read Mr Horsfield's note, and it was as if she were reading something written by a stranger to someone she had never seen.

[...] Every day is a new day; every day you are a new person. What have you to do with the day before? (*ALMM*, 114)

This passage gives us a strong sense of where the chapter will take us and signals what the insistence of the childlike does in the novel generally. The refrain evokes the freedom of the child who has not yet developed a perception of time, but Julia's relegation of Mr Horsfield to 'a stranger' indicates the ease with which we can do violence to others when we relinquish precisely this – our sense of continuity. Julia's hurt is particularly palpable in 'Childhood', and an interaction with the hostile maid

leads her to recall her innate knowledge, held ‘ever since she knew anything’, that people are ‘unfriendly’ (*ALMM*, 115). At which point we are plunged into the novel’s most detailed meditation on childhood, development and affect. The first paragraph outlines an epistemological and ontological dimension of childhood which suggests a Lockean ‘pure’ perception prior to knowledge of the world:

When you were a child, you put your hand on the trunk of a tree and you were comforted, because you knew that the tree was alive – you felt its life when you touched it – and you knew that it was friendly to you, or, at least, not hostile. But of people you were always a little afraid. (*ALMM*, 115)

In one respect, the young Julia’s ‘comfort’ is the opposite of Antoine Roquentin’s titular nausea in Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist novel of 1938 (*La Nausée*). Her young consciousness is a *tabula rasa* and her pure experience of the tree anchors her in a world which comforts due to the life that it sustains and to which it gives access. There is also the suggestion that it is Julia’s perception itself, her capacity for conscious experience, that marks the world as ‘friendly’. Conspicuously absent is that which so often fills Rhys’s prose: there is no anxiety about the arbitrariness or inadequacy of words, or the instability of meaning. Instead, Julia’s words evoke an extra-linguistic identification with the necessary and commensurable nature of being, which is the opposite of Roquentin’s anguish at the inadequacy of language and the contingency and superfluity of existence. Words and feeling are entirely in harmony and both enhance the young Julia’s access to the world.

However, this passage also sustains a sense of profound loss, created through the bleak final sentence, the discomfiting second-person address and the past tense. As the subsequent paragraph unfolds, the idea forms of an originary wholeness from which the young Julia was removed: ‘When you are a child you are yourself and you know and see everything prophetically. And then suddenly something happens and you stop being yourself; you become what others force you to be. You lose your wisdom and your soul’ (*ALMM*, 115). Characteristically, the ‘something’ is oblique. It suggests the childhood loss of the maternal bond, which is signalled by the touch of the tree in the paragraph above which seems to stand in the place of the mother’s hand; yet this code is conflated with the code of social conformity that ‘force[s] you to be’ a certain way. Returning to Savory’s analysis, this ‘something’ seems like an allusion to the

event of sexual abuse which may have also been the occasion of the mother's betrayal of her daughter. The demands, then, are presumably those of sexual submission, gender conformity and daughterly obedience. Savory ties Julia's incapacity for enjoyment generally and her childish inability to incorporate others into her understanding to her melancholy inability to let go of a situation of a 'vividly felt apprehension of the impact of a situation on the self' in childhood, (1998: 64). Certainly in these few paragraphs in 'Childhood' the text seems to be revisiting an originary loss. The opacity in which the prose is couched also adds to the sense that these may be memories or screening memories of a trauma which cannot be revisited directly. Subsequent paragraphs which describe a final pure happiness and a first 'fear of nothing' conflate darkness and light, fear and desire, freedom and terror, life and death in a manner that baits the reader into inferring a subtext of a traumatic sexual awakening. They also signal a way out of this problematic search for the correct psychoanalytic interpretation.

This discussion has, of course, entered territory which appears at odds with Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the psychoanalytic tendency to Oedipalise everything. Yet it is at this stage that their method of literary criticism becomes particularly useful. 'The three worst themes in many interpretations of Kafka', they write,

are the transcendence of the law, the interiority of guilt, the subjectivity of enunciation [...] And also, the idea of the tragic, of the internal drama [...] No doubt Kafka holds out the bait [...] because he wants to make a very special use of Oedipus to serve his diabolical project. It is absolutely useless to look for a theme in a writer if one hasn't asked exactly what its importance is in the work – that is, *how it functions* (and not what its 'sense' is). (*K*, 45)

Following this advice, we might cease to ask what this world-shattering 'something' was for the young Julia, or what childhood or the childlike mean in this novel and turn instead to the question of what this bait, this seemingly loaded return to childhood, does, here and throughout the text as a whole. What diabolical use might Rhys be making of Oedipus? My proposition is that the childlike is the text's problematic orientation to and reterritorialisation into an impossible, imaginary prior state of holistic, singular affective experience that is untouched by capitalism and power, and external to the assemblages Rhys maps. It is Julia's insistence that she is not complicit

in the processes she so despises, and the text's affirmation of a desire that is pure and 'outside' power. The novel severs the female line through the absence of a bequest and the deterritorialisation of the mother function, but it also enacts a return to origins, signalled by Julia's return to her incapacitated mother's bedside. The family drama tempts us to read this orientation as the return to the mother, but she is entirely absent in the important chapter, 'Childhood', which designates this returned-to state as the place in which Julia still had her 'wisdom and [her] soul', which is all the more dangerous for not being the place of the mother, and all the more seductive. This orientation is Julia's attempt to escape the realities of her present and the society in which she lives, and her claim of moral superiority. Yet, as the final page makes clear, there is no escaping capitalism. Her orientation is a flight, but one which fails as it rediscovers its 'larval fascism' (Deleuze 1997: 4).

#### **IV. Suspicious oneness and a fantasy of escape**

The two paragraphs in 'Childhood' already discussed depict this place as a prelapsarian state which is neither pre-symbolic nor exactly innocent: there is sufficient innate knowledge of cruelty such that Julia was 'always a little afraid' of people (*ALMM*, 115); and the description of her habit of catching butterflies is sinister as it shows her 'fine' enjoyment at 'get[ting her] hand on something that a minute before had been flying around in the sun' (116). Childhood is instead a state of intensely affective wholeness when the child is 'at one' with her body, her thoughts, sensations and her environment: 'When you are a child you are yourself and you know and see everything prophetically' (115). This wholeness is vividly apparent in the description of the 'last time [Julia was] really happy', a time when Julia was

happy about nothing [and] had to jump up and down. 'Can't you keep still, child, for one moment?' No, of course you couldn't keep still. You were too happy, bursting with happiness. You ran as if you were flying, without feeling your feet. And all the time you ran, you were thinking, with a tight feeling in your throat: 'I'm happy – happy – happy...'

That was the last time you were really happy about nothing, and you remembered it perfectly well. How old were you? Ten? Eleven? Younger... Yes, probably younger. (*ALMM*, 115)



Julia's early understanding of what is 'friendly' and 'unfriendly' is instinctive, like an animal's, but it also depends on sensation: 'you felt its life when you touched it – and you knew' (115). In her memory of happiness, Julia's feeling is entirely at one with her ability to express it in words and her body's capacity for expressing it in movement.

This is, however, no becoming-joyful in a Deleuzian Spinozist sense, as that philosophy does not allow for an innocent childhood consciousness prior to the trappings of adult knowledge of power. Instead, childhood is a state of delusion in which the child mistakenly believes she is free. Maturity is a matter of becoming incrementally aware that one is deluded. 'Consciousness', writes Deleuze, 'is inseparable from the triple illusion that *constitutes* it, the illusion of finality, the illusion of freedom, and the theological illusion. Consciousness is only a dream with one's eyes open', and the child's belief that she 'freely wants' to drink milk or to run or jump up and down is as mistaken as the drunk's belief that 'it is from a free decision of the mind that he speaks the things he later, when sober, wishes he had not said' (Deleuze 1988: 20). Rhys may have disagreed with this view of the necessarily delusional nature of consciousness, but it is significant that there is no innocent and free childhood elsewhere in her other novels. The most prominent child in her fiction is Antoinette who is not exempt from the crimes of her family and whose fate is mired precisely by her inability to see things clearly. It is, I think, unclear whether in Julia's idealisation of childhood Rhys is genuinely proposing that there is a state of human consciousness which is free and beyond power, but at the same time it is impossible to say definitively that Rhys is critiquing such a belief. For this reader the novel works somewhat as an exploratory exercise, probing the becomings to which such a naively self-assured oneness might give rise.

The holistic affective experience of the child has many echoes in Julia's present, in her reflections upon her bodily and psychological response to situations. The 'effect' of the strange wallpaper in her hotel room 'was, oddly enough, not sinister but cheerful and rather stimulating'; unlike striped wallpaper, the images of birds and fungus in this new room do not make 'her head ache worse when she awoke after she had been drinking' (*ALMM*, 8). Looking at the Seine makes Julia

shiver[.]. She felt certain that the water made her room much colder. It was only at night that she loved it. Then it seemed mysteriously to increase in width and

the current to flow more strongly. When you were drunk you could imagine that it was the sea. (*ALMM*, 12)

As these two examples show, alcohol is not only an anaesthetic for Julia. It also enhances her capacity for affective experience.

In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* city life is an affective onslaught. Returning to her room, Julia's mood changes suddenly: 'She could not have explained why, when she got to her room, her forebodings about the future were changed into a feeling of exultation' (*ALMM*, 45). While crossing a road her recollection of the war suddenly shifts and 'an exultant and youthful feeling took possession of her' (*ALMM*, 49). Pondering the poorly lit London streets, Julia thinks

It was the darkness that got you. It was heavy darkness, greasy and compelling. It made walls round you, and shut you in so that you felt you could not breathe. You wanted to beat at the darkness and shriek to be let out. And after a while you got used to it. Of course. And then you stopped believing that there was anything else anywhere. (*ALMM*, 62)

These passages give us a clear indication of Julia's plight: she is intensely affected by the external world and because she has no money and does not want to buy into normative modes of self-making she is constantly swerving from and deflecting the effects of unpleasant encounters. Her becoming-child is not, then, simply an attempt to reactivate her affective capacity, for this capacity is already heightened. It is, rather, the text's insistence on precisely this capacity as a response to and a rebuke of the unfeelingness of those she encounters and the society in which she lives. It is an insistence on vulnerability and openness as an alternative to the desire to wield power.

Julia's becoming-child is both attractive and subversive to a limited extent. It is a commitment to personal feeling, a rejection of the demands of capitalist society. To Uncle Griffiths she is able to assert her utterly childlike commitment to 'lovely things' rather than to financial security (*ALMM*, 60). To Norah, after their mother's funeral, Julia goes further, denying any guilt at having left the care of their mother entirely to her sister, and expressing 'rage':

Animals are better than we are, aren't they? They're not all the time pretending and lying and sneering, like loathsome human beings [...] They'll let you die for want of a decent word, and then they'll lick the feet of anybody they can get anything out of. 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 [...] you're jealous. That's the bedrock. All you people who've knuckled under – you're jealous. (*ALMM*, 97-98)

Julia's rage is complicated and feels very much like a child's tantrum, albeit one with a strong political message. The freedom that she is claiming, and of which she knows Norah is jealous, is not just freedom from the rules of gender and sexuality. It is the freedom to follow or to be committed to one's feelings – a freedom that is always compromised whenever one 'knuckle[s] under'. This is not a Romantic commitment to the production of a creative life, but an insistence on the uncompromised value of the affective life. The heart of her accusation is that Norah hasn't 'once looked' at Julia as though she 'cared whether [she] lived or died' (*ALMM*, 98), while in contrast she has felt sincere pity for Norah. She feels fully whereas, the text suggests, Norah does not. Julia's commitment to her affective life is a rejection of the codification of feelings and behaviour in respectable, bourgeois society. Mr Mackenzie and Mr Horsfield are attracted by Julia's ability to make them feel alive in the sense of momentarily *feeling something* (whether sentimentality for an inappropriate woman, or anger at social injustice) other than that which is permitted in their pre-scripted middle-class lives. Two pages after she locates her first memory, Mr Horsfield asks Julia, 'with a certain curiosity':

'What do you think about, Julia?'

She said: 'All the time about when I was a kid.'

'It's the easiest thing in the world to imagine you a kid,' Mr Horsfield felt sentimental about her. And then he wanted to laugh at himself because he was feeling sentimental. (*ALMM*, 117)

Julia's becoming-child is a movement away from the norms of permissible adult behaviour, just as Mr Horsfield here moves away from the permissible self-serving masculinity to which he usually adheres. Hers is a preference for the unworldliness and

relative powerlessness of childhood over the affective corruption of adult life. As such it is a minor refusal of the dominant order – a slight deterritorialisation.

Problematically, however, Julia's becoming-child is also profoundly unselfconscious: although living the painful reality of it, in all her humiliations and rejections, Julia apparently remains oblivious to the fact that her dependency has had devastating consequences. In Part Three, the narrator informs us in a sombre tone that, despite Julia's attempt to convince herself that '[a]nything might happen. Happiness. A course of face massage', in reality '[s]omething in her was cringing and broken, but she would not acknowledge it' (*ALMM*, 131). Julia does not look to the future, as Savory notes, but neither does she seem able to locate herself temporally: she evades her own history as irresponsibly as she denies Mr Horsfield familiarity after they have had sex. Furthermore, her becoming-child permits no acknowledgement of her involvement with others. In an early moment in Part One, Julia walks 'towards the quay, feeling serene and peaceful. Her limbs moved smoothly; the damp, soft air was pleasant against her face. She felt complete in herself, detached, independent of the rest of humanity' (13). It is easy to overlook the catastrophic lack of self-awareness in these peaceful-sounding lines. From start to finish, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* chronicles the pain of Julia's dependency on others. Her becoming-child is not a process of beneficial change, but a refusal to 'grow up' in the sense of attempting to become financially independent and taking responsibility for one's social existence. Julia remains as financially dependent on the novel's final page as she was on the first, and seemingly without definite plans to change her ways. Her affective life is one of painful dependency and in this sense the novel presents us with a striking dramatisation of the Deleuzian-Spinozist unethical life. Julia is committed to misconceiving her existence as something external to the society she so despises and against which she rages. On her return to London she buys an English illustrated newspaper: 'she read steadily down the glossy pages, which chattered about a world as remote and inaccessible as if it existed in another dimension' (45). Heeding the signal at the opening of 'Childhood', we are reminded that the childlike is also self-centred and profoundly apolitical. Julia's becoming-child tempts us to infer an Oedipal drama of sexual abuse and maternal loss and thereby distracts us from noticing that the protagonist invests not in a return but in an entirely impossible and irresponsible freedom.

John Su has recently argued that in Rhys's later novels negative affect which the protagonists cannot articulate disobeys the codification of emotion and thereby

resists oppressive structures (2015). Given this proposition, Julia's orientation to a state in which the bodily and linguistic expressions of affective experience are in harmony seems, in a fairly straightforward way, to be accepting of the status quo. Her becoming-child is a function of a reterritorialised schizoid desire, turned from a line of flight into a self-destructive acceptance of a binary logic, 'conforming to a code of dominant utterances, to a territory of established states of things' (Deleuze and Parnet 2006: 55). Su's argument rests somewhat on the privileging of the linguistic code, which Deleuze and Guattari oppose. In their philosophy, affect is not something that can (or should) ever be captured in language, but is the form of embodiment which manifests the flux of life: the task of literature is to free life rather than to capture it. Rather than describing a situation in which certain oppressed groups are unable to articulate certain types of negative affect due to ideological structures which have deformed the subjectivity of those people, Deleuze and Guattari argue that to write in 'hate' against 'all languages of masters' necessitates ridding language of its representational function as far as is possible. This will never be a completed process:

Even when it is unique, a language remains a mixture, a schizophrenic *mélange*, a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centers of power are played out, blurring what can be said and what can't be said. (*K*, 26)

This *mélange* is particularly evident in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. Clearly, the text critiques dominant structures, but it is not able to rid itself of the representational function and become writing as delirium: writing aimed not at being 'free', but at fighting dualisms, scrambling codes, 'tracing flows and causing them to circulate' and altogether betraying signification (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 144).

Returning to this originary 'Childhood' scene of holistic affective experience, it is clear that with her second novel Rhys is not yet such a traitor. The passage is rife with dualisms (the 'first time' and the 'last time', fear versus happiness), and thick with both lack (the girl's play with the butterfly lacks kindness, and she 'never [tells] anybody why' she cries in terror) and a striving for control, for capturing that which should not be captured (affect, the butterfly), which involves, of course, an original term: 'The last time you were happy about nothing; the first time you were afraid about nothing. Which came first?' (*ALMM*, 116). By far the most dangerous aspect of this

chapter is Julia's enjoyment in capturing the butterfly which seems to be the occasion of her first fear 'of nothing'. The child cruelly imprisons a living thing merely for her pleasure, and takes a sadistic enjoyment in the 'very fascinating sound' made by the butterfly in the tin box as it makes a surprising 'row'.

Of course, what always happened was that it broke its wings; or else it would fray them so badly that by the time you had got it home and opened the box and hauled it out as carefully as you could it was so battered that you lose all interest in it. Sometimes it was too badly hurt to be able to fly properly.

'You're a cruel, horrid child, and I'm surprised at you.'

[...]

That was the first time you were afraid of nothing – that day when you were catching butterflies – when you had reached the patch of sunlight. You were not afraid in the shadow, but you were afraid in the sun. (*ALMM*, 116)

Julia's fear 'of nothing' is, we can infer, her terror as she senses her own capacity for cruelty or, the same thing, the absence of her kindness. Due to what is presumably the mother's scolding words, her fear might be prompted by the thought that she is replicating the coldness of her mother – that 'still, desolate, and arid' being 'just behind [her]' (*ALMM*, 116). The child's actions also bear a striking resemblance to the men who use Julia for their own pleasure only to 'chuck [her] away' when they find her broken and useless (116), and again there is a thematic association with slavery as Julia conceives of butterflies according to their use-value. In this chapter Rhys brings to light the complicity of *all* thinking people, adults and children alike, in the cruelty of masters but, tragically, while Julia can cry at this the text can do nothing more with this knowledge. It is passive, just as Julia is, 'just stay[ing] in [her] room' all day, 'just lying there and thinking' (116-17). There is no comment on Julia's cruel desire, and two short chapters later, in 'Departure', Julia repeats her disposal of the butterfly in her articulation of how completely disposable she finds Mr Horsfield: 'If you think [...] that I care... I can always get somebody, you see. I've known that ever since I've known anything [...] To hell to all of you!' (126). She commits to cruelty here rather than countering it, as the text insists on a realm of purely personal feeling to which language corresponds fully.

*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is, I think, the novel in which Rhys faces the most significant impasse. The text cannot bring itself to look at what becomes so evident in the later novels: the fact that language is always part of the social world, and every utterance proceeds from the assemblage of which it is part. The vision in this work is like Julia's: fixated on the political potential of an individual's passionate feeling, and unable to understand the political need to acknowledge one's role in the dominant order – that is, how one always affects and is affected by others. Rhys's language here ultimately retains a commitment to a will to power quite unlike the sense of self-overcoming we encounter in the later novels. In Julia's final request from Mr Mackenzie, Rhys's conclusion seems to acknowledge the failing of her text. The deterritorialised mother function is reterritorialised as Julia refuses to confront her own complicity and desires. Her line of flight merely rediscovers 'Oedipal structures' and 'fascist coagulations' (Deleuze and Parnet 2006: 29) in her claim of an alternative affective life. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* seems to both ask and answer Deleuze's question in 'On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature':

In fleeing everything, how can we avoid reconstituting both our country of origin and our formations of power, our intoxicants, our psychoanalyses and our mummies and daddies. How can one avoid the line of flight's becoming identical with a pure and simple movement of self-destruction? (Deleuze and Parnet 2006: 29)

In her next novel Rhys turns to a dramatic deterritorialisation of language to solve this problem, but in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* she is unable to offer a positive answer. Perhaps, though, this was a productive inability. Perhaps this second novel is Rhys's admission of her own paranoiac desire to be outside that which she critiqued. In this sense, Julia's becoming-child might be read as the guilty expression of the bad daughter who refuses her female heritage all too easily.

## Chapter Six

### Rhys's minor literature: becoming-unmother in *Voyage in the Dark*

#### I. Anna's complicity

In her third novel Rhys no longer offers the possibility of a realm beyond the assemblages she maps. On the contrary, *Voyage in the Dark* is relatively at home with its complicity in oppressive power structures. This chapter focuses on what I term Anna's becoming-unmother by tracing Rhys's problematic inscription of masochistic sexual encounters which lead inevitably to the protagonist's abortion at the novel's close. The central proposition, inspired by arguments in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, is that the text haemorrhages desire in a manner which inflicts a liberating violence on both its body (the text's and Anna's) and its thought.

I intend no glorification of abortion in these arguments; rather I offer a reading of complicity which works through the radical sexual politics of Anna's story. Emery's incisive and illuminating commentary on the control of women's bodies in *Voyage in the Dark* demonstrates how important the text's historical context is for understanding Anna's narrative (1990: 91-104). Emery deciphers Rhys's nuanced encoding of the political control of women's bodies in the Edwardian period, charting the connections between Anna's fate and the Contagious Diseases Acts, Purity Crusades and the Social Hygiene Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The analysis brings to light the subtext of rising social panic in the 1910s, 20s and 30s prompted by the spread of venereal disease, feminist agitation, women's increasing use of birth control and their increasing resort to illegal abortion. Anna's disturbing, dangerous abortion at the novel's close was rewritten for Rhys's Constable editor, Michael Sadleir, to soften the impact of Anna's brutal demise by making her 'death' more ambiguous, yet it remains a rare, unusually realistic and detailed literary depiction of an experience which was relatively common among women in England in the early decades of the twentieth century but which remained, in 1934, a largely taboo subject.<sup>64</sup>

Detailing the increasing permissiveness of the publishing world of English literature in the interwar years, Chris Baldick writes that 'the Great War blew away the

<sup>64</sup> The Abortion Law Reform Association was founded in 1936 by women in England campaigning for the right to have more involvement in abortion legislation – a fact which speaks to the timeliness of Rhys's third novel. For a detailed history see Brookes, 1988.



official censorship of literary representation' of the bodily facts of sexuality in its 'regular and irregular' forms (2004: 378, 377). Writers were now permitted to address a range of more or less risqué areas of human experience and, as Baldick notes, a few, such as Rhys, Aldous Huxley, Elizabeth Bowen and Rosamond Lehmann were able not only to challenge the taboo around abortion but to 'address abortion as a fact of contemporary life' (2004: 378).<sup>65</sup> It is significant that, while not an isolated pioneer, Rhys was among the first twentieth-century writers to address this controversial topic in her fiction, and to situate it firmly in relation to class divisions in England, women's economic status and the prevalence of prostitution in both its 'amateur' and 'professional' forms. Rhys's first-person narrative situates the reader in unusual and disturbing proximity to the events of Anna's 'fall', and Emery suggests that it is the singularly female point of view from which we witness the protagonist's experience in *Voyage in the Dark* that makes Rhys's depiction of abortion so unusual even among such contemporary works (1990: 79). Rhys had an abortion, or 'what was then called an illegal operation', at the end of her early affair with Lancelot Grey Hugh Smith, as she explains in *Smile Please* (118), but the third novel is in no way simply a personal exploration of this subject. Anna's narrative generally and her uncontrollable blood loss at the novel's close are, I think, comments on the restrictive codification of women's bodies and state control of their fertility in a country in which, when the novel is set, women still did not have the vote. In short, the novel demonstrates a profound engagement with sexual politics.

It has been argued that the early twentieth-century 'reproduction crisis' surrounding gender, sexuality and the rethinking of maternity that accompanied women's increasing 'reproductive autonomy' is central to Anglo-American modernism generally (Hauck 2003: 256). We might, then, consider that in *Voyage in the Dark* Rhys is writing back to the codification of women's bodies, male anxiety concerning fertility and also a certain modernist preoccupation. We might even read the novel as Rhys's 'late modernist' refusal of an aesthetics of formal mastery that is found in a certain

<sup>65</sup> The literary texts Baldick cites here in addition to *Voyage in the Dark* are Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), Bowen's story 'Firelight in the Flat' (1934) and Lehmann's *The Weather in the Streets* (1936). Baldick also notes T.S. Eliot's concise inclusion of the subject in *The Waste Land* and Naomi Mitchison's depiction in *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (1925), which is somewhat 'softened' by the novel's historical remove (Baldick 2004: 378).

strain of modernism practised by Pound, Wyndham Lewis and the Futurists.<sup>66</sup> However, *Voyage in the Dark* is read in this chapter for its complicity rather than for its disruption of artistic conventions. Rather than focusing on the text's relation to its literary moment, the discussion here concerns the novel's relentless inward gaze at its own problematic desire. The shape (though not the content) of my argument is similar to an important chapter on this novel by Emery which, deploying Mikhail Bakhtin's theory, suggests that the bodily degradation suffered by Anna evolves as a sort of Carnavalesque, 'collectively experienced cycle of life' which 'is opposed to the European realistic convention of "character"' (1990: 79). Emery argues that at the novel's conclusion a 'spirit of laughter' which is both 'destructive' and 'regenerating' enables Anna to identify with the black community of her childhood, thereby 'imagin[ing] a return' that also 'perhaps chang[es] the meaning of the abortion into an event that regenerates her own life' (1990: 80-81). I also see a crucial form of relationality being forged at the novel's end which is both destructive and generative, and I think Emery sets an important precedent for reading Anna's abortion as a solution of sorts to an aesthetic problem concerning how to sustain difficult life.

There is a significant body of criticism focused on the difficult relationships between Rhys's protagonists and their mothers, yet a relative scarcity of scholarship on unwanted pregnancy and abortion in Rhys's writing. There are numerous explanations for this, but I suspect that there is something in Rhys's representation which makes analysis a little too uncomfortable. Two factors seem particularly important in Anna's case: the sense of inevitability surrounding the abortion, and Rhys's emphasis on Anna's youth and vulnerability which may be read as special pleading. There is a problematic, even masochistic 'fatedness' in Anna's narrative. If her willingness to be exploited, her increasing promiscuity and resulting pregnancy are the narrative elements that render the text a modern retelling of Émile Zola's *Nana* (1880), Anna entirely lacks the self-consciousness and bawdy self-confidence that ensure *Nana* is no simple victim. Yet paying close attention to the many mirrorings and repetitions involved in Anna's slide into a hellish promiscuity leads us out of a closed cycle of destruction. What emerges clearly is desire in its two forms: one works to deterritorialise the text, producing ways out of the impasse which blocks Anna's ability

<sup>66</sup> I am thinking here of Tyrus Miller's theorisation of 'late modernism' as a trend in 1930s literature in which artists sought politically meaningful aesthetic solutions to the 'impasse' or decline of earlier 'classical modernism' (1999).

to live well, and the other does the opposite, reinforcing hegemonic processes and leading the protagonist to her destruction.

The role of Anna's youthfulness in her sad fate is profoundly troubling. It attracts men and it is a cause of her economic vulnerability, rendering her open to exploitation. Clearly attracted by her youth, Walter and Vincent bolster their power by infantilising Anna, repeatedly referring to her as 'you rum child' (*ViD*, 48), 'my dear child' (75) and 'my infantile Anna' (69). Most significantly, Anna's youth enables Rhys to maintain to a degree Anna's victimhood in a narrative in which the protagonist knowingly plunges into a depressive downward spiral of increasingly unsafe, anonymous sexual encounters until she finds herself with an unwanted pregnancy and seeks an abortion. Anna has none of Nana's more mature capacity to enjoy a decadent sexuality, and her unhappiness, youth and over-determined vulnerability somewhat distract our attention from the fact that, in the second half of the book, she becomes painfully self-destructive, making irresponsible choices that lead directly to her violent fate. Eighteen when the novel begins, Anna is by far the youngest of the protagonists of Rhys's novels and also the most clearly self-destructive, and it is too easy, I think, to position the first fact as the excuse for the second. The intense pathos at the end of Part Three and in Part Four need not distract us from the violence of Anna's thoughts about the foetus. Similarly, her fate is an intensely violent one: she must choose between unwanted motherhood and the danger of an illegal abortion, and yet it is surprisingly easy to overlook the details of the violence being done to the two bodies in the novel's closing pages.

In my opinion Rhys's third novel is a feminist masterpiece, but it is so because Rhys creates a protagonist who is a tragic victim of the violence inflicted by a cruel society on vulnerable women *and* who is ruled by a problematic desire which, in the second half of the book, as her powerlessness increases, becomes inseparable from her self-/destruction. *Voyage in the Dark* is a devastating depiction of oppressive desire in a feminist narrative. It presents a poetic articulation of the proposition that we are all guilty of bad desire to an extent. However, this is not simply a pessimistic indictment of humankind. Anna's destructive desire is not excused by Rhys, and in this novel in which birth and maternity are so central we can see Rhys as positioning one's complicity in oppression as the starting point for creativity. This works in numerous ways. On the one hand, *Voyage in the Dark* does more than suggest its author's engagement with her family history; it includes what I read as the first relatively visible

acknowledgement in her novels of guilt concerning her family's history of slave-ownership. On the other, although more explicit than in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, this engagement is still a subtext, and so is rendered through evasion. The text negotiates an uneasy path bearing the flows of productive and destructive desire and, in this sense, *Voyage in the Dark* is closest to Kafka's minor literature as Deleuze and Guattari view it: literature which takes its own failure as its starting point.

A great deal of Rhys criticism has addressed Rhys's use of two time schemes in *Voyage in the Dark*, a method foregrounded in Rhys's earlier title for the novel, *Two Tunes*. The intertwining of these 'two tunes' of Anna's past as a child in the West Indies and her present fall into becoming-unmother has been given vigorous explication. Savory's complex analysis highlights the integrity of Rhys's poetics, identifies Rhys's characteristic use of details which 'juxtapose opposites' alongside the original choice of title as evidence that 'clearly a binary structure was Rhys's intention', and suggests that Anna's past and present constitute one more structural opposition (2009: 58). Rhys's handling of race in this novel has also been read as evidence of a binary principle. O'Connor, for example, explores this in relation to Anna's fall, concluding that there is a distinct Manichaeism at work in this novel (1986). However, as Savory notes, 'Anna's fondest memories [of her childhood in the West Indies] suggest that she breached racial divisions somewhat' (2009: 59). Any discussion of binaries in Rhys's work ought to allow room for that dominant critical proposition: that the collapsing of apparent opposites is central to Rhys's aesthetic. As a counterpoint to this, I suggest that desire in its contrary states and rhizomatic relationality are key principles in this novel. Rather than reading Anna's narrative in terms of a dichotomy between past and present, innocence and experience, victim and victimiser, a warm fantasy world of being black and a lived, cold, white English reality, we can understand Rhys to be working against the binary logic that codifies Anna's social existence. Desire is not good *or* bad. Always political, never simply Oedipal, although in this novel it flirts with being so, and never simply the target of power or the passive object of repression, desire constitutes social machines as much as it is constituted by them. Desire is fascistic and schizoid, always playing its two tunes. The text does not require that we privilege either of these. Rather, I propose, it asks that we listen closely to the cacophony of desire as it is pulled between these two poles. 'The Cries of London' is encountered repeatedly by Anna, cropping up unexpectedly as supposedly cheerful decoration (*ViD*, 113, 119, 152). This much-reproduced series of illustrations

challenges us to enjoy its images and to respect the street vendors whom it purports to depict while not overlooking the politics of its representation of the itinerant and dispossessed. Its cries are those of social misery, cries for social justice, the demand that although the agency of these street workers may be limited it must not be denied, and the cries of sellers happily playing their part in the life of London. *Voyage in the Dark* asks us to listen to the different cries of desire which echo across and beyond Anna's narrative.

## II. Dangerous desire, difficult connections and diverse series

The coexistence of schizoid and paranoiac desire in this novel is most evident in the proliferation of increasingly tense associations between Anna's inability to prevent her unhappy progression from loss of virginity to pregnancy and the history of slavery in the Caribbean. It is easy to view this association as an artistic weakness on Rhys's part, and even to deem it a politically dangerous, ethically impoverished elision of the differences between the black experience of slavery, the violence done to women's bodies in patriarchal capitalist society and female masochism. Yet while Rhys establishes definite connections between these three things, the difference between them remains resolute and irresolvable in the text. Indeed, this difference holds these situations of power together and allows them to work as a multiplicity. The key question is: what does this multiplicity do? The chapter in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* entitled 'Proliferation of Series' provides us with a useful set of concepts for thinking about this problem.

In Chapter Three of the first part of *Voyage in the Dark*, Walter seduces Anna for the first time. He is her first lover, and when he voices pleasure in this fact she becomes cold, she cries, but obediently follows him to the bedroom:

I kept saying, 'I must go, I must go.' Then we were going up another flight of stairs and I walked softly [...]

I stopped. I wanted to say, 'No, I've changed my mind.' But he laughed and squeezed my hand and said, 'What's the matter? Come on, be brave,' and I didn't say anything, but I felt cold and as if I were dreaming.

When I got into the bed there was warmth coming from him and I got close to him. *Of course you've always known, always remembered, and then you*

*forget so utterly, except that you've always known it. Always – how long is always? (ViD, 32)*

In the italicised lines, Anna accesses the memory of something. She cannot be recalling sex because she was a virgin before this encounter. Instead it seems that this is the recollection of a masochistic desire or an experience of being forced to do something against her will. The flight of stairs up which Anna is led and her 'dream'-like passivity in relation to Walter's dominance strongly evoke Antoinette's recurring dream in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the dream's earlier two reiterations in Part One a man is leading Antoinette through a forest into a walled garden and up steps to what will presumably be her attic cell and the turrets of Thornfield Hall. Clearly, Antoinette's fate in her dream concerns her entry into sexuality into which the Rochester figure leads her, and has only one possible conclusion: her subjugation to his will. Her trance-like inability to resist the man may carry the dream's function of wish-fulfilment. Just as Sasha's early nightmare of being stuck struggling against the flow of a crowd in *Good Morning, Midnight* suggests that she wants to want to be different (while actually desiring conformity), there is a strong suggestion that Antoinette wishes that she could wish to resist her marriage plot. Antoinette's dream feels unavoidably masochistic. It also suggests the girl's guilt at her desire for sex, and a concurrent desire for punishment, and thereby recalls the young Rhys's preference for Catholicism over the majority Anglican faith of the white community of Dominica, lending support to a reading of the dream as Antoinette's desire to be punished for her sexual fantasies.<sup>67</sup>

Antoinette perceives the garden at Coulibri as an alternative Eden, like 'that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild' (*WSS*, 16). There is a similarity between Coulibri's Eden and the 'enclosed garden' into which Antoinette is compelled in her second dream (*WSS*, 34). The ancient Greek root of the word 'paradise' means 'a (Persian) *enclosed park*, orchard, or pleasure ground (Xenophon)' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, my italics). The walled garden of the dream, then, stands also for the paradise of Antoinette's childhood. The dream that seems initially to symbolise her sexual desire and religiously inculcated guilt can be understood to signify the problematic desire to return to the lost place of the loving relationship that

<sup>67</sup> There are numerous references to Rhys's preference for Catholicism in her letters and autobiography. See, for example, *Smile Please* (79); and O'Connor's 1986 study.

Antoinette shared with her mother for a few short years in infancy. On this reading the danger in her dream derives from two points: the impossibility of the desire to return to the place of the maternal bond, and the worldly and psychological danger posed to the individual who is prematurely deprived of this relationship. There is the primal desire for safety in the awareness of its impossibility; and the fact that, in her melancholic inability to let go of the loss of their mother, Antoinette is doomed to replicate in her sexual relationships the dynamics of the maternal relationship, always entering into the illusion of loving safety with a man whose protection is never reliable, whose love is never lasting. There is a still more dangerous meaning in this nexus of fate, desire and return. Heeding the facts that Antoinette's narrative is not 'free' (she is doomed to end up in Thornfield Hall) and that in her dreams she is enslaved to her desire to follow what is clearly a dangerous path, we can read this desire to return to her childhood Eden as the desire to return to a state of innocence prior to her awareness of her family's history of slavery.

We can think this problem through using Peter Hulme's detailed analysis of Rhys's ambivalence in relation to her family history: it may be that Antoinette/Rhys guiltily desires a return to a 'family romance' – a time when she could freely admire her family's power (Hulme 1994a). Alternatively, the imbrication of slavery and desire in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be understood as an expression of the inescapable fact that for Rhys, desire is necessarily – perhaps even tautologically – self-endangering. The desire to recover the maternal bond which is the template for subsequent desires is the desire to re-enter the 'enclosed garden' of childhood which must, for some time and to some degree, have shielded the young Rhys from the painful reality of her family's role in Dominican slavery. In *Smile Please* she recalls the moment when she realised that she and her family are 'hated' because of their history (49), and this recollection is grounds, I think, for reading in these two novels the desire to return to the time before this event. Yet this desire holds within it impossibility – protection from such knowledge cannot again be found – and extreme danger, implicating the desiring subject in the heinous wrongs of the system which she seeks to avoid. This instance of profoundly complicated yearning conveys the degree to which adult desire in Rhys's writing is never innocent and is always endangering. It signals the fact that the political contaminates everything in Rhys's minor literature – the maternal bond and sexual desire most of all. These scenes of female submission in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* show us that in the worlds that Rhys

depicts, ‘social investments are themselves erotic and, inversely [...], the most erotic of desires brings about a fully political and social investment, engages with an entire social field’ (K, 64). Slavery, like fascism, was a ‘concretion’ of ‘historically determined desire’, and Rhys inherited the history and the social, ethical and epistemological difficulty that follow from that desire (K, 59).

Throughout Rhys’s oeuvre we find scenes of desire which defy social codes, ranging from Rhys’s and Anna’s youthful desire to be black, to her protagonists getting drunk alone in cafes and causing scenes. The casual and sometimes masochistic sex in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Voyage in the Dark* also manifests a schizoid desire that marks a point of escape from the patriarchal regime of England in the 1920s and 30s which drastically demarcated the permissible for women’s bodies. To this extent, Rhys’s writing demonstrates Deleuze and Guattari’s central proposition that it is precisely ‘desire [that] doesn’t cease to undo’ all machinic assemblages (K, 59). Yet while Anna’s schizoid desire creates a point of escape from bourgeois patriarchy, how it works in terms of the racial concretion of slavery is a far more oblique matter.

Returning to Anna’s first seduction by Walter, the idea of a maternal prototype helps us to understand the dream-like italicised statement of recollection which is so difficult to reconcile with the fact that this encounter is the occasion of her losing her virginity: ‘Of course you’ve always known, always remembered, and then you forget so utterly’ (ViD, 32). The statement makes sense if Rhys is likening the irresistible lure of the dangerous sexual encounter to a different type of desire which shares its dynamics. The novel opens with a meditation on Anna’s intense and physical loneliness which figures her move to England as ‘being born again’ into that which is ‘cold’ and distant (7). The coldness that engulfs her when she is following Walter evokes this movement away from her homeland and from the maternal bond. Her desire to be held ‘close’ and ‘warm’ by him strongly recalls the child’s desire for her mother, and using the clues in *Wide Sargasso Sea* we can conclude that Anna’s entry into sexuality is inseparable from a dangerous desire for impossible innocence. It seems impossible that Anna’s sexual life can ever be one of goodness and free will.

Anna is attracted to the affluent Walter, but more importantly she needs him to desire her. She is without money, and her future depends on attracting a wealthy husband, as Maudie reinforces throughout the book, advising that Anna ‘ought to make him give [her] a flat’ (ViD, 41)). Anna is not engaged in prostitution for most of the novel, but she does accept money for sex: after she and Walter have sex for the first



time he puts ‘some money’ into her bag (33), and this procedure remains in place. The ‘businesses’ of money and sex are inseparable in Rhys’s view, as she indicated in *Smile Please* in her observation that they are ‘mixed up with something very primitive and deep’ (121). Anna’s reading of *Nana* is effective shorthand for the proposition that Rhys dramatised in all her novels: prostitution and other forms of sexual relationships including marriage differ in magnitude rather than in kind. In all cases, women are sexual commodities in a transactional, patriarchal economy. Anna’s material and psychological poverty means she has very little choice in how she sells herself to Walter. Her capitulation to his request for sex is, in one sense, her submission to being bought and used at his pleasure. Although her fate becomes unhappier as the narrative proceeds and she embarks on far more meaningless affairs, it is in this scene as she submits for the first time that Anna is most dangerously close to the slavery of unwilling prostitution.

A number of further resonances between *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* reinforce the centrality of slavery in the former. Anna’s statement concerning an uncanny remembrance resonates powerfully with Antoinette’s forgotten knowledge about what she ‘must’ do in the ‘cardboard house’ in England at the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

In the end flames shoot up and they are beautiful. I get out of bed and go close to watch them and to wonder why I have been brought here. For what reason. There must be a reason. What is it that I must do? (*WSS*, 146)

Protagonist and reader must turn to Antoinette’s dreams for the answer to this question, as they have prophesised her fate as much as her destructive maternal inheritance, her awful marriage deal and the cruelty of her husband have enforced her unhappy plight. The answer, of course, is set fire to Thornfield Hall, the house of her oppressor, just as in Part One the emancipated slaves set fire to Coulibri, the house of ex-slave-owners. Antoinette finally takes her cue from black Dominican history in a gesture that affirms a virtual connection to that culture and thereby allows her a means of escape.

There are numerous times in *Voyage in the Dark* when Anna gets ‘that feeling of a dream’ about her everyday existence (*ViD*, 21, 67, 129), and many dream-like reminiscences of her childhood which seem involuntary, but there is only one actual dream that is described in Anna’s story and this is a nightmare in Chapter Four of Part

Three. Unlike Antoinette's last dream, Anna's does not make it clear what she must do. It does, though, develop a series of problematic but powerful symbolic connections between Anna's sexual identity and slavery. Anna dreams that she is 'on a ship', sailing among 'small islands – dolls of islands' which, according to the novel's geographical logic, should be the West Indies but are 'wrong'; on their shores grow 'English trees' (140). A sailor carries a 'child's coffin' from inside which a 'little dwarf' dressed as a 'boy bishop' arises, appearing very much 'like a doll' (140-41). Anna tries to 'walk up the deck and get ashore' but she cannot:

I was powerless and very tired, *but I had to go on*. And the dream rose into a climax of meaninglessness, fatigue and powerlessness, and the deck was heaving up and down, and when I woke up everything was still heaving up and down.

It was funny how, after that, I kept on dreaming about the sea. (*ViD*, 141, my italics)

We must note the undeniable presence of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in Anna's dream: the fact that Anna is sailing to England against her will is reason alone for allowing that this passage might once have been intended for Antoinette's story. The passage also reminds us that *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* concern themselves with very similar things: both protagonists are white Creole women with a family history of slave-ownership which is, in a profoundly difficult manner, inextricable from their sexual identities both in the West Indies and in England. The phrase I have italicised also fits with the sensation of passive fatedness in Antoinette's dreams. The little dwarf in 'priest's robes' recalls the fascist dream figure in *Good Morning, Midnight*, but the 'narrow, cruel face' of this 'boy bishop' that is 'like a doll' evokes the cruelty of Antoinette's husband who attempts to turn her into a 'marionette' locked, like a doll in a dollhouse, inside the attic of Thornfield Hall. Anna here initiates a series of dreams of the sea (just as Antoinette repeats her dream of walking through a wood). In a lecture entitled 'Symbolism in Dreams', first published in English in 1920, Freud identifies the sea and ships as well as woods with the female sexual organs and the mother (2001b: 149-69). In the context of Caribbean history the associations are different. Most significantly, and rendering this passage among the most troubling in the novel,

Rhys's prose creates a profoundly disquieting association between the 'heaving up and down' and 'climax' of the sexual act and the ocean journey of the Middle Passage, an effect underscored by the repeated reference to the 'powerless'. Again, this is a highly complex connection. It suggests to me that Anna's life does, in the course of the novel, become a form of slavery, and that her potentially lethal termination is an essential, inevitable part of a violent exploitation. The association also suggests guilt at an inherited involvement in slavery.

Anna's dream occurs at the end of the chapter in which she realises she is pregnant. In this chapter she has a long recollection of the West Indies and rumours about women who practised Obeah. She is jolted back to the present and her dawning realisation by her pregnancy sickness which resembles seasickness: the 'bed was heaving up and down and I lay there thinking, "It can't be that"' (*ViD*, 140). She is resigned, thinking 'as soon as a thing has happened it isn't fantastic any longer, it's inevitable. The inevitable is what you're doing or have done. The fantastic is simply what you didn't do. That goes for everybody' (140). But her almost-pragmatic tone immediately shifts, becoming more fatalistic and self-pitying – '[t]he inevitable, the obvious, the expected' – and she then begins to imagine the cruel things people will say when they discover she is pregnant, culminating in a question about why she didn't 'bloody well make a hole in the water' (140).<sup>68</sup> This is marked by a line break, followed immediately by the dream in which she 'was on a ship'. This sequencing suggests the guilt and shame that an unforgiving society will impose on Anna as an unmarried pregnant woman, enlarged and transformed into her guilt at her family history. The shame she 'ought' to feel (and that 'should' make her want to drown herself) manifests in her awareness of the place of the history of slavery in her identity and body, as her pregnancy sickness induces a dream of an unfree transatlantic crossing.

The dream is a revelation in a narrative which, since Anna's first sexual encounter with Walter, has depicted sex as a violent and exploitative practice which will lead to her demise. It sheds light on the mysterious thing that Anna has '*always known, always remembered*' (*ViD*, 32). Her shrouded recollection as she loses her virginity is the near-resurfacing of her family's history of slavery as a reaction to her unhappy understanding of what sex with Walter really means. She submits to him in a

<sup>68</sup> This question, of course, is echoed in *Good Morning, Midnight*, which suggests its significance for Rhys.

self-destructive erotic drive which positions her as both slave to his desires and one of the slave-masters, whether her own imaginary family, James Potter Lockhart (Rhys's slave-owning great-grandfather) or the figure of Antoinette/Bertha which may, in 1934, have been in embryonic form. In this series of scenes of desire and memory, desire is always that which is involved in two counter-movements, one of which works to harden the 'segments' or local scenes of oppressive power, and the other which works to weaken them, warning Anna to try to escape.

By the time we come to the second sex scene between Walter and Anna, several months have passed (the story starts in October or November 1913, and it is now January 1914) and we are unsure how often the pair have met, but she has become accustomed to her part in their sexual routine: 'Of course, you get used to things, you get used to anything. It was as if I had always lived like that' (*ViD*, 35). She has just turned 19, is drinking heavily in Walter's home, she is no longer cold and instead wants to share with him her passionate feelings about her home in the West Indies. Her feelings have deepened and she seems to be falling in love but it is clearly not reciprocated. Anna tells Walter about the beauty of Constance Estate, her 'mother's family place', describing the colours of the island, her childhood desire to be black (45) and, in a haunting eruption, recalling 'an old slave-list' she once found at Constance:

'It was in columns – the names and the ages and what they did and then General Remarks.'

...Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant. The sins of the fathers Hester said are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation – don't talk such nonsense to the child Father said – a myth don't get tangled up in myths he said to me...

'All those names written down.' I said. 'It's funny, I've never forgotten it.' (*ViD*, 45-46)

Walter remains mostly silent, allowing Anna to proceed into a further free association of childhood memories and replying only with terse, negative comments, noting in a voice that sounds just like the husband's in *Wide Sargasso Sea* that her home sounds 'too lush' for him. He makes little attempt to hide his lack of interest in Anna's inner life, which Anna accepts. They have sex and she recalls her convent school's practice of meditating on 'the Four Last Things', 'Death, Judgement, Hell and Heaven' before

going to sleep (48) – the recollection clearly signifying the degree of conflict, guilt and desire that she feels about her relationship with Walter, as well as suggesting her awareness that the demise of the relationship is imminent. Anna then asks Walter to turn the light out and her thoughts return to the slave girl: *'Maillotte Boyd, aged 18. Maillotte Boyd, aged 18... But I like it like this. I don't want it any other way but this. [...] Lying so still afterwards. That's what they call the Little Death'* (48). This time Anna reveals explicitly that she views herself as a willing slave. It is one of a handful of passages in Rhys's fiction which pinpoint the lure of sexual masochism with breathtaking precision. It is impossible not to link this passage to Rhys's descriptions in her *Black Exercise Book* of the guilt she assumed at the sexual abuse that she suffered as a teenager. Yet proceeding further with this establishment of links between *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* opens a productive realm of meaning in which desire is no longer confined to the personal but given its due status as a vehicle for power.

In the fifth novel, Antoinette has a brief, intense friendship with Tia, the black daughter of a friend of Christophine's named Maillotte. Christophine arranges for the girls to become friends so that Antoinette has some protection from the anger of the local black children. However, the friendship ends when Antoinette isn't forthcoming with money after losing a bet, and Tia finally puts into words her pent-up resentment of Antoinette's privilege and family history:

She hear all we poor like beggar [...] Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got gold money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger. (*WSS*, 21)

Later in Part One, Tia and her mother stand amid the crowd which has set fire to Antoinette's childhood home of Coulibri, thereby killing her brother and her mother's parrot, Coco. In a scene painful for its positioning of raw, impossible desire as the child's only response to profound tragedy, Antoinette sees her former friend:

Then, not so far off, I saw Tia and her mother and I ran to her, for she was all that was left of my life as it had been. We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I

will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri. Not to go. Not. When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it [...] We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass. (*WSS*, 38)

Antoinette's identification with Tia has sustained great critical debate, and Rhys ensures we cannot but pay attention to it by returning the dreaming Antoinette to this childhood bond in the novel's penultimate paragraph, in which she sees Tia beckoning her to jump from Thornfield Hall's battlements. Tia represents Antoinette's and Rhys's Caribbean home in this final scene and, I think, something richer than a lost Eden. This is yet another scene of impossible desire: not only can Antoinette not return to Coulibri and Jamaica, but the question of whether the identification with Tia was ever mutual in the first place, of whether it was ever capable of sustaining any real warmth, remains utterly unclear. It is quite possible that there never were welcoming arms outstretched. What does seem relatively clear, I think, is the fact that, while in the West Indies, Antoinette could not comprehend, let alone overcome, the social history that divided her from her friend and provoked Tia's anger. My suggestion is that Antoinette identifies so strongly with Tia because she wants to run away from her own history, identity and unhappiness, and because she wants to be part of the black community, but also so that she can be Maillotte's daughter. At the burning of Coulibri she runs towards a black mother and daughter in a crowd, and although she's running to her enemies, she is also running to a maternal bond which at that moment derives its strength from the black community of which mother and daughter are a part. In contrast, the disintegration of Antoinette's relationship with her mother is an inevitable result of their social isolation, their distance from the white Jamaican ladies and the grief this caused Annette. At the scene of the burning of her childhood home, when she knows her relationship with her mother is now in a deathly descent, Antoinette runs to Tia and Tia's mother. This is done, I contend, in an impossible but understandable desire for a different mother, which is also the desire to usurp Tia's place. 'I will live with Tia and I will be like her' suggests usurpation as well as sisterly cohabitation. This is an ethical desire for positive connection with a community from which Antoinette is divided, driven by the understandable although selfish desire for maternal warmth which she currently lacks, and which inflicts violence as the identification itself attempts to breach what cannot be breached, elides what cannot be hidden and claims

what is not hers. The text thereby performs its commitment to writing against the ‘instrument of subservience’, as Salman Rushdie describes the English language (1982), in the knowledge that the text is still written in the language of masters. Maillotte is not present on the final pages of the novel, but we can still read Antoinette as reaching out to the daughter who has a mother. Alternatively, perhaps Antoinette’s final act is fundamentally less self-serving than the young girl’s desire to be a part of a black family.

Another peculiarity in the details of the slave recalled by Anna is the surname, which also appears in *Wide Sargasso Sea* as one of the two family names attached to the unpleasant character of Daniel, Antoinette’s mixed-race half-brother and the Iago figure in this Caribbean tragedy. Daniel Boyd or Daniel Cosway is a resentful blackmailer intent on taking revenge on his father’s daughter, Antoinette, by spreading rumours of her incestuous relationship with another half-brother, Sandi, and of her inheritance of her mother’s madness. It is hard to know what to make of this strange conglomeration of names in *Voyage in the Dark* other than the fact that if we assume any correlation between names and characters in the two novels, Maillotte Boyd clearly stands for both black identity which is desired and the idea of a dangerous black presence in a white bloodline. Hulme concludes that Maillotte Boyd’s name represents a profound social anxiety about miscegenation which is also present in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and about which Rhys was deeply ambivalent, both sharing and being critical of such worry (2000a). Anna Snaith has taken the name as the keystone in Rhys’s use of blackness as a grammar for proto-feminist revolt: Maillotte is Rhys’s means of blurring racial categories and thereby writing back to the imperialist form of thought (2014: 148-49). Maillotte seems to figure the interrelation of histories of empire, race, gender and class, and she thereby seems to cause Anna’s abjection against a threat posed from an exorbitant outside or inside. Both of these important readings add significantly to the possibilities for sense-making in our reading of *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As a counterpoint, I propose that this use of a proper name also detaches language from sense by refusing the representational function altogether in a gesture that answers the husband’s violent renaming of Antoinette in the latter text.

In the fantastical conjuration of Maillotte Boyd, Anna’s masochistic desire for Walter is inseparable from the desire she voiced a page earlier – her forbidden desire ‘to be black’ (*ViD*, 45). The slave’s surname suggests that Anna is aware that this desire is an ill-motivated betrayal, presumably both of her own history and family, and of the

fact that those in league with masters cannot identify with the oppressed. This scene is another brilliantly dense dramatisation of the coexistence of the two contrary states of desire. And yet, the fact that the slave's name is an uncomfortable amalgam of Maillotte and Daniel in *Wide Sargasso Sea* warns us against assuming that the names refer to particular characters in the later novel or to any single, definitive set of racial coordinates. The recurrence of both names in the last novel invites us to look for meaning, for what the names represent in Anna's narrative, and confronts us with the stark fact that they signify a number of contrary things. The two names also bear in themselves the possibility that they mean nothing at all in relation to the later novel, and the possibility that they denote a character who is not in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, either in the sense that there is no ex-slave named Maillotte Boyd in the 1966 text, and in the sense that Rhys entirely omits any evidence to support the idea that Tia's mother is related to Daniel. Rhys's recycling of the names in 1966 renders the name of the already-absent slave girl in *Voyage in the Dark* a signifier without a signified. It is without sense, language deterritorialised. The proper name works just as Deleuze and Guattari describe its function in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*: as materially intense expression, a 'living and expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form' (K, 21). Maillotte Boyd works in opposition to the name of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is used by the husband to signify – that is, to represent – his complete domination of his wife. Anna's desiring scene can be read as a radical dismantling of dualisms, which is not content to rid the text of the opposition of contrary desires (the text supports all desires at once) and between oppressor and oppressed, mother and lover. In Anna's strange identification with a name which has no subject, Rhys rids language of its representative function which gives a figurative sense, leaving only

a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word. The thing and other things are no longer anything but intensities overrun by deterritorialised sound or words that are following their line of escape [...] it is now a question of a becoming that includes the maximum of difference as a difference of intensity, the crossing of a barrier, a rising or falling [...] To make the sequences vibrate, to open the word onto unexpected internal intensities – in short, an *asignifying intensive utilisation* of language. Furthermore, there is no longer a subject of the enunciation, not a subject of the statement [...] Rather, there is a circuit of



states that forms a mutual becoming, in the heart of a necessarily multiple or collective assemblage. (K, 22)

Anna's reference to Maillotte strips the text of the traditional structures and processes on which we depend to construct meaning. We can understand the association as signifying Anna's guilt and masochistic desire, or we can engage in a difficult but rewarding differential reading practice that involves thinking through *Voyage in the Dark* in tandem with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, thinking through the placing of various names in several texts and Anna's and Antoinette's scenes of desire alongside Rhys's own family history of slave ownership and what she might be doing in terms of confronting that history. To make these connections the reader needs to be open to multiple story lines, histories and manifestations of desire in both its orientations, and to the difficulty of thinking beyond dualisms. This is, I think, an important example of Rhys's strategy of encouraging her readers to draw connections between different painful histories which are traditionally kept separate, but here the strategy emerges across different texts and different desiring scenes. This encouragement is also an ethical impulse: there is communality in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but it is virtual rather than actual, existing as non-pre-existent relations among writer, different texts, characters and readers and among different series of scenes of desire which are the means of a careful and highly self-conscious mapping and remapping. Reading Rhys is surprisingly close to schizoanalytic thought in its requirement of both abstraction and creation.

As more scholarship on Rhys's writing emerges, and more connections across the work become visible, the critical community is responsible for actualising the patterns and links in Rhys's writing and the meaning-making which they allow. This is the case for all great artists, but it is a particularly important aspect of our encounters with Rhys's texts due to her style of imbricating diverse histories and submerging meaning, and the degree of difficulty that always attends the notions of connection and communality in her work. Conversations become possible at different times due to the inevitable changes in the academic climate around the world. The recent so-called 'turn to affect', for example, coincides both with a turn from what was the dominant deconstructive paradigm in literary studies and an increasingly necessary emphasis on

the coding of the environment in literature.<sup>69</sup> The idea of this ‘turn’ has been deconstructed by feminist and postcolonial critics such as deCaires Narain who comments that this is better described as a “re-turn” to key tenets of the feminist movement, with its focus on the experiential, the personal and the domestic’. She cites Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* as evidence that postcolonial writing ‘also has a longer history of engagement’ with affect than is ‘perhaps obvious, given its belated and knotted connections to work on feminism and affect’ (deCaires Narain 2013: 276). Without calling it a ‘turn’, then, we can nevertheless say that recent work on embodiment by Ahmed, deCaires Narain and others is making possible increasingly nuanced, productive engagements with difficult connection in Rhys’s fiction. This work, which is foundational for the present study, suggests a reorientation. Rather than reading these narratives as concerning connections which happen to be difficult, and then looking for a cause of this situation, this thesis proposes that Rhys writes about the ethical and ontological fact of the difficulty of connection. Of course she does so from her perspective, but this is nevertheless a fact of life for many people and is at the heart of many social, political and philosophical questions. This fact is also central to aesthetic concerns. The literary text is a site of connection. It allows the reader to feel connection with the author’s voice and her vision, and to learn from these things. As deCaires Narain observes, the text can also make possible the conditions for difficult conversations. It can be such a condition. The literary text can enable solidarity while reminding us of the hard work needed for this to be possible. Rhys’s last three novels remind us of this necessary hard work. The end of *Voyage in the Dark* dramatises a great physiological effort to live that takes place as the text forges a complex network of difficult connections. In this harrowing conclusion, Anna’s haemorrhaging body figures the life of the literary text. It may even, in Deleuzian parlance, be releasing that life.

### **III. The proliferation of desire: a termination and the life of the text**

In their chapter ‘The Proliferation of Series’, Deleuze and Guattari identify a proliferation of terms in Kafka’s novels which works to unblock situations. Doubles and trios are common in his fiction, but signal an Oedipal impasse. ‘Why two or three

<sup>69</sup> This environmental and ecological focus is evident in Rhys studies in work such as Savory’s essay in Johnson and Moran’s collection (2015) and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert’s writing (2007).

and not more?', his novels ask – and answer, by rendering these units 'so vacillating, so supple and transformable, that they are ready to open onto series that break their form and explode their terms' so that, by the time Kafka comes to write *The Trial* and *The Castle* (*Das Schloss*, 1926), 'there will be no reason for a novel to end' (K, 54-55). Something similar is at work in the various dualities in *Voyage in the Dark* which function as a sort of limitation for Anna and, perhaps, Rhys. There is the slave and the slave-owning family, black and white, virginity and promiscuity, innocence and experience, victim and victimiser, male power and female submission, the good and bad woman, the past and present and the many other versions of the 'two tunes'. There is good reason to think that these respectable dualisms block something in the text, and in the desiring scenes with Walter, Rhys is not content to oppose objects of desire, submission and domination, but instead creates a series in which these dualities are connected to sexual masochism, identification with the black community, both free and enslaved, to betrayal, family memory, the haemorrhaging of a dangerous abortion and the transatlantic crossing.

In Anna's delirious haemorrhaging in the novel's final chapter we have a similar, though even more vivid, procedure in which Rhys connects different terms across divergent series.<sup>70</sup> A white man's face in the recent past leads Anna to think of the white masks worn by men in Carnival during her childhood; Hester's past disapproval of this tradition is echoed in the present as Mrs Polo also thinks Anna's bleeding 'ought to be stopped'; Anna's present giddiness evokes a scene of dancing – it is unclear when, but presumably also during Anna's youth; the banging of kerosene-tins in Carnival echoes both the clock ticking in the present and the regular pulse of her dangerous blood loss; remembrance of Walter's past instruction to Anna to leave his flat evokes the voice of somebody (again, it is unclear who), instructing Anna in horse-riding, somewhere on the island of her childhood; and the recollection of trying to grip the horse's sides with her knees brings her back to her present (*ViD*, 156-58). This is not a simple opposition between the past and the present but a series of temporally and thematically different moments connected across the present and different series of the past and these moments are in no way neutral. The terms and the characters which are repeated in these series each 'correspond to a position of desire' (K, 55).

<sup>70</sup> This analysis refers to the conclusion of the published text of *Voyage in the Dark* and not to Rhys's original version of the ending, which is available in Bonnie Kime Scott's edited volume, *The Gender of Modernism* (1990: 381-389).

We can also read in these series what Deleuze and Guattari describe as ‘segments’: these are scenes in which a particular concretion of power is exercised and visible. In *The Trial* there is the ‘police segment, lawyer segment, judge segment’ (K, 55). In the last chapter of *Voyage in the Dark* there is the illegal abortion segment (Anna’s current bodily predicament), the sexual submission segment (signalled by Walter’s voice – a situation of sexual desire involving a ghastly inequality), the prostitution segment (the white face of the man who knows that Anna will say, ‘[s]top, stop, stop’ (*ViD*, 158)), the colonialism segment, and the absent mother segment (Hester and Anna in her delirium both embody this). Deleuze and Guattari theorise that capitalism and bureaucracy proceed by the production of hard segments which are often contiguous with each other and across which desire flows. Desire becomes ‘attached to this or that form of content, crystallised in this or that form of expression (capitalist desire, fascist desire, bureaucratic desire, and so on)’, attached to this or that segment (K, 59). However, when there is a proliferation which results in the acceleration of chaotic flows of desire, the creation of a line of flight from the current assemblage becomes possible as, however unexpectedly and momentarily, desire might be for the abolition of the current assemblage and might just direct itself at an alternative assemblage coming into sight. Desire might find ‘a way out, precisely a way out, in the discovery that machines are only the concretions of historically determined desire and that desire doesn’t cease to undo them’ (K, 59). It is the task of literature to predict ‘diabolical powers before they become established’, in such a way that desire overcomes those powers and finds these lines of escape (K, 59).

This conceptualisation of political literature enables a positive reading of the contrary flows of desire that have run throughout *Voyage in the Dark* and which coalesce in the diverging series as Anna haemorrhages, struggles for life, overhears, remembers and imagines. The various terms (people, symbols, motifs, phrases) which are repeated in these different series cease to have just a representative function. Instead, they ‘become agents, connective cogs of an assemblage [...] each cog corresponding to a position of desire, all the cogs and all the positions communicating with each other through successive continuities’ (K, 55). Everything in this complex assemblage is desire, and this is what Anna’s bodily predicament – which is notably also one of delirium, a schizoanalytic term for the predicament of literature – becomes in this text’s conclusion. The two contrary forms of desire traverse her body in an excessive fashion: Anna’s desire for life and change (her refusal to accept her

entrapment in impoverished, undesired motherhood) and the desire for a double death in the lethal flow of blood out of her body. This is the desire both of the oppressors and the oppressed, ‘desire as a plenitude, exercise, and functioning’ (*K*, 56). Yet Anna’s desire for life is only one instantiation of the impersonal desire that traverses her body. This novel’s final scene dramatises the flow of desire of all sorts as life itself. Imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy coalesce on the sexually exploited white woman’s body as she bleeds out and recalls her colonial childhood. The flows of desire in her delirium are the signs of this larger complex assemblage which she now figures so well, the assemblage of advanced imperialist capitalism that ‘brings into coexistence engineers and parts, materials and machine personnel, executioners and victims, the powerful and the powerless, in a single collective ensemble’ (*K*, 57). Anna’s body is a passive concretion of this assemblage and an active moment of resistance and escape. There is deathly reterritorialisation in the bedroom, plantation and colony, but there is also the contrary impulse which ‘makes desire take flight through all the assemblages, rub up against all the segments without settling down in any of them, and carry always farther the innocence of a power of deterritorialisation that is the same thing as escape (the schizo-law)’ (*K*, 60). This is not the breaking down of distinction between different types of power structures, but the rapid movement from one into the other, such that each is constantly changing. The mask is a key trope here and a constant in a sequence of transforming segments, as the scene of amateur prostitution and nonconsensual sex morphs into the racist assumptions of the family of colonialists and a colonialist’s summary of ‘the whole damned business’ of colonialism (*ViD*, 156), into the Masquerade scene which reveals both the oppression of women that breaches racial divisions *and* the violence done to women’s bodies throughout the history of racism. In its final sense the mask expresses Anna’s bleak assessment of the void within humanity’s lust for power, all society being ‘a place where nobody is’ (158).

As a concretion of the complex assemblage of advanced imperialist capitalism, Anna’s body is caught up in a dangerous becoming that maps the world – an inverse of the psychoanalytic archaeology of family drama. ‘Contact and contiguity are themselves an active and continuous line of escape’ and so the ‘pathways’ of Anna’s delirium and haemorrhaging form a rhizomatic outward movement, ‘open[ing] up all the polyvocal elements of desire, in the absence of any transcendental criteria’ (*K*, 61). We can hear numerous voices in the final pages of the novel: Anna’s, Hester’s, Laurie’s, Mrs Polo’s, Walter’s, the doctor’s, several unknown men and the voices of

those celebrating Carnival. As the connections between Anna's past and present proliferate the relationships between speaker, voice and words spoken are destabilised, the figures become interchangeable while the words are increasingly torn from sense, becoming elements that reverberate with other elements, according to their sound, appearance and associations. The flashback-delirium 'becomes a center for the perturbation of situations and characters, a connector that precipitates the movement of deterritorialisation' (K, 61) and, as Anna's ability to hold onto any one line of narrative disintegrates, it precipitates the deterritorialisation of language.

As desire traverses these segments, the connected terms (the beat of Carnival, Hester's disapproval, the mask) cease to be confined to their representational function, and become materially intense expression: there is the pulse of sound (voices, drums), movement (Anna's body, dancing, riding), Anna's delirious thought, and the accelerating pulse of the text as it reaches its conclusion. The meaning of the text then emerges not through the interpretation of a fixed linguistic code but when we sense the connections and reverberations between these terms and this sound and movement. The predicament of Anna's desiring body, her delirium flashbacks and her uncontrolled blood flow connects things in such a way that the text 'opens up new series and explores uncharted regions that extend as far as the unlimited field of immanence' (K, 62). When we read the conclusion of *Voyage in the Dark* this way we enter into a zone of indistinction with the text, in which the reverberations and connections between the terms of materially intense expression change according to our affections – our capacity to be affected – at any given instant. We find the desire and the pulse that we want at any particular moment.

Three questions remain: what is Rhys's question in writing? Does she offer a prognosis? And does her language at the close of the third novel evidence a high coefficient of deterritorialisation? I offer just a tentative answer to the first question here. It is answered more fully in the following analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. My feeling is that in *Voyage in the Dark* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys addressed the question of how to write what she had to write – that is, what she saw and felt, her own perspective – without excluding others, and without writing for and over others. These novels are her attempt to write an 'I' that is also a 'we' that does not inflict avoidable violence on others. This gives us an answer to the second question. For decades feminist thinkers have been engaged with the question of how to write as an oppressed group while not excluding, eliding or diminishing differences within that group. I think

that the end of *Voyage in the Dark* grapples precisely with this problem and is, therefore, a sort of prognosis. How to speak of the multiplicity that is women, how to utter something meaningful as this collective assemblage? Rhys offers her answer: start with maximum difficulty and complicity. Start with the body of an unhappy, oppressed white woman in the moments of abortion and deathly blood loss, with a desire that is both claiming escape from the replication of oppressive female roles, and that is hardening victimisation, complicity, individualism, irresponsibility, and hardening the segments that have been involved in these predicaments. Start with a brilliant, rich and political imagining of a predicament of maximum passivity: the patient, brought there by passions, and entirely without interpersonal agency, suffering and being moved. Start with a series that brings together sex, childhood, slavery, masochism, bleeding, dancing, riding, drumming, listening, observing, desiring. Start, in other words, with the impulse of the rhizome, reaching out and hoping for the best.

As to the final question, in her third novel Rhys advanced the most explicit version of what would remain from then on her preferred model for concluding novels: a dramatic violence experienced by the protagonist in her first-person narrative as a deathly self-overcoming is made proximate. The sense of self-overcoming is clearer in *Good Morning*, *Midnight* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, but the violence and death are most apparent in *Voyage in the Dark*. In both the original conclusion and the published ending of her third novel Rhys engages with the problem identified by O'Connor (1986): how to write the first-person narrator's death and thereby deterritorialise the first-person narrative? We have no reason to think that at the end of the published version of *Voyage in the Dark* Anna does not die, and we need not speculate on her existence beyond the narrative. The end of the text marks Anna's death, and the text itself therefore marks her life, hence the repeated references to birth in the opening lines. But as Anna's becoming-unmother concludes by submitting the language of life to a deathly deterritorialisation, a line of flight is opened up for a different form of life. As the representation of her blood flow releases materially intense expression in the text's acceleration towards its encounter with its outside, with that which is beyond the first-person narrator's life, everything beyond Anna's capacity for experience, life ceases to belong to Anna. Communitarity may not yet be possible, but at the conclusion of Rhys's third novel the life of the complex assemblage of advanced capitalism, life as desire itself becomes the life beyond Anna's life, and the life of this text about

complicity, difficult connection and unmothering thereby finally exceeds the individual and becomes impersonal life. This is the implicit affirmation of *Voyage in the Dark*.

In the final paragraph of this novel Anna watches the ‘ray of light’ come in ‘under the door

like the last thrust of remembering before everything is blotted out. I lay and watched it and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again, all over again... (*ViD*, 159)

This passage does not describe Anna’s desire to resume her unhappy promiscuity, nor a determination to prolong her existence. The words are fresh and devoid of compromise. To me, the ‘new and fresh’ life signals a different life, and perhaps a new novel, a new writing life. In the ‘misty days, when anything might happen’ and the palpable sense of the cyclical there is an evocation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The words suggest imagination and memory, and the freedom, effort and necessity involved in working out how to write what ‘*you’ve always known, always remembered*’. Rhys’s subsequent novels will offer a vision as dangerously uncompromising as that in *Voyage in the Dark*. It is likely that in this novel that chronicles Anna’s becoming-unmother, Rhys experienced her own becoming-writer.

## **Coda: Anxiety, sensation and connection in *Wide Sargasso Sea***

### **I. The ‘struggle’ to ‘get the thing right’**

Chapter Two concluded by suggesting that anxiety is the dominant affect in Rhys’s novels. The subsequent chapters have explored failure in three guises, in *Good Morning, Midnight* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*; and, in reading *Voyage in the Dark*, I have identified an aesthetic solution to an on-going problem that is predicated on risk. This concluding discussion turns to the anxiety of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and examines the conclusion to Rhys’s search for the conditions of positive connection.

Rhys voiced anxiety about a great variety of things in her writing and interviews. It is palpable in her writing about her skin colour and family history. It is,



however, most evident in her letters to her editors, Diana Athill and Francis Wyndham, in which she wrote of her anxiety at confirming her final novel's completion and relinquishing control by handing it over for publication. She demonstrated the degree of this worry by delaying for twenty-seven years before publishing a work which was written at least in fledgling form in 1939. The clearest and most resonant evocation of this concern occurs across a number of her poems and letters to her editors between 1964 and 1966, in which Rhys refers to her 'struggle' to 'get the thing right' and finish (or bring to term) *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her grudging acceptance that – due to some mysterious aesthetic law – the gestation was complete, and her fearful awareness or 'complex' that the text, once birthed, would have a life of its own which she would not be able to control, 'cold print being so final and nothing to be done about it anymore' (*Letters*, 255). Rhys was plagued by the impossibility of determining the final, perfect linguistic expression and deeply anxious about the chance of a negative critical reception and the likelihood of being misread. In a letter of 1964 to Francis Wyndham, Rhys ponders how she, 'of all people', dare 'say [Brontë] was wrong? Or that her Bertha is impossible? *Which she is*' (*Letters*, 271). Rhys then cites an important passage from Brontë's 1850 'Preface' to her sister's novel, *Wuthering Heights*, which describes the essentially passive role of the writer in relation to the creative work which somehow assumes a life of its own.:

She wrote: - Charlotte did:

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

So you see she *knew*. It is so. (Brontë 1850: xxiii-xxiv, in *Letters*, 271)

This passage was clearly of great importance to Rhys. In her letters at around this time Rhys makes numerous references to the poetry she was writing in order to 'cure [herself] of sadness', and apparently also to free herself from the constraints of the

‘labour’ of writing prose and to access creative solutions for *Wide Sargasso Sea* (*Letters*, 261 and 271). One such text, entitled ‘Kitchen Poem’, is dedicated ‘To Charlotte Brontë [sic], who said “There comes a time...” and relays the inspiration Rhys found in her dreams (‘[redacted]’), her anxious attempt to conclude a text (obviously her final novel) and her awareness of the instability and violence of both words and critical reception, which might ‘[redacted]’.<sup>71</sup> Rhys had been nurturing *Wide Sargasso Sea* for close to three decades when she wrote this poem and the letter to Wyndham, and a sense of awe at the mystery of the final appearance of the novel is palpable in her repetition of Brontë’s words. It is striking that Rhys’s expression of passivity in the creative act is formulated using the words of Brontë, to whom Rhys’s long-gestated novel is a reply. There is here a sense of over-determined passivity. We might go as far as inferring a sort of possession or Obeah at work, whereby Brontë or some other force was controlling precisely when and how *Wide Sargasso Sea* was to be born: ‘I’m not quite in control of [the novel] now’, Rhys declared in 1964, ‘[i]t’s in control of me’ (*Letters*, 274).

Rhys’s use of Brontë’s ‘Preface’ may be read as homage or taken as the expression of Rhys’s sense of inadequacy in comparison to the canonical nineteenth-century novelist. We can infer a political dimension in this uneasy, even phobic identification, as the woman from the colony adopts words from a canonical voice of the motherland to describe her literary endeavour to write back. If Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar had considered Rhys’s relationship to Brontë they might have read an identification with the older English author that counteracts a characteristically female “anxiety of authorship” – a radical fear that [Rhys] cannot create, that because she can never become a [historically male] “precursor” the act of writing will isolate or destroy her’ (1979: 49). This is not, however, the anxiety that I read in Rhys’s authorial statements. Undoubtedly, within them we find her political awareness of the instability and violence of language and her knowledge of the intensified problems with authorship experienced by women writers. But on my reading Rhys’s anxious connection to Brontë, and her statements concerning her literary practice delineate not

<sup>71</sup> Rhys’s poem ‘Obeah Night’ gave her the idea for the love potion plot device on which the last third of the novel turns and through which Rhys makes the husband sympathetic to a degree. She sent it to Francis Wyndham and it is published in her *Letters* (264-266). ‘Kitchen Poem’ is held in UTC: 1976.011.1.3.10 (and listed on the online inventory under the title ‘To the Memory of Charlotte Brontë’).

a problem of writing as a woman and concerning women's access to language, but a problem with what happens to the writer as she writes. Despite the maternity metaphor, I do not read Rhys's ontological problem with creation as centring on gender. Her statements convey an irrepressible anxiety at the fact that literary creation involves a deeply problematic relinquishment of agency as the artist becomes a conduit for inspiration; she becomes passive before the work of art which in a sense births itself. Rhys found motherhood difficult, but came to understand writing as a comparable form of creation in which the writer is caught up in an anxious, passive becoming-mother in which she has limited control over the development and birth of her creation. In a tragic letter of March 1966 Rhys informs her editor of the sudden death of her husband, Max Hamer, and declares in a passive voice that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is now ready:

I've dreamt several times that I was going to have a baby – then I woke with relief.

Finally I dreamt that I was looking at the baby in a cradle – such a puny weak thing.

So the book must be finished, and that must be what I think about it really. I don't dream about it any more. (*Letters*, 301)

Confronted with another profound loss, it seems that Rhys could sustain no further faith in improving her novel. Circumstance concluded the tortuous writing process which had spanned three decades, and the artist concluded her greatest work with an acknowledgement of her passivity. Whereas in *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys faced the possibilities that the art work and the art world do nothing, in her struggle to produce her final novel she seems to have faced the question of how to locate and necessarily relinquish artistic agency in the process of literary creation. I propose, then, that Rhys's anxiety at birthing her texts found fictional expression in narratives in which the maternal line is severed and intuitive affiliations across divergent series are established in its place, and that the passivity of her protagonists figures the author's anxiety concerning her own passivity in the creative act.

Anthony Cuda has written a compelling book on modernist anxiety concerning the relinquishment of control in the passions of the creative process (2010). The writers on whom he focuses refuse 'to grant the viability of an intellectual and self-possessed stability that would somehow exclude and safeguard against the unruly and

unpredictable energies of passion' (Cuda 2010: 187). Instead, argues Cuda, they address the illusion of the artist's complete control and self-awareness, and the fact that 'psychological openness or vulnerability to intrusion is neither weakness nor aberration but a structural part of how we experience the world and a constitutive part of the creative process' (2010: 187). They return obsessively to scenes of passivity or what Cuda calls 'passion scenes' in order to develop textual strategies that 'reflect the ceaselessly uncomfortable and often threatening ways in which passion both shapes and disfigures our experiences of self-possession and creativity' (2010: 34). Cuda's reading is compelling and his arguments transpose easily onto Rhys's novels which concern both passivity and passion. I contend that the Rhys woman's passivity, her willingness to be vulnerable and buffeted by the world through which she moves, constitutes Rhys's evolving version of Cuda's passion scene.

Rhys's novels show us that 'good' activity is often not really good and that passivity is not the opposite of activity; they offer a diagnosis of the human condition, depicting it as affective enmeshment, a matter of sometimes disgusting and sometimes shameful bodies being affected by intensities which move those bodies closer to or further from joyful action. Sasha expresses this succinctly:

My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on. (*GMM*, 40)

Conspicuously absent here are other people and how they affect Sasha, but the passage nevertheless shows subjectivity to be a dissipating individuation taking place as one is affected by other entities. Rhys's art is not a matter of developing compensatory mechanisms to shore up the fragments of a self-contained, self-identical ego.<sup>72</sup> Instead, her prescient vision helps us to see the life of the affected not as a limitation, an inhibition or a symptom, but the stuff of great literature. Her novels are the necessary other side of this story, whereby we affect others with words in what Claire Colebrook

<sup>72</sup> Cuda's analysis takes as a counterpoint statements by a range of figures such as Freud, Georg Simmel, T.E. Hulme, Wilhelm Worringer and the 'Men of 1914' which suggest that art (and formal experimentation) has the function of compensating for a reality that threatens the stability of the self.

describes as the ‘transindividual possibility of becoming’ (Colebrook 2000a: 7). This is the potential of great literature.

This thesis has argued that passivity is a function of Rhysian becoming. I suggest, in conclusion, that it also figures an authorial anxiety concerning agency. When the individual is conceived as an emerging entity determined largely by its encounters, it becomes very difficult to locate agency. Rhys does not, in general, make great effort to locate it (Antoinette’s becoming-disgusting is a rare exception), preferring instead to focus on the experience of and potential in vulnerability and openness. I believe that we have no reason to think that this choice was not a positive one. We can read Rhys as affirming the ontological, aesthetic and ethical value of the instability which arises from not possessing but being possessed and affected by the winds of external causation. The ending of the last two novels strongly convey an affirmation of openness. This situation sheds light on and is illuminated by Rhys’s ontological and, I think, ethical statement that ‘when you are safe you are very rarely free [...] when you are free you are very rarely safe’. Free need not mean free from oppressive conditions or from political structures which limit our capacity for joy. It may denote the dissolution of becoming. One of the most curious things about Rhys’s fiction is the fact that there is paranoia and anger but strikingly little anxiety felt by the protagonists concerning their lack of safety. There is, instead, the potent anxiety palpable in Sasha’s lonely description of the affective life that signals the global affect that saturates Rhys’s novels and becomes urgent in the final three. Our bodies are proximate to other bodies and life is a matter of relationality, yet connection with other people is precisely that which is hardest to affirm for Rhys’s protagonists because people are, more often than not, hostile. Sasha cannot even acknowledge others in this passage. This inability to affirm connection with other people is, I contend, the source of the most profound anxiety within Rhys’s novels. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* she reaches a means of resolving this which is also her means of overcoming her worry about the artist’s passivity.

One solution can be sensed at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight* which, like Antoinette’s call to Tia, suggests that the literary text itself be considered for its ‘transindividual possibilit[ies] of becoming’. Both novels end in a dark, unknown ‘passage’, signalled in the fourth novel by an ellipsis, between indeterminate states, in which the protagonist is somehow connected to another. These conclusions work for me as figurations of the potential of literature to connect people, and to enable positive

change. However, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys develops a far more sophisticated means of affirming connection by saturating her text with affect, in the form of ‘pure’ and ‘autonomous’ entities extracted from human affections, blocs of ‘nonhuman becomings’ through which art gives ‘sensation the power to exist’ (*WP*, 166). These blocs of sensation make connection visible, bringing it into presence and thereby countering Antoinette’s and Rhys’s anxious inability to affirm connections with others. This argument is indebted to Cuda’s reading of T. S. Eliot’s 1940 poem ‘East Coker’, which became the second part of Eliot’s *Four Quartets* in 1943. Cuda argues that Eliot’s complex manipulation of sound and imagery in this poem ‘recalibrate[s] the affective scales of passion and surrender’ in such a way that Eliot can accept that the ‘passive nature of inspiration coincides with – rather than opposing or obstructing – the active processes of the conscious mind’ (Cuda 2010: 60). In the ‘midst of debilitating paralysis’, images and sounds work as ‘signals of affective emergence’, countering evacuation with presence as ‘process[es] of becoming visible and audible’ (Cuda 2010: 60). Drawing on Cuda’s analysis, I propose that blocs of sensation formed from a dense, dynamic network of connections logically oppose the dangerous impulse to individualism that is always threatening in Rhys’s work and always hinders – if not actually severing – relationality. To conclude this discussion I turn to the life that Rhys gives to sensation in the attic scene in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

## II. Becoming-present

A great deal has been written on the idea of the return in Rhys’s fiction, and her complex transmutation of fact into fiction. GoGwilt reads in this oeuvre an ongoing search for the lost memory of Rhys’s Caribbean childhood (2011), and Hulme and Gregg have discussed how Rhys distorted history due to her inability to face it. I propose that Rhys’s returns and use of facts are her means of forging connections between people, places, histories and, of course, texts. The fire at Coulibri in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the most potent return in this fiction and is also the rewriting of historical events. The conflagration of Antoinette’s childhood home, in the novel’s first section adumbrates Antoinette-Bertha’s concluding act of setting fire to her husband’s house in England, thereby also establishing the fact that the novel is a return to the prehistory of *Jane Eyre*. The fire functions as the mnemonic trace of race riots in the West Indies in the years immediately following Emancipation. Rhys modelled Coulibri on Geneva Estate

at Grand Bay, Dominica, which was the slave plantation bought by her maternal great-grandfather in 1824 and which, on his death, was left to his wife, Jean, to run. There was an attack on the property by rioters in the Dominican ‘Census Riots’ or ‘Guerre Negre’ of 1844, but the house was not burnt.<sup>73</sup> However, the ‘Estate house at Geneva was burned down in 1932 during a period of unrest in which the incumbent Lockhart was very unpopular’ (Hulme 1994a: 87, n. 12). This was four years before Rhys’s one return to the island. Notwithstanding this transposition of a 1930s fire to the 1830s, the fire at Coulibri, in a work published when Rhys was in her late seventies, can obviously be understood as a search for the lost memories of childhood. It undoubtedly marks a confrontation with her history. It may symbolise the emigrant’s final admission that her home is irretrievably lost and, given Rhys’s problematic position growing up in Dominica as the white great-granddaughter of a slave-owner, may have always been. To me the fire obliquely suggests the violence committed by her family. Crucially, Rhys locates Coulibri in Jamaica, thereby putting a critical distance between her story’s opening tale of origins and her childhood, and the fire thereby stands for the traumatic history of the region as well as her family history.<sup>74</sup> Crucially, the fire also signifies an authorial history.

In a letter of 1945 Rhys writes that she has a ‘novel half finished’ and it ‘might be the one book [she’d] written that’s much use’ (*Letters*, 39). This was ‘Le Revenant’, an early version of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (*Letters*, 213). According to Angier, the fate of this embryonic novel had already taken a dramatic turn in 1939, in a striking incident which was ‘extraordinary, a typically Jean story’ (1990: 372):

One day after *Good Morning, Midnight* had been published Leslie gave [Rhys] *Jane Eyre*: and suddenly – so he told Maryvonne, and so Jean must have told him – she had ‘a marvellous idea’. She was very excited. She wrote *Le Revenant*, or half of it, very quickly, and Leslie typed what she had written [...] But then something happened. They had a furious row; and to punish Leslie she took his typescript and burned it in the grate. (Angier 1990: 371)

<sup>73</sup> Hulme has redressed the fact that in much Rhys criticism the fire in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is taken and reported as historical fact (1994a). He suggests that Rhys’s fictionalisation of the event may have had a compensatory function, enabling her to view her family as victims of history rather than individuals who were involved in handing out extreme and violent punishments to the black rioters.

<sup>74</sup> Part Two of the novel takes place on an unspecified Windward Island, though the geographical descriptions suggest the island on which Rhys grew up. Granbois is based on Bona Vista, Rhys’s father’s estate in Dominica.

Assuming the tale is accurate we can infer that in her rage, destroying her manuscript was Rhys's means of exerting agency, whether with the intention of punishing herself or her husband; and in this act we can sense the threat to agency that producing a finished novel may have represented for Rhys. In terms of these arguments it is striking, to say the least, that in the year in which the Second World War broke out, and Rhys's fictional testament to the death of her artistic birthplace was published, the author herself burned a version of her fifth novel which would, in its final form, open and close with an image of a fire which had its origins in Rhys's family history. In a sense, then, we can read the burning of *Coulibri*, which connects various biographical, historical and textual facts to one another, as the objective correlative of the violent dissolution of the artist in the passion of artistic creation. This passion involves an encounter with the unthinkable (the failure of art to effect positive change), the proliferation of both forms of desire in a chaotic optimism, and the anxious passivity of the creative process as the author is 'taken over' by the passions of inspiration. On this reading, the fire is the objective correlative of the literary passion which ensures that loss of the self – rather than loss of one's origins – is the condition of writing. In one sense, then, this is a fairly conventional use of a symbol which denotes the impossible simultaneity of destruction and creation. In another, the fire figures the connection of disparate moments of violence across diverse series (historical and textual) and thereby has a similar function to that of Anna's body at the conclusion of *Voyage in the Dark*.

In this sequence of repetitions, returns and fires, connection becomes almost tangible and we might even intuit Rhys's intention in the title of her final novel, which evokes a threateningly dense marine tangle that prevents smooth movement. The Sargasso Sea is the only sea to not be bound by a land mass, and the title thereby also suggests a concern with that which threatens us in 'free', unbound being – the difficulty of both locating agency and affirming positive connections with others. The title also indicates Rhys's preoccupation with place. For Deleuze and Guattari great writers create percepts or 'beings of sensation, which preserve in themselves the hour of a day, a moment's degree of warmth'; these are 'the landscape before man, in the absence of man', 'compound[s] of sensation that no longer need[] anyone' (*WP*, 169). *Wide Sargasso Sea* presents a marvellous dramatisation of how the pure qualities of the landscape affect those within it. The husband experiences great threat to his rock-like



ego on the West Indian island, and Antoinette is made deathly cold and amnesiac by the environment of the English attic-prison. Poetic logic in one territory becomes loss of self in another. There is great potential in perceiving Rhys's urban and Dominican landscapes – the plantation gone to ruin, the threatening streets of Paris and the English streets which are 'all alike' – not as external places, but as the very element of a 'passage of life', showing us that '[w]e are not in the world, we become with the world' (*WP*, 169). Rhys's oeuvre unfolds as a drama of navigating social encounters but also those landscapes which lead to an 'increase or decrease' of our power, 'growth or decline, joy or sadness' (Deleuze 1997: 140).

Antoinette's intense love for her homeland gives us an important signal concerning how to read the end of the final novel. It is at the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, when Antoinette is trapped in the cold, unpleasant attic that she develops an intensely affective imaginative capacity centred on her response to her red dress which allows her to reach back to other inhabitants of her homeland. Antoinette's removal from the island or, to rephrase it, the termination of her becoming-island, leads to a far more potent sort of becoming, in which she enters into a zone of indistinction, encountering others from her island, sensing connection firstly with Coco the parrot, then Aunt Cora and finally Tia in the bloc of sensation which creates her line of flight and necessary destruction. The Coulibri fire serves as the keystone for the affective register Rhys builds, becoming the key point of affective, intuitive connection in a dense tissue of relationality.

During the fire at Coulibri, the family escape the burning house only for Annette to attempt to re-enter. Mason asks if she is trying to rescue her 'Jewel case', but Aunt Cora tells him 'Nothing so sensible', and explains that Annette wanted to return for her 'damned parrot', Coco, a bird that 'didn't talk very well, he could say Qui est là? Qui est là? And answer himself Ché Coco, Ché Coco' (*WSS*, 35). Mason prevents Annette from returning for the bird, and shortly afterwards Coco emerges from the conflagration:

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

I began to cry. 'Don't look,' said Aunt Cora. 'Don't look.' She stopped and put her arms round me. (*WSS*, 36)

In the attic in Thornfield Hall, Antoinette's life depends on her affective awareness of colour, smell and texture that remind her of vitality: 'Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning. Where is it?' (*WSS*, 151). The dress reminds Antoinette of the Coulibri fire – it is 'the colour of fire and sunset' – and the deathly fall of Coco, but this affective association itself has vitality, enabling that experience when 'your soul is lifted up when it flowers. Everyone wants that' (151). The force of the affective imagery and the smell of the dress grows:

The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vertivert and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain.

... I was wearing a dress of that colour when Sandi came to see me for the last time. (*WSS*, 151)

In the final line, the smell of the landscape of her home conjures Antoinette's affectionate relationship with Sandi which has not been included from her perspective until now. This reminiscence is a moment of hope, despite its pathos. Later, after a violent incident in which her step-brother denies her help, Antoinette is left feeling worse off and worries that 'they had changed' her dress when she wasn't looking; but she reassures herself, 'but how could they get the scent?' (*WSS*, 152). She sees it laid out on the floor and again her affective response is a transformational encounter: 'and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do. I will remember I thought. I will remember quite soon now' (153). At this point, the affect produced by her dress which recalls the Coulibri fire begins to resemble the paradoxical feeling of needing to do something that will risk everything; this is the 'necessity' to 'lose [...] soul to find soul', Antoinette's necessary surrender to bliss, that Harris celebrates (1980: 145, 148). However, there is still an ebb and flow of affect; it has not sufficiently secured its life, there is not enough sensation to make connection present.

Harris persuasively identifies the flamboyant 'tree of life' at Coulibri (*WSS*, 17), which resurfaces in this late vision, with the foodbearing tree in the Arawak-Carib creation myth that ties violent destruction to generativity (1980). He argues that Rhys

is handling the ‘variables of unconsciousness’ in drawing on this pre-Columbian imagery: ‘Nothing [...] possesses quite the tone of necessity – that runs deeper than appearance and logic – with which Jean Rhys imbues Antoinette, and in so doing makes her madness essentially human’ (Harris 1980: 145). The necessity Harris identifies runs throughout the novel but becomes palpable in the novel’s closing pages, as Antoinette returns again and again to the increasingly affective red dress. The garment’s intensity increases as the prose seems to be involved in a conjuration, adding ever greater density of connection to its material, so that it does not just smell of Antoinette’s home, or remind her of a sexual passion, but incorporates history (her own and that of the West Indies) and mythology, figured by the foodbearing tree of life, and then, gradually, the specifics of a life which can sustain, populated finally by people, landscape and creatures with whom Antoinette desires connection:

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 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? and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. [...] when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me [...] All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, Why did I scream? I called ‘Tia!’ and jumped and woke. (*WSS*, 155)

This time Antoinette’s vision is dense with warm colour, sweet fragrance, sound, motion, the familiar, the fearful, a sense of timelessness and above all a sense of rich, intricate connection which is neither simple nor linear but ‘alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2006: 52). This is an affective delirium, a poetic complex of imagery and sensation formed through a dense entanglement of relations which has been built over pages. This bloc of sensation composed of affects and percepts logically opposes the anxious, passive inability to affirm human relationships which has dominated since the opening page and all Rhys’s previous novels, by securing the presence of connection in the text. This bloc is irreducible to personal feeling. It does not belong to Antoinette,

it is neither controlled nor determined by her. Rather, she is passive before it and it *moves* Antoinette to call out to Tia, in a process similar to that described by Deleuze in his essay on T. E. Lawrence:

The mind begins by coldly and curiously regarding what the body does, it is first of all a witness; then it is affected, it becomes an impassioned witness, that is, it experiences for itself affects that are not simple effects of the body, but veritable *critical entities* that hover over the body and judge it. (Deleuze 1997: 124)

This scene dramatises affect as sensation given life, expressed in its ability to affect Antoinette. Language is no longer confined to its representational function but has become a liberated language torn from sense, ‘a living and expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form’ (*K*, 21). The signifiers no longer just convey meaning. They create sensation, acting directly on Antoinette and reminding her of what she must do: ‘Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do’ (*WSS*, 156). Critics have debated the meaning of Antoinette’s final call to Tia. My suggestion is that by securing affective connection the bloc of sensation impassions Antoinette sufficiently so she becomes able to recognise that she ‘must’ do that which feels most difficult: to repeat her dreamt call to Tia from the battlements in her waking life, to affirm the possibility of communality in the future, in hope and as a sign of reparation, in Antoinette’s and Rhys’s full knowledge of their complicity in what has been.

This thesis has argued that Rhys’s fiction assigns great value to difficulty, and I propose that Antoinette calls to Tia in her dream because of all the people Antoinette has encountered it is the affirmation of her connection with Tia that is the most necessary. Her connection with the girl who has instinctively punished Antoinette for her family’s actions, a girl who has both less and more than her, is the most necessary because it is the most difficult to affirm. Antoinette has never been able to comprehend and accept the divisions between herself and Tia which made friendship impossible; and if the suggestion in the previous chapter holds, then this connection is difficult, too, because Antoinette’s call is in no way selfless as she is calling to Tia’s mother as well as the black community in general. As she did in her third novel, Rhys again makes difficulty creative. But although this scene at the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea* also

involves contrary desires the central procedure at work is not a chaotic proliferation in hope, but the making present of feeling. Antoinette's need for the vitality of her dress leads to the conjuration of a bloc of sensation dense with connections to her homeland which overcomes her scepticism and enables her really to feel the need to affirm a connection with Tia in a moment when she has nothing left to lose. In the most intuitive form Rhys affirms a creative necessity of feeling in the place of the presupposition of a people who work for and with one another. Communality can never be assumed for Rhys but her global affect finally becomes creative, and the *need to really feel the need* to forge a connection becomes the text's affirmation of its own anxious feelings as a condition for faith in a better world and faith in what we might describe as falling into love, a 'matter' described beautifully by Sedgwick as

suddenly, globally, 'knowing' that another person represents your only access to some vitally transmissible truth or radiantly heightened mode of perception, and that if you lose the thread of this intimacy, both your soul and your whole world might subsist forever in some desert-like state of ontological impoverishment. (Sedgwick 1999: 167)

The tragic mode of *Wide Sargasso Sea* enables Rhys's sophisticated and beautiful solution to the problem that runs through all her writing, as the loss of soul to find soul concludes with an affective making-present that affirms the possibility of sharing truth and thereby knowing the world in a better way. There are a number of reasons for relating the ethical overcoming of *Wide Sargasso Sea* to Rhys's engagement in the mid-1960s with the problem of relinquishing agency in the creative process. It is relatively straightforward to see how Rhys might have viewed the creative passions as the loss of soul to find soul. Passivity was clearly a condition of difficult feeling for her, but perhaps in the mystery of creativity the impossibility of defining her borders and locating agency was alchemised for or by Rhys into the necessity of somehow affirming her connection with others. The monument of feeling that Rhys creates in her art is proof that whether or not intended, that connection is one of her greatest achievements.

In one sense, then, bad feeling in Rhys's novels is Deleuzian. Anxiety is

overcome in her final novel, thereby moving protagonist and author towards joyful action. However, Ahmed's arguments are also resonant here. There is a movement through Rhys's novels from individualist passivity to the ethical capacity for openness that we sense in *Voyage in the Dark* and finally see in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. After her dream, Antoinette has nothing left to do but complete Bertha's actions, and this means that she has nothing left to lose in calling to Tia. This does not happen in the novel. The conditions of a minor language are not yet in place for Antoinette or Rhys, nor for us today. Yet *Wide Sargasso Sea* helps us to recognise that our awareness of the need to feel the need to forge connections *while* practising an ethical vulnerability might just be an integral aspect of our becoming-revolutionary. Rhys shows us that practising an ethical vulnerability enables such an awareness. The point is to pay attention to the many things that feeling does today and might do in the future. Feeling enables Antoinette to remember what she must do, and the novel enables us to remember that we too should attend to our difficult and perhaps not-yet-realizable connections.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has proceeded as a process of abstraction, extracting disconnected scenes of passivity and problems from Rhys's last four novels, which have been examined using various schizoanalytic tools in conjunction with a few others. A politics of difference has been identified which is central to a textual thinking through of the limit of thought. The artist's confrontation with the literary text's incapacity to effect change has a counterpart in characters who face or refuse to face their complicity in the established order. The political nature of desire affects relationality in these novels, requiring a break from the tradition figured by the maternal line, and Rhys establishes in its place a proliferation of contrary states of desire. Similarly, there is an absence of good development in these narratives which disrupts the textual coagulation of normative values, and forces the reader to examine her own ideological framework and libidinal position. Complicity is addressed textually by embodying the proliferation of the segments of a complex, temporally and geographically expansive assemblage in the haemorrhaging body of a young woman who has chosen to terminate her pregnancy. In a comparable multiplicity, affect works in numerous ways in these novels. It works

in favour of and disrupts the established order, it plays out as joyful and sad passions, and it proceeds as a becoming, as the constant variation of the protagonists' power, and as the object of art, that which art brings to life and which, in turn, has the capacity to bring us 'to life'.

The thesis has also proceeded as a process of creation, establishing relations between these disconnected arguments and identifying tendencies and functions which run through and are developed across Rhys's work from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* to *Wide Sargasso Sea*. There are, of course, scenes and problems which have not made it into this thesis, which nevertheless deserve to be incorporated into the analysis. The most obvious is a detailed examination of how place works in this fiction. Two Deleuzian ideas which hold considerable potential for Rhys studies might help us to take the reading of Rhys's philosophical literature which has been attempted here into contact with the considerable work which has been done on landscape and environment in this writing. These are the percept and the idea of the climate of concepts, both of which are dealt with in *What is Philosophy?*. The former, at least, might help us to further open up Rhys's attachments to Dominica and Paris.

This thesis has attempted to establish Rhys's philosophical credentials, but far more work is warranted in this area. In particular, archive work would be useful for establishing textual histories, more details concerning connections across texts and Rhys's other articulations of philosophical problems concerning, among other things, agency, subjectivity, perspectivism and the passivity of the writer. Further evidence of Rhys's political views would also be useful, and of course her unpublished writing held in the Rhys archive in Tulsa would be a sensible place to start looking for this. The fragment which has been so central to this study was sourced from Elaine Savory's 1998 monograph, and it is not currently listed on the McFarlin Library's online archive inventory.<sup>75</sup> It would be worthwhile to compile these fragments. It is, I think, likely that they include material which would warrant further philosophical study.

The nature of Deleuze's philosophy is such that it was not possible to look in detail at Rhys's novels through a number of aspects of his thought *and* to bring this examination into intricate dialogue with postcolonial and feminist theories such as those I outlined in the first chapter. The intersection of Deleuze's philosophy and these political and literary theories is an important subject for academic inquiry, and Rhys's

<sup>75</sup> See page 32.

fiction is an ideal context for such work. Obvious connections to be explored are those between Deleuze's thought and Édouard Glissant's poetics of Relation in the context of Rhys's affirmation of difference, her individualism and her position as a West Indian writer; and the relation between Deleuze's work and Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine* in relation to Rhys's minor literature and what I have identified as her libidinal mapping.

The model of Rhys's minor literature needs refinement. In particular, it calls to be related more substantially to the development of Rhys's language, so as to account for the languages she was exposed to in Dominica which included West Indian Creole English, and black and white local variations of it, standard English, French and French patois. Ideally this model would also incorporate Rhys's preference for French and her development as an artist writing in French. The concept of Rhys's minor literature deserves to be thoroughly interrogated through relevant postcolonial theories. This was not within the scope of this thesis, but I hope the arguments developed here have opened some avenues of potential inquiry.

One of the things that has emerged strongly from this investigation is the potential of reading affect in Rhys's fiction. For decades critics have sought ways to navigate between postcolonial and psychoanalytic feminist concerns in Rhys's narratives, and it seems that closer attention to her inscription of affect as that which is social and political would be profitable here. The psychoanalytic work of Jessica Benjamin (1988) and André Green (1986) might be profitably used to further prise open the difficult issue of miscegenation which runs through Rhys's narratives and constitutes an important dimension of the mother-daughter relationships. However, one of the most resonant relationships to emerge in the lines of inquiry followed in this thesis is that between Rhys's writing of affect and Fanon's psychoanalytic work on race and colonialism. While bringing these two writers into dialogue with one another is clearly a task fraught with difficulty, I think further exploration of this connection would be particularly productive.

A diffuse issue in this thesis has been the matter of competing types of 'strong', 'generous' and 'weak' readings. The analysis has navigated the problems in using Deleuze, whose thought vacillates between weak and strong but definitely inclines to the latter, to produce a strong reading of a weak strategy. This has not been the central concern, but it would be instructive to stage further encounters between Deleuze's philosophy, Rhys's insistently weak narratives, Sedgwick and other theorists and



philosophers of ‘weakness’. There is a recently energised interest in literary studies in vulnerability, demonstrated in the torrent of beautiful work on ‘critical vulnerability’ (Emma Mason), fragility, shattering (Sara Ahmed), trembling and the tremulous (Glissant). Thinking about these arguments together, one of the questions which emerges is: how does one draw out the potential in vulnerability without idealising it and, unwittingly, turning it into a strength? How do we claim that passivity does something of political value while still arguing that it works through weakness? To argue that a character’s passivity does something of political value is to argue that it is therefore ‘acceptable’ according to usual notions of doing. It may be argued that this thesis inadvertently works to soften the political force of Rhys’s radical passivity: that in showing it to be doing something, I have rendered it ‘acceptable’, when a moralistic notion of acceptability is precisely what Rhys’s fiction works against.

The resolution of these various questions is not something that can be offered here. I do, however, propose that we follow Braidotti and many other feminist thinkers who argue that we should look to the myriad possibilities for political change, that we should always consider our own positionality, and that our critical practice should be nomadic rather than well-behaved. This study has argued that Rhys does these things in her fiction. I have tried to do likewise and have aimed to open up passivity in these novels by reading it as the difficult, persistent and passionate life of Rhys’s writing.

This thesis has, I hope, demonstrated that there is good reason to read Rhys alongside Deleuze and through the schizoanalytic method. To conclude, I turn briefly to Rhys’s ideas about a writing life which bear a striking resemblance to statements in Deleuze’s final work – an essay entitled ‘Immanence: A Life’.<sup>76</sup> Deleuze writes:

What is immanence? A life...

[...]

A life is everywhere, in all the moments that a given living subject goes through and that are measured by given living objects: an immanent life carrying with it the events or singularities that are merely actualised in subjects and objects. This indefinite life does not itself have moments, close as they may be one to another, but only between-times, between-moments; it doesn’t just

<sup>76</sup> This was originally published as ‘L’Immanence: une vie’, in *Philosophie*, 47 (1995): 3-7. It appeared just two months before Deleuze’s death in November of that year. The English translation, by Anne Boyman, is included in the short collection titled *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life* (Deleuze 2001).

come about or come after but offers the immensity of an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened, in the absolute of an immediate consciousness. (Deleuze 2001: 29)

Rhys's novels actualise the life she lived, and she claimed in letters and in *Smile Please* that literature, poetry and the act of writing were her reasons for life. To her daughter in 1959 Rhys wrote that yes, human beings are generally 'devils – but poor devils most of them', and yet,

Still one is left with all sorts of problems. How to explain away music, painting, poetry, courage, self-sacrifice of *any* sort, flowers, gardens, good acting or writing. Grace or beauty at all?

[...]

So to encourage myself I'll write MAGNA VERITAS PREVALLI and stick it on the screen (*Great is truth it will prevail*). For I know that to write as well as I can is my truth and why I was born. (*Letters*, 173)

The instances of grace and beauty in Rhys's fiction are instances of life, and so too are blocs of sensation, the writer's delirium and her hallucinations. These are the impersonal flows of life released in great literature. Rhys's understanding of this impersonality is signalled in her novels and stated in a letter of 1953: 'I don't believe in the individual Writer so much as in Writing. It uses you and throws you away when you are not useful any longer' (*Letters*, 103). As Lambert (1998) and other commentators have remarked, the fabulating function of literature is impersonal in the sense that the reader shares in the hallucinations of a future people brought into presence through the writer's delirium. Rhys's delirium enabled her to work towards the affirmation of connection that she needed. This was her writerly becoming. But what, we might ask, did Rhys become? Affirmative, certainly, and with the world, in the sense that her delirium is world-historical and shared by us today. Above all else, I read Rhys in her writer's life as becoming passionately impersonal as she and her writing, and through it her readers, enter a zone of proximity in which passions and the impersonal are inseparable. The political, the difficult, the intimate and the affective, the philosophical and the artistic, and the passive and radical populate this zone.

To write for the possibilities of life is to trace a new language, a becoming of

language, and Rhys wrote about attempting to do this. ‘One must have blind faith’, she writes in 1959: ‘Sometimes I long for an entirely new way of writing. New words, new everything – sometimes I am almost there. But no – it slides away’ (*Letters*, 160). Yet Rhys’s effort remains. Through a profound, ethical literary imagination Rhys created ideas which are of great importance today and she did so with beauty and intellect, struggle and honesty, and with great and lively feeling.

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### Primary texts

#### Books

Page references to works by Rhys are to the latest editions cited here unless otherwise stated. The following abbreviations are used in this thesis:

- Q*            *Quartet* originally published as *Postures* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1928); first published as *Quartet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1929; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)
- ALMM*        *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)
- ViD*         *Voyage in the Dark* (London: Constable, 1934; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)
- GMM*         *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Constable, 1939; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)
- WSS*         *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: André Deutsch 1966; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)
- SP*            *Smile Please* (London: André Deutsch, 1979)
- Letters*       *Letters 1931–1966*, eds. Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985)

#### Collections, stories and other published writing

*The Left Bank and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927)

*Tigers Are Better-Looking: With a Selection from The Left Bank* (London: André Deutsch, 1968)

*Sleep It Off Lady* (New York: Harper, 1976)

*The Collected Short Stories*, ed. Diana Athill (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987)

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‘Outside the Machine’, in A.D. Maclean (ed.), *Winter’s Tales*, 6 (London: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 189-219; rpt. in *Tigers Are Better-Looking: With a Selection from*

*The Left Bank*; and *The Collected Short Stories*, pp. 189-209

‘Tigers Are Better-Looking’, in *The London Magazine*, 2/7: 24-34 (October 1962); rpt. in *Tigers Are Better-Looking: With a Selection from The Left Bank*; and *The Collected Short Stories*, pp. 176-88

‘Pioneers, Oh Pioneers’, first published as ‘Dear Darling Mr Ramage’, *The Times*, 28 June 1969, p. 19; rpt. in *Sleep It Off Lady*; and *The Collected Short Stories*, pp. 275-84

‘Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose’, *The New Yorker*, 30 August 1976, pp. 26-27; rpt. in *Sleep It Off Lady*; and *The Collected Short Stories*, pp. 285-90

‘Obeah Night’, in *Letters 1931–1966*, eds. Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly, pp. 264-66; rpt. in Paula Burnett (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 147

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‘Jean Rhys: The Art of Fiction, No. 64’, interview by Elizabeth Vreeland, *Paris Review*, 76 (1979): 218-37; rpt. in Philip Gourevitch (ed.), *The Paris Review Interviews: Vol. 3* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008), pp. 195-214

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Jean Rhys Archive, 1920-1999. Coll. No. 1976.011. McFarlin Library, Department of Special Collections & University Archives, The University of Tulsa (UTC):

MS Manuscript fragments, 1976.011.1 (various)

BEB Black Exercise Book, 1976.011.1.1.1

BEBT Mary Lou Emery, Black Exercise Book Transcription, 1976.011.1.1.1A

GEB Green Exercise Book, 1976.011.1.1.2

OEB Orange Exercise Book, 1976.011.1.1.4

Press cuttings of reviews: *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, 1976.011.1.1.5

Press cuttings of reviews: *Good Morning, Midnight*, 1976.011.1.2.1

Press cuttings of reviews: *The Early Novels*, 1976.011.1.2.19

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‘Triple Sec’, first version of *Voyage in the Dark*, 1976.011.1.5.11-12

*Voyage in the Dark*, Part 4, unpublished, 1976.011.1.5.13

Press cuttings: *Voyage in the Dark*, 1976.011.1.5.16

Press Cuttings: *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 1976.011.1.6.5-6

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Jean Rhys: Manuscripts, typescripts and letters, 1931-1979, RP 6206: 1996

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Jean Rhys MS 88915/1/182: 1966-1991

### Secondary texts

The following abbreviations are used to refer to three secondary texts which are used intensively in this thesis:

*DR* Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004)

*K* Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, *Theory and History of Literature*, 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986)

*WP* Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)

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