The Politics of the Sneer: Jean Rhys and the Milieu of Modernist Iconoclasm

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by

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This thesis titled "***The Politics of the Sneer: Jean Rhys and the Milieu of Modernist Iconoclasm***", submitted by **Ms. Ruchi Mundeja,** Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This thesis titled "***The Politics of the Sneer: Jean Rhys and the Milieu of Modernist Iconoclasm***", submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

The wrench that one seems to be experiencing as one prepares to hand in the dissertation is a measure of the fact that a thesis is really an intimately lived journey where, beyond the academic bearing of the exercise, close associations are forged with people one looks up to and whose work one admires. It is in these academic and personal exchanges that one locates the most important take-away.The evolutionary arc that underpins one's academic voyage has primarily translated from quest to reality thanks to my supervisor, Prof Prasad. In the many crests and troughs that dot one's path through this long sojourn, he has been a pillar of support and encouragement. I would especially like to mention that even as, on occasions, I teetered dangerously close to ingesting the tempestuous spirit of my main author (!), it was his equanimity and sound advice that saw me through. In fact, it would be fair to say that Prof Prasad embodies what for me the Centre for English Studies at JNU has come to stand for- a rare spirit of conviviality and warmth, shorn of hierarchies.

In the course of this doctoral journey, I have had the good fortune of associating closely with the Katherine Mansfield Society. I wish to particularly record my admiration for Prof Sydney Janet Kaplan, not only for her redoubtable scholarship but more importantly for how lightly she wears it. Dr Gerri Kimber and Prof Janet Wison are the other cornerstones of the society, and I consider myself fortunate to have had a chance to interact and brainstorm with them. And a special mention of Prof Todd Martin, the Membership Secretary of the Society as also my editor for the (forthcoming) volume on *Katherine Mansfield and Bloomsbury*. His suggestions on my essay in the volume taught me a lot about focussed writing.The six months that I spent at King's College gave me a chance to associate and work closely with/under Prof Anna Snaith, and her disciplined approach was helpful in my improving my work, most crucially in terms of how a dynamic argument gains that much more from measured writing.

A word of appreciation for a friend / colleague - Dr Ira Raja at the English Department at DU, who has painstakingly read through segments of my writing at various stages, and been a most ruthless 'interpreter of (its) maladies'.

And a small note to say that this research is also a belated tribute to my father who believed in my ability to get there long before I quite did so myself.

Chapter One
"Half-Potty Bastard"

It is customary for critical compendiums on Rhys to begin with how there are various corpuses to which Rhys's work could simultaneously stake claim and seek 'affiliation'. But there is also the other strain- how there is much in her work that might be said to make it difficult for these critical/theoretical constitutions to 'accommodate' her − whether it be modernist literature, Caribbean literature or the question of feminism. In the introduction to *Rhys Matters*, the editors cast a glance at these battles that have long been waged to see "what reading will eventually win out" (Wilson and Johnson 1). This study is interested in looking at Rhys in relation to the modernist corpus in particular, since I see the fevered zeal with which these 'parvenus' and late arrivistes are now being inducted into the mainstream as involving perhaps the reverse danger- of writing out of the script the resistant strand in their writing - and by that I refer specifically to Rhys's looking sceptically at the mythos of modernist iconoclasm even as it was taking shape.The new turn in modernist studies has done much to bring up front writers who were writing in the early to middle decades of the twentieth century but who languished in the sidelines while the narrative was given over to those who self-consciously wrote modernism into being. However one wonders that this expansive turn might not insidiously become a reiterative moment, reprising the West's historical hold over directionality in literary studies − where writers from the colonial borderlands are bestowed recognition and place in the main corpus and thus the vanguardism and farsightedness of Western-centric trends, in this instance in its enfolding embrace of previously ignored writers, remains unchallenged.

In fact, without making a virtue of marginality, it would not be wrong to suggest that these gestures of inclusion might depotentiate the voice and vision of piquantly positioned writers − that it might silence the 'perverse' in the writings of authors like Rhys and Mansfield- their looking aslant at the art circuits of their time. As scholars such as Bryony Randall have pointed out, the new revisionary turn in modernist studies might run the risk of becoming the "new orthodoxy" (Randall and Goldman 28). Since my chapter heading directly refers to in-betweenness, my argument centres around in fact holding onto the 'halfness' of Rhys's own position vis-à-vis literary periods/ movements. It is the non-synchronous and recalcitrant that I wish to foreground in Rhys's relationality to modernism- rather than to argue with the high/low divide and to make a case for Rhys certainly deserving

to be in the former category, I wish to explore whether her deliberate embrace of a louche, low, world might in fact function as an insightful commentary on some of the blind spots of the 'highbrow'.

" Expatriate from where?"

(qtd. in Emery *World's End* 13)

"Well, London…It has a fine sound, but what was London to me? It was a little room, smelling stuffy…Nothing in that room was ever clean: nothing was ever dirty, either. Things were always *half-and-half*."

(*Good Morning, Midnight* 95 ; italics mine)

In *Rhys Matters,* Mary Wilson and Kerry L.Johnson talk of how while Rhys's place in the Caribbean canon continues to fluctuate, the bestowal of the English Heritage 'blue plaque' on her Chelsea home is a measure of her increasing "Anglicization"(17). The battles fought over the mechanics of incorporation (Chakrabarty 98) vis-à-vis Rhys made me wonder if one could perhaps, conversely, explore how holding on to the idea of Rhys's work as a 'pariahed' corpus can serve as a leveraging point into critically analyzing the very formations that have held raging debates as they have sought to 'accommodate' her. In terms of the counter-sneer that I believe can be recovered from her oeuvre, her fiction can hence be positioned as a chastening addendum to modernism in particular.To that extent, her work can be read as making cutting inroads into the monumentalising of the iconoclastic in modernism.It must of course be said here that Rhys would be reacting to the fact of the modernists' self-conception as encoded in their manifestoes/ non-fictional statements, their fictional proclivities and importantly in their experimental lifestyles. Since I look at Rhys's fiction as in many ways a prescient unravelling or at least problematizing of this heretic temper, for me this train of thought meant examining whether this self-perpetuating narrative of modernist iconoclasm has in recent critical discourse been probed or re-entrenched. And as I shall suggest through specific readings of recent work on modernist literature, surprisingly, given the self-critical turn in modernist studies, this enshrined narrative has proved to be quite tenacious. In moving from a time when modernism was configured as apolitical to the reverse scenario, that is looking at it as inextricably implicated in politics, the study of modernist literature has been immeasurably enriched-however, there is in this one worrisome aspect-how that thrust towards modernism as implicated in politics more often than not, inclines towards its radicalized avatar, and perhaps the more compromised/ blinkered aspects do not get equally highlighted.

The idea of interstitial positioning led me to examine how Rhys's work could be viewed vis-à-vis the two literary periods/movements it straddles – modernism and postcolonialism. I read Rhys's work as edgily positioned in terms of both, which is perhaps why the desire to slot her has always been a fraught exercise.My focus is drawn more towards how in the context of modernism in particular, Rhys's work can be seen as presaging some of the self-enquiries that have by now become a part of critical discourse. I explore the possibility of moving beyond what Zemgulys calls the unfair "self-centring" of Rhys and to draw upon the metacritical value of her work (Wilson and Johnson 28). Given her own dividedness, Rhys's work emanates from her ability to see both sides. To that extent, her work might seem a de-radicalized version of the radicalizing energy of both modernist and post-colonial literature. It is perhaps this that has led to a prolonged debate on where to 'place' her.

Thus putting a somewhat different spin on the above phrase from Rhys, I look at how her work stands in an edgy, recalcitrant, relation to modernist as well as postcolonial literature- an 'expatriated', maladjusted, version of some of the strands seminal to both. In other words, I explore how her liminal positioning vis-à-vis both centre and colony, makes for fiction that engages with but also departs from, the core thematics of modernism and postcolonialism. The focus throughout the study is more on her off-centre relationship to modernism, and I look at the other axes of 'halfness', the question of her place in postcolonial literature, in part in the last section of this chapter and then finally in the epilogue. I argue that the piquancy of Rhys's writing would be better served by focussing on her dialogic combativeness with modernism. My sub-heading points to recovering the disaffiliated in her work.

This chapter hence introduces the main axes, as reflected in the title, along which this study moves. Rhys's uncertain place in these literary brackets and periods seems almost an ironic repetition of her women's contested/tense position within imperial patriarchy. I begin this chapter by looking at the sneering, discriminatory apparatuses that her women continually speak of. Both Rhys and her protagonists seem to contend with 'expatriation'- the 'halfness' that haunts her placeless protagonists and as pointed out, the interstitiality and dividedness that makes Rhys herself a malcontent in given corpuses and canons.

The phrase from *Voyage in the Dark* (*Voyage*) which I have used as the title of this chapter, one of the many appellations by which Anna Morgan is defined and derided, resonates beyond the immediate context of the novel since the thematics of halfness can be the lens through which to read the positionality of Rhys's protagonists as also of the writer herself. The quote from *Good Morning, Midnight* (*Midnight*) indicates how the voyage into the imperial capital is inseparable from the experience of Creolized, stigmatized, 'halfness' in

Rhys and how that makes for a fluid and reworked/contestatory understanding of ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’. In the first section of the chapter, I look at the trope of the sneer in Rhys in inter-relation to this dynamics of in-betweenness/non-belongingness, and in terms of how bastardization/miscegenation became a part of the imperial landscape with the instantiation of the ‘voyage in’.

Vis-à-vis the opprobrium directed at her pariah protagonists, it is the response that the works contain to the trope of the exclusionary ‘sneer’ that centres my discussion. I probe her works for the presence of a counter sneer, both at the characterological and the authorial level. In the second section, I attempt to look more specifically at the modernist sneer, both in terms of its self-inscription and then re-inscription in recent work on modernist studies. I look at some of the ways in which the modernist field has been opened up, by way of examining how far we have moved beyond the canon, if at all.

By using the category of ‘halfness ‘ as my launchpad, I hence lead forward into the next three chapters, where I study the non-congruent in Rhys’s relationship with modernism.The impasse of Rhys’s position and work becomes a way to probe how literary paradigms sometimes need to be further de-hierarchized. I do a cross reading of Rhys with Woolf, Conrad and Mansfield, both to foreground how she looks aslant at modernist tropes, that of iconoclasm most importantly, and how this enquiry can push the borders of a remapping of literary studies/ periods further.This chapter is an attempt to bring together the main terms of the debate- the sneer in Rhys and the modernist ‘sneer’(its iconoclastic [over]-drive) - within the frame of halfness − the sneer at Rhys’s protagonists’ as provoked by perceptions of contaminatory halfness and Rhys’s examination of modernist radicalism through her inside-outside position. Barbara Johnson argues that “literature can best be understood as the place where impasses can be kept and opened for examination, where questions can be guarded and not forced into a premature validation of the available paradigms. Literature, that is, is ….the work of giving-to-read those impossible contradictions that cannot yet be spoken” (qtd. in Schor xxv). It is this work of “giving-to-read” that Rhys performs via her incursions into modernism, and it is in escaping the bind of her as modernist or post-colonialist that these formations can in turn be read through a reading of Rhys.

In the last section of the chapter, I do a reading of some of her short stories from within the category of halfness. I have chosen to look more at her stories in this chapter since the short story itself continues to be an embattled form, still having to establish its relevance beyond being a bastardized, inferiorized, version of the novel. And this can be borne out from within the critical attention given to Rhys’s work- the work done on her novels far outweighs that

centring around her short fiction.The stories to be studied are arranged into three clusters, all again revolving around the thematics of in-betweenness – first, where the metropolis is negotiated by her Caribbean protagonists, the second category comprising stories where the colony is the site of in-betweenness.The third section would be made up of stories that show women from the Western metropolis and yet play on the idea of liminal positioning in a crucial way. And in the reading of these the sneer and the counter-sneer remain the pivot of discussion.

"**The Eternal Grimace of Disapproval"**

"*Quartet*…starts on a high note and plunges downward for 228 pages, hitting the bottom on the last page with a dull thud. You will read it at one sitting and then you will put cigarette ashes in the grand piano, the cat in the goldfish bowl, and your own illusions about the sweetness of life in an unmarked grave…Vivid? To brutality. Well done? Beautifully…But why was it written?"

From a Review published in 'Emporia Kansas Gazette' (Latham 165)

That is a particularly expressive example of the discomfiture that Rhys's repetitive enactment of her protagonists' experience of victimization provokes. Rhys's protagonists frequently attest to their acute awareness of the "eternal grimace of disapproval" trained at them (*Voyage* 140). The narrative trajectory of her fictional protagonists and plots is transparently, almost viciously, predictable. Rhys delineates a bald and insistent anatomization of female entrapment and dereliction. As social pariahs her protagonists find themselves at the receiving end of the collective apparatus of societal derision. As outsider figures they are measured against metropolitan values and are pilloried and sneered at for being found wanting.

This study, as also my conceptualization of the trope of the 'sneer', finds its genesis in two parallel reading tracks that seemed at the inceptionary stage to run largely parallel but over a period of time, it is the divergences that became more provocative and worthy of probe. The primary reading track was my interest in Rhys's oeuvre and I would like to mention here that I consider it rather providential that unlike most readers, I began with her early novels and her stories, and came to *Wide Sargasso Sea* only later. This allowed me to look at her other work/s more freely, instead of regarding them as inferior precursors to the semantical density of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. A motif that emerged from that reading was the ubiquitous mention of the 'sneer'. The other reading track was looking at the ever fertile industry on modernist studies, especially recent reprisals of the territory. A leitmotif that recurred was high

modernism's self-validating gestures of transgressive radicalism. In its self-narrativization, modernism emerges as bustling with the energy to cleanse and purge both the socio-political as also the aesthetic realm of encumbering orthodoxies. Much of Anglo-American modernism defined itself against societal conservatiness. The modernist writers are characterized as training a sneer at defunct and encrusted social attitudes. Many studies elaborate on the expansive gestures of modernist artists and its embrace of the 'other'.

For me, this catalyzed an enquiry into where Rhys's work intersected with, or alternately, distanced itself from, that of the metropolitan modernists. In the way that her work most centrally engages with certain dominant modernist tropes, the sneer in Rhys is also a test-case for the proclaimed radicalism of modernist formulations and an entry-point into problematizing that defining feature of European modernism. Jean Rhys, given her Caribbean background, in fact occupies a complex position in the modernist corpus. This thesis reads her works in the light of her incisive sneer trained against racial, imperial and patriarchal hegemony. I also study this 'sneer' as raising the familiar spectre of the high and the low in modernist studies, as a voice from the margins scrutinizes the high modernist sneer of the canonical writers, that is, their purported dismantling of power structures, and shows how their iconoclasm is coloured and compromised by co-ordinates of race, class and gender. I place Woolf, Conrad and Mansfield alongside Rhys, and look at overlappings and divergences vis-à-vis their deployment of the sneer. Probing more closely the nagging discrepancies is in the final analysis an enriching exercise since it seeks to examine how Rhys's dialogic skirmishes with the narrative of modernism can be a readerly expansion on the gaps in the more recognized writers.

It is the prejudicial sneer undergirding colonialism and patriarchy that is the driving force of Rhys's work. All her texts speak of a landscape over-inscribed by the patriarchal and imperial sneer.In the subsequent chapters, the ramifications of the texts' reading of the 'sneer' will be the pivot of discussion. The 'sneer' that Rhys foregrounds as turned towards the 'other' operates at the level of the body, word/language and concept − that is, firstly, how the sexual being of the women is forced into a slot, the stereotypes of bodily decadence associated with natives/ Creoles in the metropolitan imagination, and conversely how the facial expressions of the denizens of the imperial metropolis betray their racial phobias. The second aspect is of language −again, both how their perceived inability to articulate reconfirms notions of 'backwardness' (the most fitting example of this being Mr Blank's humiliation of Sasha for her incapacity with language, as will be discussed), and on the other side, Rhys's counter-sneer at how language systems carry cultural biases. And finally, how the imperial system

functioned on conceptual hierarchies that worked to distance the metropolitans from colonial excesses, and Rhys's excoriation of these self-exonerating gradations.This last would also be relevant to an understanding of Rhys's apprehension of lurking biases that formed the hidden sub-text of the modernists' embrace of alterity. In this section, I touch upon these aspects through a brief look at some of her fiction, and offer more sustained discussion of the novels/ stories individually in the following chapters. I also look at how the reading of the sneer is linked to the question of anger in Rhys's texts, and discuss that more fully in the next chapter. It needs to be said, finally, that in any discussion of the 'sneer' in Rhys, the distinction between writer and character is to be borne in mind − that is, the writer's more focussed use of it as opposed to her protagonists's emotional ,even inflamed, apprehension of it.

To begin with the *Voyage in the Dark*, where the term 'sneer' repeatedly confronts the reader (though the word figures equally pressingly in her other fiction such as *Good Morning, Midnight*), from the very start of her acquaintance with Walter, Anna Morgan dreads that he will turn out to be the "sneering sort"(19). The first time that Walter takes Anna out, to one of the "swankiest clubs" in London as the other girls in her chorus group gush, he seems intent on establishing her 'freedom' from social structures so that he can side-step any later sense of guilt(17). Through the series of questions that he directs at her, Anna feeling all the while that he is laughing at her, he seems almost over-eager to establish her vagabondism and her consequent lack of social agency. For instance when Anna tells him that Maudie stays with her mother between tours, the fact that Anna doesn't do the same confirms her 'difference' in his eyes. This he grabs at, asking her if her stepmother disapproves of her "gadding about on tour? Does she think you've disgraced the family or something?" (19).This appears to be an attempt to "place' the placeless Anna in a differential economy. From the beginning, Anna can see that he is 'reading' her- "sizing her up" as she says (12). As Rosemarie-Garland Thompson has noted, "staring is structured seeing. It enacts a cultural choreography between a disembodied spectator and an embodied spectacle that attempts to verify norms and establish differences" (qtd. in Scully and Crais 304). The sneer that Anna senses in his fixed gaze is thus laden with 'tropes of tropicality', while he himself retains his elusiveness, since the questioning in this scene is a largely one-way traffic (Dash 21).

Walter is by turns condescending (of her intellectual backwardness) and circumspect − of her lineage of the 'pornotropics'(McClintock 21).Walter labels her simple for investing so much in him and counsels her to try and 'get on' in life. Patronising her, he says- "You're a perfect darling, but you're only a baby.You'll be alright later on.Not that it has anything to do with age. Some people are born knowing their way about: others never learn.Your

predecessor…"(44). Almost hinting at some intrinsic incapacity in Anna, he pins onto her the stereotype of the child. And on the other hand, his reference to the excessive lushness of the tropics figures her as intemperate and sexually forward. Thus, Rhys underlines how both racial and sexist registers come into play here.

There is a lot in *Voyage in the Dark* that is deeply disturbing from a feminist viewpoint, though both writer and I believe the character display an awareness of that. When Anna admits that her voice changes and the contours of the room seem to expand once she has the money given by Walter in hand, she also traces this alteration to that source with a matter-of-fact, almost fatalistic, acknowledgment of the power of lucre.There is no modernist soul-searching − only a brutal recognition of the overwhelming importance of the registers of material empowerment. And that knowledge comes to Anna from the 'sneer' directed at those who are materially disempowered. When she goes to the Miss Cohens' boutique, she comments on how their standoffishness is only a pose and that buying power can earn one entry into these establishments. In fact Anna begins her description of them by mentioning their noses, very close to how she aligns Walter and the waiter at the posh club as sniffing at the indecorous breach of protocol- "There were two Miss Cohens and they really were sisters because their noses were the same and their eyes-opaque and shining-and their insolence only a mask" (24).The reference to opacity is Anna's reading of the judgemental eye they train on their customers that lurks beneath the blank stare. But at the same time Anna feels that the sight of money overrides all other concerns. It is to systemic realities that Rhys points.

How eyes, nose, and bodily gestures emanate a sneer is written into the novel. Not only does Anna refer to how Walter and the waiter sniff at any hint of offence against the exclusivity of the establishment, but there is also the reverse deployment of the idea. Hester, Anna's stepmother, talks of how Anna's father related it to getting at the hypocrisies cloaked under English sanctimoniousness. As Hester recalls, he "lost touch" with everybody in England and would resolutely maintain -"No, I never want to go back…I've got nobody there who cares a damn about me. The place stinks of hypocrites if you've got a nose" (53). In this instance, then, it is the reverse sneer that comes into play. In fact, Anna portrays her father as occupying the inside-outside position vis-à-vis the plantocracy.That he sees Anna as taking that discomfiture with the colonial system further is clear from his reference to her sharp eyes as opposed to his fading sight.

The 'sneer' also comes into play through the voice, such as how the suspiciousness / derision with which Anna's "drawly" (commented on by one of her landladies and of course Hester) voice and Creolized inflections are treated is in her own consciousness set against Hester's

model Englishness (26), communicated through her speech-" …an English lady's voice with a sharp cutting edge to it. Now that I've spoken you can hear that I am a lady. I have spoken and I suppose you now realise that I'm an English gentlewoman.I have my doubts about you. Speak up and I will place you at once. Speak up, for I fear the worst" (50).

Anna's downward descent makes for bleak reading. Anna's articulations of freedom from gendered norms are lost in the multiple indices of the discriminatory sneer that follows her. For instance even as she distances herself from the encoded ideal of chastity, she also understands that this will only re-confirm the prejudicial picture of her 'tropical' decadence in the minds of her metropolitan acquaintances-" I am bad, not good any longer, bad. That has no meaning, absolutely none.Just words.But something about the darkness of the streets has a meaning" (49). Anna paints the urban streets in sinister carnivorous colours- this is how she describes the early morning washing of the streets- "Men were watering the streets and there was a fresh smell , like an animal just bathed"(77).

Fully cognizant of the bodily stereotypes of primitive decadence and 'hot-bloodedness' affixed onto her in the imperial metropolis, Anna Morgan experiences the carceral network of colonial patriarchy almost corporeally. De Certeau's thoughts on how the dominant discourse, the Law, as he designates it, 'inscribes' the body bring this into clearer focus. He speaks of how "the law constantly writes itself on bodies. It engraves itself on parchments made from the skins of its subjects…It makes its book out of them" (140).

Inez Best in Rhys's 'Outside the Machine' caustically comments on how one is expected to be "born" into one's designated place in the 'machine' -" A born nurse, as they say. Or you could be a born cook, or a born clown or a born fool, a born this ,a born that…"(200). Rhys envisages this process in terms of the brands of placement that are violently stamped onto human beings[1].The ruthlessness with which these categories are enforced is conveyed through Inez Best's constant fear of how the un-placeable might be picked up at any time "with a huge pair of iron tongs" and put on "the rubbish heap"(193). And those who refuse

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[1]With her knowledge of the violent practices that were a part of the system of slavery, this could be seen as evocative of the branding that was done to slaves. Patterson mentions that "branding as customary form of identification only began to decline during the last decades of the eighteenth century under abolitionist and missionary pressure"(59). Can one trace Rhys's constant concern with the ferocity with which society entraps individuals within categories to her almost certain knowledge of this brutal practice?

to conform are either demonized or treated as spectacles to be consumed. Importantly, Inez Best as a part of a ward of women in a sanatorium is already poised at the edge of the 'robust' machinery of society. As she says of the matron who sails into the ward on her rounds, "At half-past ten the matron, attended by the sister, came in to inspect the ward, walking as though she were royalty opening a public building"(189). This indicates both how these women are inferiorized as also spectaclised.

There is both a reinforcement of the mould into which one is expected to fit and a 'sneering' interest in the bodily spectacle that exceeds that mould.The fact that Anna Morgan is labelled the 'Hottentot' underlines as Gillian Whitlock notes in *Postcolonial Life Narratives* "how cultural meanings are assigned to skull, skin, skeleton, genitalia, tongue, lips…How bodies are identified − sexed and gendered, racialized, regarded as unruly and grotesque or disciplined and normative" (37-8). In the reference to Anna's being labelled the Hottentot, Rhys touches on the idea of imperial spectacle, where the 'foreign' body was seen as a curiosity, with all the attendant suggestions of sexual decadence and primitiveness.Whitlock points out that Enlightenment intellectuals − Diderot,Voltaire,Montesquieu −were fascinated by the place of the Hottentot, in the spirit of 'scientific' enquiry (37). That sometime later in the text Anna imagines the "damned bust of Voltaire" sneering down at her indicates the connections Rhys was suggesting (75).The writer points to the lascivious, consuming interest in otherness, that undergirds the purportedly scientific one.

Voyage in the Dark is also an ideal reference point to study how both Rhys and her women decode the 'sneer' but that Rhys's own engagement with it moves beyond the affective to the analytical. A brief insertion that could easily be overlooked is where Anna, along with the xenophobic Ethel, watches some episodes from the Three-Fingered Kate cinematic series. It is the subversive element in the criminal leanings of Kate that most interests Anna who rebels against her co-readers' interpretation, that is, her fellow audience's loud applause at Kate getting caught. In Ethel's discomfort with foreigners, such as the actress who plays Kate, making inroads into British cinema the 'othered' Anna reads an instance of conservativeness. Through such vignettes and ephemera, Rhys evokes the cultural landscape of the imperial metropole.By prising open the imperial / racial history that lurks in the metropolis, she shows how the art of Europe is both founded on "imperial…pillage" as Carole Sweeney terms it and the erasure of the subjecthood of these source elements (22). The positionality of her socially dubious protagonists gives Rhys a vantage point from which to conduct a dissection of the "idioms of power" vis-à-vis the power-grids of patriarchy and empire (Patterson 17).

A number of characters in the text comment on Anna's 'absentness'. They jeer at her desire to anchor herself to an ethos, as if in their minds her vagueness is her primary reality, a register of her non-being. Rhys portrays how Anna has to contend with the metropolitan variant of the colonial gaze. Her grip on sanity founders as she finds herself incarcerated within the pathological brackets of colonial society and her final 'confinement' which culminates in stillbirth establishes the blankness and absence conjoined on her by the erasures of history.

The almost salacious pleasure humanity derives from watching the powerless squirm is a leitmotif in Rhys's fiction. Anna comments on the way the 'other' is hunted down- "But I think it was terrifying- the way they look at you. So that you know that they would see you burnt alive without even turning their heads away: so that you know in yourself that they would watch you burning without even blinking once. Their glassy eyes don't admit anything so definite as hate. Only just that underground hope that you'll be burnt alive, tortured where they can have a peep…" (103). This sporting with misfortune and suffering finds an even more ambivalent iteration in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (*Mackenzie*) where Julia Martin recalls trapping butterflies in a tin box and then intently hearing the sound of the ineffectually beating wings. Rhys seems to be casting a general glance at the human propensity for gratuitous cruelty and on the processes of socialization (the image also, given the many allusions to Conrad in the novel especially reminiscent of, and starkly different from, Stein's entomological, 'connoisseurly', interest in butterflies in *Lord Jim*) .

In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia Martin suffers from frequent feelings of dissolution.The onslaught of societal opprobrium leaves her 'ghosted'- "Her career of ups and downs had rubbed most of the hall-marks off her, so that it was not easy to guess at her age, nationality, or the social background to which she properly belonged" (11). It is significant that all of Julia's recounted history is one not of presence but of absence. 'Making Up' is crucial to her fighting against disembodiment. Julia's buying spree as she prepares to face her family in London is spurred by an attempt to gain some acceptability in their eyes, knowing as she does that she is the mote in the eye of their embrace of bourgeois norms. It is fitting that in her meeting with Uncle Griffiths , the voice of surveillant patriarchy in the text, Julia yearns for the protective armour of her fur coat-" She told herself that if only she had had the sense to keep a few things, this return need not be quite so ignominious, quite do desolate. People thought twice before they were rude to anybody wearing a good fur coat; it was protective colouring, as it were" (57). A little later the hunter-hunted metaphor is even more explicitly underlined – "She felt as though her real self had taken cover, as though she

had retired somewhere far off and was crouching warily, like an animal, watching her body in the armchair arguing with Uncle Griffiths about the man she had loved" (59). As Julia is called upon to draw on her real self, the one that had refused to be like those who had "knuckled under" (98), she finds it hard to recover that sense of youthful daring under the onslaught of the punitive patriarchal gaze directed at her, which seems to sneer at her fate as someone forever condemned to languish "outside the sacred circle of warmth" (57) .

As the protagonist of Rhys's short story "A Solid House" puts it there are "continents of distrust" that form the substratum of human contact (Rhys *Collected Short Stories* 229).Though the bleakness of her statement may be explained by the backdrop of the war, yet patriarchal stonewalling of women is at the centre of the story. At the start of the story, the narrator speaks of how the local tobacconist refused, with punitive relish, to sell to women customers in times of acute shortage due to the war. She claims that she rather respects him for the openness of his hatred- "His open hatred and contempt were a relief from the secret hatreds that hissed between the lines of newspapers or the covers of books, or peeped from the sly smiling eyes. A woman? Yes, a woman. A woman must, a woman shall or a woman will" (*Stories* 221). In visualizing the sneer as lurking in the writerly, another important facet of Rhys's deployment of the sneer emerges − how it is encoded in visual but also in verbal/textual terms. Rhys's critique of Eurocentric cosmogonies centres on its power to trap the 'other' in a lexical bind- where words and labels weigh you down, where language is always already saturated with gendered and cultural biases. Sasha Jensen in *Good Morning, Midnight* says at one point, "Every word I say has chains around its ankles" (88). One wonders whether the acute and repeatedly recorded apprehension of society's hunting down of the outcast can be analyzed as the the excess that marks Rhys's work, using Bill Ashcroft's paradigm. In his article on the thematics of excess in postcolonial literature, he comments on how " the excess of insistence must always be the lot of the marginal and displaced" (Lawson and Tiffin 34). Noting Ashcroft's point about 'excess' as the tactical machinery of the marginal to make itself heard, could Rhys's claustrophobic and unrelievedly grim representation of entrapment itself be read as a mode of protest?

The affect of feeling hunted down is writ large into Rhys's works, and it makes for, on the part of the writer, a grim analysis of society's paranoia towards the uncontainable.The protagonist of 'A Solid House' notes- "Join the noble and gallant army of witch-hunters-both sexes, all ages eligible-so eagerly tracking down some poor devil, snouts to the ground. Watch the witch-hunting, witch-pricking ancestor peeping out of the close-set Nordic baby-blues" (231).The woman's observations are in response to her manager of the lodging house

counselling her to be calm, to guard against hysteria and to avoid being visibly alone, since that would again invite adverse labelling in a woman. And the advice ends with Miss Spearman telling her to ease up with a good laugh. The protagonist turns back to pose a query that in its pithiness conveys her rage at how a woman "shall" and "must" even more powerfully- "Which helps most-with or at?"(231). It is in such statements that Rhys locates her protagonists' shift from the affective to the diagnostic – there are many such moments in her fiction "that turn the gaze of the discriminated upon the eye of power" (Bhabha 112).

Rhys trains her eyes on society's coercive sneer, that is satiated from 'laughing at', an activity far more 'savagely' (the Nordic ancestor peeping through) gratifying than 'laughing with'. Sasha Jensen speaks of the "mystical right" that the powerful have to sneer at the down-and-out (*Midnight* 26). For her, that sneer that respectability directs at the 'disreputable' is inscribed onto the facades of houses. As she says," If you have money and friends, houses are just houses…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…Frowning and leering and sneering.Tall cubes of darkness, with two lighted eyes at the top to sneer" (28). In *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, Julia Martin speaks of how, as she winds her way through the streets of London, she senses the houses stepping forward, "bulging" with a sneering importance, as if positing their stolidity against her waywardness (61).That this is how Julia reads the cityscape after her meeting with Uncle Griffiths, the juridical voice of patriarchy in the text, is telling.The streets 'bring home' their unbelonginess even further, since the streets and the habitations therein seem to emanate a steely hostility. Rooms, in fact, talk to their occupants, jeering at their delinquency-Sasha feels the room in Paris greeting her back with mocking familiarity.Thus the societal zeal to punish difference and preserve conformity translates into the sneer they feel lurking everywhere in the imperial metropole. Rhys gives it a palpable,visual, form. It is, however, in the accentuation of reverse visuality that Rhys delineates a space, however limited, for her protagonists to rebut the sneer directed at their alterity. Even as they find themselves stymied by prevalent race and gender stereotypes, they in turn turn their gaze back at the adjudicators of 'normalcy'.Undeniably succumbing to systems of exploitation, it is in their understanding of the politics of exploitation that Rhys situates the counter-sneer.

The question of 'anger' would be of direct relevance to determining the quiescence or otherwise of her protagonists, and I focus on this aspect in detail in the second chapter.My reading brought out in fact startlingly disturbing vignettes of murderous rage (perhaps exacerbated by a realization of its impotence in these women's minds given their social

marginality) in Rhys. More deeply sucked into the complicated entanglement Lois and Heidler have drawn her into, Marya Zelli thinks to herself that when "sneered" at by Lois, she does not seem to be able to react -"the kick" seeming to have gone out of her (96). But that observation is qualified by her fantasising about how next time "just when she's thought of something clever to say about me for her friends to snigger at, just when she's opening her mouth to say it, I'll smash a wine-bottle in her face"(*Quartet* 97). And she lingers mentally over the "sound of the glass breaking, the sight of the blood streaming" (97).This is a way of combating readings that look at Rhys's fiction as over-written by passivity − admittedly the fury is impotent but in that chiasmus between articulation and repression, the space for a politics of scepticism is created − Marya for all her dependence on Heidler is also able to see through his "chic" world and feel that much more a part of a collective of the disadvantaged- "she extended this passion to all the inmates of the prison, to the women who waited with her under the eye of the fat warder, to all unsuccessful and humbled prostitutes, to everybody who wasn't plump, sleek,satisfied, smiling and hard-eyed"(98), that last surely a glance at the 'sleekness' with which Heidler conducts *l' amour courtois*.

In their transitory mode of existence, the women encounter the cultural iconography of the European world and with their often leering,parenthetical, asides dissect it to reveal the hegemonic undergirdings. I propose that her writing is in fact an act of critically reading the European metropolises and their artistic and cultural postulates. I thus see her reading persona as crucially involved in addressing the blinkered facets of high modernist probings. Rhys was a figure plagued by non-belonging, yet as a one time lover of as high-profile a figure as Ford, she was also on the fringes of the metropolitan art-scene and as such, would certainly have been witness to its matrix of coteries, clubs and manifestos-in fact, this awareness is contained in that acidic comment by Sasha, in *Good Morning, Midnight* when she remarks to Rene, "Everything is clubs in London, isn't it? Clubs, clubs….."(131). Rhys's protagonists show an acute awareness of the 'masked sneer', the exclusionary sensibility that forms the under-side of the ostensibly gregarious and increasingly cosmopolitanized imperial city. It is in *Quartet* that Rhys pillories most pointedly (through the Heidlers) the self-performative nature of avant gardism. Rhys casts the patronage of Marya as the sexual underside of Heidler's expansive, cosmopolitan, encouragement of peripheral artist figures. Both are then seen as part of a whole- a calculated, self-serving, posture that perpetuates an 'othering' even as it self-avowedly claims to challenge it.

Significantly the first time that she meets the couple, when she accompanies Miss De Solla for a lunch meeting with them, Marya remarks on how the three of them discuss eating,

cooking and Marya in the same breath, "whom they spoke of in the third person as if she were a strange animal or at any rate a strayed animal-one not quite of the fold" (12). Rhys deliberately evokes the idea of ingestion here. Marya as the 'savage' piques Heidler's interest, since he is a collector/promoter of curiosities.The interpenetrating grids of the voyage in and the voyage out made for a complex network of exchange and mobility, such as has led to many an optimistic formulation of the liquefying malleability of the modernist embrace of the other. Recent research has certainly broadened the parameters of modernist studies −the pulsating cross-traffic of imperialism is being studied in great detail.We would do well however to factor in how contemporaneous writers like Rhys as outré figures looking askance at this spectacle showed remarkable prescience in consuming those gestures sceptically. Rhys's counter-glance at the 'bohemia' factors in its troubling exclusionisms, and one see can see the long critical after-life it has had. For instance if one considers Bloomsbury as a locus of adversarialism, quite literally embodying the 'sneer' against bourgeois provinicialism (if one were to read some of the statements of Strachey,Grant etc) then contemporary writers such as Ondaatje speak of the problematic nature of its aesthetic engagement with the other. Expressing his reservations about their proclaimed radicalism, Ondaatje, commenting on the group's telling silence on Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*, asserts that they " were not radical enough to take seriously a viewpoint utterly removed from their own … even through the literary filter of one of their own" (qtd. in Rosner Bloomsbury 113)[2].

Though the counter-glance is easier to affix in the writer, where does one locate it in her women?Underneath the overt impression of passivity, Rhys gives her characters a sneer that slices though the sneer directed at them, that is, a voice that conducts an unsparing scrutiny of hegemonic structures. It is in Rhys's investing her women with, as Sasha Jensen from *Good Morning, Midnight* terms it, the "grimacing devil" inside their heads that the insurrectional locus of Rhys's works is centred though in a deheroicized mode (146).Molly Hite has commented on the tendency to see Rhys's protagonists as "floozies" (*Other Side* 24)[3]. The overwhelming interpretative frame of the 'Rhys woman' has perpetuated notions of

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[2]Sir Christopher Ondaatje, *Woolf in Ceylon: An Imperial Journey in the Shadow of Leonard Woolf, 1904-1911* (London: Harper Collins, 2005), 238-9.

[3]Hite in fact make a strong case for moving beyond the self-limiting model, both in terms of its composite and autobiographical emphasis, of the "Rhys Woman' in analyzing Rhys's

masochism and low self-image. While that is undeniably present in the narratives, what needs to be reckoned with is also how the mask of compliance often veils a ferocious rage. One detects a violence that is never far from the narratives of Rhys. Failed relationships, stunted births, predatory cities, burning estates, crumbling edifices, intimations of insanity, all bespeak a sensibility that foregrounds dissonance and rupture.Through her scrupulous choice of outsider protagonists in her metropolitan fictions, Rhys " challenges the colonial discourse of purity…with one of difference, contamination and uncertainty" (Upstone 13).

Ironically it is, I believe, Ford's celebrated preface to Rhys's stories that in some ways did Rhys a disservice. His statement about her passion for the underdog translates implicitly to a representational canvas rather than to a contestatory one (26). Though Ford is right in seeing her vision as experientially honed, he does not make allowances for its scorchingly satirical, tactical, deployment (which he would later himself feel the heat of!). Though the affective and the experiential layer of Rhys's writings cannot but be reckoned with, Ford did not make enough space for the pungently analytical that emerges from the felt intimacies of her writing.

Theorists of space often offer interesting insights on the space of reading, I want to refer in particular to the work done in this area by Bachelard and Certeau. Bachelard and Certeau both question and discard the model of readerly passivity. Both envisage the reading act to imply an inhabitation of sorts. Bachelard writing on the subject says-" The image offered us by reading…becomes really our own. It takes root in us… The touch of pride that is born of adherence to the felicity of an image, remains secret and unobtrusive…It is a homely sort of pride. Nobody knows that in reading we are re-living our temptations to be a poet…In this admiration which goes beyond the passivity of contemplative attitudes, the joy of reading appears to be the reflection of the joy of writing, as though the reader were the writer's ghost."(xxiii-iv) Where Bachelard celebrates harmony and collaboration as the cornerstones

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female protagonists. She points out that many feminist critics have "turned Rhys's writing into compulsive self -revelation, a by-product of therapy". Acknowledging that Rhys does tell her own story, Hite at the same time urges that "to make biography the principle that governs interpretations of her work is to make Rhys unable to control the form and ideology of her own text" (22). Though a transgressive elan is absent from her texts, where Rhys complicates her characters' almost passive internalization of societal edicts is in their mutinous inner voice, in "that interminable conversation in their heads" (*Stories* 199).

of a fruitful reading experience, Certeau envisions reading as a tactical forcefield, with a disruptive ghosting of the written text yielding its own meanings. Thus vis-à-vis the act of reading, Certeau foregrounds the 'unhomely' as against Bachelor's visualization of the 'homely'- one speaks of surreptitiously taking over (possessing) the text while the other celebrates becoming creatively possessed by it. Certeau's readers as already discussed are temporary lodgers who nevertheless ferret into its chinks and coax out of it the muted, as "a different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place"(xxi). As we contend with so many of Rhys's heroines being compulsive readers, we also realise that this is the space where their sceptical consumption of the pre-scripted most comes to the fore. Inez Best in Rhys's story, 'Outside the Machine' (discussed in the fourth chapter) is one of those sceptical readers-"And she disliked some of the novels the sister brought. One day when she was reading her face reddened with anger. Why, it's not a bit like that. My lord, what liars these people are! And nobody to stand up and tell them so"(*Stories* 201). It is in their being dissatisfied readers, non-acqueiscent consumers of the textual authority within which they themselves are framed, that the women in Rhys probe the narratives that seek to sneeringly circumscribe them.

These debates form a productive backdrop to the readerly component in Rhys's work. It is in that space, as caustic, even enraged, readers of their milieu, that Rhys's (and her characters') counter-sneer is located and it is through this that she moves from the representational, which is Ford's axes in assessing her, to the dissectory.

The Modernist Sneer : " Bourgeoisophobus"

(qtd in Gay 6)[4]

Where Rhys's letters are usually read in terms of tracing the heavily autobiographical element in her writing, keeping in mind the thrust of this enquiry I read them to look for traces of her comments on writers contemporaneous to her. I found few comments on the more famous of these, for instance, there is a complete silence on Woolf (I discuss this in the second chapter). There are, however, significantly references to Mansfield and more revealingly to a rather obscure writer Anna Kavan. She writes in a letter to Francis Wyndham -" I've never read a long novel about a mad mind or an unusual mind …" (Wyndham and Melly 254-5)).This is, as the editors of *Jean Rhys-Twenty-First Century Approaches* note, a strange claim given that so many modernist writers write from the perspective of the marginal

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[4] Gustave Flaubert to Louis Bouilhet , December 26, 1852, in *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau, 5 vols.,(1973-) , II, 217.

(Johnson and Moran 10). In the same letter she then goes on to praise Anna Kavan. It seems as if Rhys is speaking of off-kilter perspectives by writers away from the mainstream. It is a statement that has a direct bearing on the whole question of canonicity. Rhys seems to want to recover an edginess from the writing of the off-centre Kavan[5]. She is reassessing/ revisiting modernist tropes through the writings of Kavan, in a move away from the more celebrated expressions of these in the canonical writers. Her silence on the acclaimed writers, I believe, has a point to it-to bring to the foreground the non-canonical, to address, through voicing and silence, both over-inscription and under-inscription.

In probing Rhys's relationship to modernism as well as going through her works to assess contemporary trends in modernist studies, this study looks to negotiate between the dilemmas of relative obscurity/marginalization and incorporation. While under-worked or relatively late to be discovered writers like Rhys herself are now being mainstreamed, these gestures of incorporatory fervour need to be approached sceptically in turn. These might be more about reinstating the Western academia's vanguardism in being the nerve centre of new intellectual trends and in that agenda, the incorporatory impulse might bury that component of Rhys's or even Mansfield's work that is irreducible to a common syntax vis-à-vis modernism.

If one looks at some of the recent essays that deal specifically with this trend in modernist scholarship, one sees the transnational focus of this enquiry.Recent work by critics such as Winkiel, Garrity and Mao and Walkowitz, radically pushes the borders of modernist studies. But there is a note of scepticism in Garrity that one needs to pick up on. She touches upon how the area of modernist studies remains uncomfortably poised somewhere between genuine broadening and an umbilical attachment to the canon, for example in her reference to how Woolf remains the only "universally canonized British woman modernist" when it comes to female writers writing in the modernist period ('Obsolescence' 17).

To carry that argument forward, I look at both how the canonical modernists positioned themselves as at the vanguard and how this self-positioning is undergoing a re-animation as writers like Conrad and Woolf are viewed through current critical vocabularies.While this certainly adds to their engagement with the politics of their time, one needs to ask at the same

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[5] At the risk of over-emphasising an aspect of Rhys's personality that might well (and has) detracted from the craft of her writing, one can see another parallel between Kavan and Rhys in the fact that Garrity mentions the latter as struggling with heroin addiction and bouts of mental illness('Obsolescence' 26).

time, as Sonita Sarker in "Woolf and Theories of Postcolonialism" does, whether these might not be " space-clearing gestures"(Randall and Goldman 121). Do these aim at enriching their works, or at re-animating the canon? If the latter, then it becomes a re-iterative gesture- further entrenchment of the iconoclastic temper of the canonical modernists.Readings of canonical writers' work such as Frances B Singh's " 'Motley's the Only Wear': Hybridity, Homelands, and Conrad's Harlequin" undoubtedly bring a new angle to the debate.Singh argues for seeing the Russian in *Heart of Darkness*, with his 'motley' wear, as emblematizing a more positive model of an embrace of 'nativism' as against Kurtz (184). But while the arguments are persuasive, certain discrepant elements stand out − such as that the Russian is, along with Marlow, the greatest idolizer of Kurtz in the text- and perhaps a more uncritical one. Singh's arguments do not seem to account for how he in fact knows of Kurtz's unorthodox, autocratic, methods with the natives but rationalizes them as a part of Kurtz's aura. Singh reads the Russian from within some of the governing terms in the postcolonial field - such as hybridity- but that there are hardly any instances in the text where the Russian displays empathy towards the natives (it is quite the opposite-he looks at them through the prism of his adoration of Kurtz) problematizes such a reading. While such readings are provocatively new, they also seem to be suggestive of the"scramble for post colonialism" to use a term from Stephen Slemon[6] (Tiffin and Lawson 17).

In fact, if one looks at modernism as a whole, the impulse to distinguish themselves from their Victorian or Edwardian precursors implies that the originary energy lay initially in the reading act. But having said that, the overriding ethos of modernism was writerly, constitutively and self-proclaimedly so. Modernism, in that wonderfully wicked phrase from Chris Baldick, was born out of "an orgy of critical recrimination" and having laid down the law on what not to do, the modernists revelled in being at the vanguard of a new aesthetics (55).Thus it is the writerly mantle that is at stake − it is to the readers still trapped in the deadened conventionalities of previous traditions that they address their exhortations. They

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[6]Slemon speaks of both the heterogeneous dis/ order in the proliferating field of postcolonial studies as also its increasing institutionalization in the Western Humanities. For this study these are indications of how the modernist interface with empire is being increasingly radicalized with the sanction of the Western academia (which in fact gets re- instated as nodal centre) but in the process the discrepant gets silenced.The terms specific to the postcolonial lexicon stand in danger of becoming critical shorthand in the re-readings of canonical writers.

excoriated with a rare zeal all that was to be discarded, a movement that was as broad as to encompass moving from the scaffolding of the text to the architecture of the home, as when Roger Fry found in the ottoman an emblem of all that was to be junked of the previous century –"the boredoms, the snobberies, the cruel repressions, the mean calculations and the rapacious speculations of the mid-19th century" (qtd in Rosner *Bloomsbury* 21). The probing of previous modes was essential to the modernists' self-instantiation.The readerly becomes a prelude to writerly virtuousity- a quest for "fanatic exclusiveness" (Baldick 55). As I argue in the following chapters, in contradistinction, Rhys and Mansfield make their critical statements more through the readerly component- and a large part of their penetrative reading is directed at the modernist 'narcissus'[7].

What is seminal to my argument here is that when the imprimaturs of the modernist moment were first seeking self-definition they visualized themselves as in opposition to the mainstream. And it is important to note here that, as Sarah Davison argues, 'modernism' is not an entirely retrospective formulation. The modernists were quite cognizant of their being 'moderns' waging a war against outmoded conventions; in fact, drawing an explicit parallel with the war being fought on the frontline, by calling themselves 'the men of 1914'(Davison 82). Davison argues that "significant literary usages of 'modernism' and 'modernist' appear from the first decade of the twentieth century onwards, for instance. T.E. Hulme (1883-1971) made a declaration of "extreme modernism" in his 'Lecture on Modern Poetry'[8] in 1908 (qtd. in Davison 3).

Modernism's self-mythification can be sampled through some invaluable nuggets from the canonized figures - such as when Pound sent some poems to be published in the magazine 'Poetry' he added a note to the editor Alice Corbin Henderson declaring, "I give you your chance to be modern" (Latham and Rogers 1).Talking of the valorized writings of the modernist period that have since achieved canonical status, Chris Baldick points out that at the time of composition, there was an acute, though laudatory, self consciousness among these writers of breaking away from the mainstream, manifested in their extreme wariness of

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[7] My indication here is to Lyndsey Stonebridge's reference to how she views Freud's gesture of gifting Woolf a narcissus an "apposite" one, since as a writer Woolf unhesitantly put the self at the centre of her work, and also since Stonebridge sees it as speaking " eloquently to certain strands of literary Modernism"(Marcus and Nicolls 269).

[8] *The Collected Writings of T.E. Hulme* , ed. Karen Csengeri. Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1994, 54.

embourgeoisment, whether in art, culture or politics, in the daring displays of their vanguardism, in their "self justificatory"manifestoes, and in their inveighing against entrenched orthodoxies(6). Innumerable statements from the Bloomsburians, for instance, attest to this self-conscious sense of breaking free of the oppressive conservativeness of bourgeois notions as well as of shaking off outmoded Victorian fictional conventions. Woolf's essay 'Bloomsbury' reflects how she envisaged their move to the new location as a transgressive rupture with the past -"We were full of experiments and reforms. We were going to do without table napkins, we were to have [large supplies] of Bromo instead; we were going to paint; to write; to have coffee after dinner instead of tea at nine o' clock. Everything was going to be new; everything was going to be different. Everything was on trial"(qtd in Rosner *Modernism* 131)[9].This purgative zeal, a desire for a canvas cleansed of the old, found its manifestation at the level of both their theorizations about fiction as well as their lifestyles. Books such as Reed's *Bloomsbury Rooms* discuss at length how these groups through the combined force of an overhauling of the aesthetic, the libidinal and the domestic,sought to get behind "the draperies and the decencies", in Woolf's words (qtd in Hoberman and Benzel 128). In *Bohemia in London*, Peter Brooker's engaging study of lifestyle modernism, the sartorial and cultural frenzy to embrace the new is documented by the critic. Relying on Vanessa Bell's reminiscences, he mentions how at the Post-Impressionist ball, the Bloomsbury denizens draped themselves in cloth that dressed up natives in Africa sourced from Burnett's and completed the impression by browning their legs and arms and by sporting flowers and beads.The Dreadnought Hoax and Woolf's participation is cited as another instance of the "cross-cultural masquerades" of the modernists (175-76). These anti-insular flourishes were in reaction to the phobic hysteria with which difference was viewed by the conservative, parochial denizens of the Empire. The avant garde proclaimed their difference from the mass by courting 'otherness'. Recent monographs by Peter Brooker, Peter Gay, Michael Levenson, Christopher Reed, as well as critical compendiums such as *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Literatures* and *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* are replete with citations and instances that reconfirm this moment of self-instantiation in modernism. Interestingly in many of these monographs, such as Gay's or Brooker's, it is the anecdotal that forms the bulk of the subject

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[9] Virginia Woolf "Bloomsbury" in *Moments of Being* ed. Jeanne Schulkind, 2nd ed.(San Diego:Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1985) , 185.

matter-an indication of how much the writers of the period have aided critics in formulating what Amour calls the "critical pieties" that continue to operate vis-à-vis the modernist canon (Berman 84). Admittedly, the period is so designated and enshrined by later critical work, yet there are enough statements coming from the core group of writers that inscribe their self-elevation as iconoclasts.Modernism was above all impelled by a desire to probe beyond the surface; the 'exhumatory' experiments of these artists, their focus on peeling off the uppermost layer, to reveal the substratum, defined them. And their interest in primitivism was tied to their pursuit of the primal that lurked underneath the layers of civilization. But what writers such as Rhys, at something of a remove from this self-valorizing narrative, record is how these experiments were often appropriative and problematized by inherited class and racial attitudes.

Undisputably, modernist writers were at the forefront of questioning orthodoxies, Woolf in the area of gender and Conrad vis-à-vis empire, if one stays with the writers included in this study.That component of their work tells us much about the politics of their time. And yet, it is equally important to come at it from the other side- how their formulations, if read in terms of the extent of their implication/ non-implication in Eurocentric cosmogonies, might also reveal something about the climate of those times. By reading Rhys alongside Woolf and Conrad, with the foci as gender and empire, I believe that one comes away with an expanded understanding of these pressing issues. It is by looking at not just commonalities but also departures, that this exercise can yield insights.

As modernism has sought to be 'politicized' there has been a valuable re-direction in the area of modernist scholarship - a number of studies look at the pressing inter-connections between modernism and Empire. The critical work that is surveyed briefly in the following part of this section moves along these two paths- modernism's self-birthing and its re-birthing in a large number of articles and books devoted to its attitudes to empire. While the anti-imperial stance of the modernist writers is reflected in their writings, it is also important to note how their self-conception as heretics often found a fertile field in the cultures of the 'other'. As Stephen Slemon says "Modernisms's most heroically self-privileging figurative strategies…would have been unthinkable had it not been for the assimilative power of Empire to appropriate the cultural work of a heterogeneous world 'out there' and to reproduce it for its own social and discursive ends" (Adam and Tiffin 1). It is this 'halfness', between a vanguardist heretic suspicion of imperialism and an eclectic consumption of its otherness, that this study probes through the lens of Rhys's fiction.

The strain of the heretic has entered into the critical discourse as a continuing reference point. It is interesting that even as the area of modernist studies undergoes a reprisal, the iconoclastic bent of modernism is in fact sought to be reinstated in newer guises and current critical idioms.Again as Bryony Randall observes, in this thrust towards reassessment, certain constants remain and thus even as one speaks of plural modernisms, modernism, in certain of its strands, persists as a "singular, 'vital' concept" (Randall and Goldman 30). A closer look at recent critical collections such as *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* betrays this bias towards reinvigoration. Laura Doyle's essay "Colonial Encounters" starts off with the premise of overturning the 'host-guest'[10] model written into the relationship between metropolitan text and post-colonial text but loses sight of that in establishing the post-coloniality of modernist canonical texts, as I discuss in Chapter Two. Another essay revealingly titled 'Modernist Narratives: Revisions and Rereadings' by David James looks at writers such as Conrad, Ford and Mansfield, with stylistics as its focus. Conrad's stylistics are duly connected to his anti-imperial politics. Stylistic elements such as the adjectival burst in Conrad's texts, James emphasizes, are "not politically unreflective"(93). His reading varies from Achebe's,since Achebe reads the "adjectival frenzy" as Conrad's deliberate use of language to paint the native landscape in sinister colours. Facets of Conrad's style, even ones that would even in fact reveal a sub-text of racial phobia which is how Achebe reads the recourse to "adjectival multiplication" , are seen as reflecting the writer's radical stance vis-à-vis empire (Brooker et al 93).

James' assessment of Conrad as a writer in whom style reflects politics is an indication of how in recent times a postcolonial Conrad has in fact begun to emerge.More revealingly, for my argument, the same interconnection between politics and style does not come into play in James' section on Mansfield. Though James does talk of how atmosphere and tone in Mansfield combine to unravel settled/privileged worlds, he does not quite connect this to her inside-outside position within the colonial structure.Thus while the work of 'revisionism' directs its interpretative energies at re-inventing canonized writers, for the 'lesser' writers , the mere fact of incorporation is an indication of revisionary largesse. In the recent *Modernism in a Global Context* by Peter Kalliney, modernism's revisionary zeal is configured along two main axes- one, increased attentiveness to the depiction of the colonial

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[10] I am drawing here upon terminology used by Simon Gikandi-'Reading the Referent: Postcolonialism and the Writing of Modernity' in *Reading the New Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* ed Susheila Nasta Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000 , 93.

ethos by already established writers like Joyce and Conrad, and two,writers like McKay, Rhys and Mansfield, being accorded "a prominent place in the modernist pantheon" (*Modernism* 25). Kalliney's observation leads directly into the malaise I see besetting the expansive turn in modernist studies. While the monumentality of the established figureheads only gets reinvigorated, for the late entrants, the very fact of 'emplacement' is seen as a gain.

I want to look also at the (re)inscription of the heretic in recent retellings of the narrative of modernism. In *modernism: the lure of modernist heresy*, Peter Gay's repertoire of sobriquets to define the modernists- rebels, extremists, dissidents- presents modernism as a setpiece of spectacular experimentation and combative radicalism. Whether it be Michael Levenson's *modernism* or Gay's testament to modernist iconoclasm, what emerges is a high-adrenalin narrative of modernist heresy, highly self-conscious in its social and aesthetic contouring. Levenson's anecdotal reference to Conrad's indignant response to nudges from his agent and publisher on his tardiness is a case in point - Conrad notes their insensitivity to the weightiness of his "being modern" and placing himself in the select company of Wagner and Rodin, reminds them of the price that art exacts, where pioneers have to " suffer for being new" (Levenson 10). This sense of a pioneering ascent (descent?) into uncharted realms cuts through these accounts of modernism, endowing it with a conquistadorial quality , quite in line with the self-description of a figure widely hailed as one of its progenitors. In a letter written in 1900 to Wilhelm Fliess soon after the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud conceives of himself thus

> I am actually not a man of science at all, not an observer, not a thinker. I am by temperament nothing but a conquistador – an adventurer, if you want it translated- with all the curiosity, daring and tenacity characteristic of a man of this sort (qtd in McHale and Stevenson 12)[11].

While the backdrop of Anglo- American modernism was the ashy, devastated landscape of the world wars, it was equally shaped by intellectual formations that signified defining ruptures between past and present, whether in the Freudian mapping of the subterranean as a retexturing of the rational human subject or the Nietzschean challenge to prevalent orthodoxies. Thus modernism was played out against a complexly woven landscape, one of ruination and collapse on the one hand and the spreading reverberations of new idioms and technologies on the other. We have to understand modernism as framed by the angst of socio-

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[11]*The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904* trans., and ed. Jeffrey Moussaief Masson, Cambridge, MA, and London : The Belknap Press 1985:398.

political bankruptcy as also the exhilarating velocity of intellectual and technological shifts. Alongside a bleakness or pessimism hence exists a surcharged narrative of a defiant search for alternate worlds/ vocabularies and an impatience with the impoverishing contractedness of the available ones. In her essays "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" as also "Modern Fiction" Woolf implicitly positions herself in relational superiority to the compendium of writers she inveighs against:

> {Realist writers} have laid enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there. But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it. (qtd in Zwerdling 15)

The hauteur present in the attitudes of both Conrad and Woolf reflects back on their self-conception of the artist figure. Implied in these formulations is a sneer at the staid facticity and imaginative decrepitude of the philistine world order.

Speaking of the great divide between the High and Low that occupies such a sizeable space in modernist scholarship, Robert Scholes suggests that in modernist discourse the scale extends from the highly formulaic to the highly original with the valorized centerpieces of modernist achievement obviously clustering around the latter scale and the rest languishing at the other end(10). It is of course important to note that in its iconoclastic declarations modernism's reach straddles the aesthetic as well as social and that latter day criticism is in fact visibly concerned with fleshing out the contours of the latter. Critics like Alex Zwerdling discuss the anti-establishment gestures in Woolf and anti-imperial sentiments articulated in the texts of Conrad and Forster have been substantially commented upon.

Recent narrative constructions of modernism and modernist aesthetics reinforce the above argument. Rachel Potter speaks of the "anti-institutional aspects" of modernism but also inserts the caveat that modernism veered between participating in the energies unleashed by the new media and a nostalgic holding on to high art's preserve (120). Peter Gay's book is a sustained account of the tidal wave of modernist adversarialism breaking through the shackles of orthodoxy. In a sweeping, magisterial survey that gathers into its folds the fields of literature, music, dance, cinema, painting, architecture, the tenor of his argument can be gauged from one of the subtitles in the introductory chapter, that resounding call to "make it new." Largely portraying modernists as tearing into and outraging conventional sensibilities Gay identifies the lure of heresy as one of the principal signposts in his reading of this literary-historical period. Adopting a bemused, ironical, tone throughout, the question that

still remains to be asked is whether Gay ruptures or in fact re-enacts the compellingly narcotic narrative of modernist heresy through his book.

The unfolding narrative of the oppositional claims of modernism leads us into the slew of recent works that reinvent modernism, endowing it with an even more sharply combative quality.This crop of works emerge from the recent interest in studying modernism against the backdrop of empire.This study with Jean Rhys as its primary focus was in fact conceived as a response to this burgeoning industry, of which it at some level partakes, while also remaining wary of its internal contradictions, the investigation of which then becomes one of its critical goals. The recent work of Peter Childs and Elleke Boehmer in this area have paved the way for a repositioning of modernism attempted by recent compendiums such as the *Oxford Handbook of Modernisms.* Childs and Boehmer both take note of the substantive presence of migrants, exiles and émigrés and how this would have impacted the literary and social landscape. But where Childs' work is different from Boehmer's is in the fact that while she focusses more on non-white, non- metropolitan writers, his concern is admittedly to look at the recognized modernists in " post colonial contextualization that is less than hostile" (1). As Childs mentions at the outset

> …mobility, travel and global migration mark the period in a way that signals its significance for imperial eclipse in terms of the incursions of cultural hybridity made inevitable by the multiple contact zones created in those decades (5).

This study looks at a writer, about whom Childs incidentally says little, who reads the transitions, paranoias and upheavals consequent upon an unsealing of borders almost clairvoyantly. Rhys questions whether the co-constitution of core and periphery made for a smooth equivalence of permeable boundaries and cultural receptiveness.

There is much in the book that fleshes out the idea of how empire and modernism were interleaved. Childs suggests pertinently how colonialist literature with its motif of sensational adventure, exploration and climatic journey stimulated the armchair European's imagination. His exact words must be quoted in full since the terminology is integral to my argument

> The colonialist journey is also always from a zone of society familiar to the reader into the imaginative thrill of the radically 'unheimlich' drawing the armchair European reader into a vicarious act of imperial possession (12).

These works revolve around the paradigm of colonialist journeys and voyages.While Childs's focus is on the voyage out, the work of Ian Baucom provokes one into probing the reverse dynamics, those of the 'voyage in'. Baucom cites Bhabha's thoughts on these complex intermeshings of the stridency of national formations and imperial/post-imperial haunting of

these. He summarises Bhabha's thesis of how a nation forges its identity by simultaneously turning a possessive gaze inward to the Heimlich treasures of the hearth and also a protective gaze outward to gather forces against "the unheimlich terror of the space or race of the Other"(5). In his explication on these thematics of how the "global beyond became the imperial within"(6), and how the arbiters of national spaces deal with embattlement of space, Baucom's work stimulates one into considering how 'colonials' like Rhys render the familiar unfamiliar by subjecting to scrutiny the visual repertoire of the imperial centre and examining the racial and patriarchal underpinnings of some of its revered cultural enunciations.

Monographs such as Peter Childs's have been crucial to a remapping of modernist studies. Chapter headings such as 'Mongrel Figures Frozen in Contemplative Irony' bode the awareness of the ideologically and locationally ambivalent spaces of 20th century writing. However the overall focus is on the inward turn, that is, how the transoceanic influx brings a consciousness of 'othered' realms, in a swirling miasma of aesthetic curiosity, experimental exuberance and self-critique.The shadow of empire exacerbates genuine moments of self-doubt and epiphanic revelations of existential and civilizational precariousness yet is accompanied by an incuriousity about its material particularities. For instance, it is interesting to note that the only outbound novel in Woolf's oeuvre is framed by Helen Ambrose's lengthy reflections on London, a fact that speaks directly to modernism's 'halfness' between the 'voyage out' and the 'voyage in' – an aspect explored vis-à-vis Woolf at greater length in the next chapter.

Admittedly, Childs does voice this when he says in the same chapter

> …because they were conflicted themselves about their relationship to British culture, modernists contributed less to greater cultural understanding than to Europe's discovery of the "Other" within itself to use a phrase of Brook Thomas'. Thomas sees *Heart of Darkness* as precisely about this; the conceptualization by Europeans what or who lies within their repressed selves – under their civilized veneer – rather than any recognition of Africans (66-67).

The title of Childs's study situates it squarely within, in recent times, the urgently contested territory of modernism and empire studies. The book displays a nostalgic yearning for a re-affirmation of the familiar templates of the cultural but more importantly intellectual vanguardism of the enshrined modernists. The imperial shadow "falling on the nation's walls" (Baucom 50) with the colonial wards increasingly entering metropolitan centres is

registered more palpably in Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures*, another book that focusses on imperial and modernist intersections.

Boehmer departs from as also builds on Childs' insights in that her work accords space to the alternate positionality of emergent migrant voices, and it probes with equal interest the axes along which the journey to the metropole and the journey outwards from its waters unravel. In line with the formidable work that scholars such as Catherine Hall have done in delineating the ubiquitous presence of empire in the metropolitan cultural imaginary Boehmer states at the outset "Imperialism is not something that took place only abroad" (31). Thus she dwells on the presence of empire in metropolitan spaces in terms of its macro-manifestations such as the imperial regalia of the Jubilee and Empire Day celebrations and registers as well the impact of the criss-cross of colonial travel seeping into the quotidian fabric of metropolitan lives. Rhys foregrounds this aspect in *Voyage in the Dark* when she selectively lingers on everyday products that bear the weight of colonial violence as also the visual paraphernalia of advertisements that employ value-laden absolutes such as the "Purity" tag of Bourne's cocoa to erase the memory of the same. It is more in these everyday spaces that Rhys' insistent re-memorialization of colonial excesses takes place.

In a lengthy note on the incursions into the metropolitan centres by the wards of colonialism, Boehmer refers to how they honed their "techniques of self-representation" for example through a nostalgic evocation of the homeland (108). Boehmer's parenthetical reference to Rhys's place in this paradigm is a pointer to how hard it has been for critical traditions and schematic histories, which is certainly not how I see Boehmer's , to 'place' Rhys- metropole / periphery, colonial/ post colonial, modernist/ post colonial, white/ creole, are the intermeshed territories that prove a stumbling block for a consanguineous placing of her in a definitive bracket.Regarding the aspect of the self-consciously nativist slant in the writing of the expatriates, her gender and race positioning render problematic any easy claim to nativist authenticity/ insiderness. Alternately, it can be argued that this gives her work a critical standpoint from which to read what are being increasingly talked of as the contradictory 'home truths' of the postcolonial industry.[12]

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[12] See for instance Graham Huggan -*The Postcolonial Exotic* and Sarah Brouillette *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007. Brouillette reads Huggan's reservations about the postcolonial industry as reader-centred. The reader as consumer of exotica symptomises the "consumerist impulse that aestheticizes, fetishizes and dehistoricizes difference", 16.

Prose of the World : Modernism and the Banality of Empire by Saikat Majumdar has given me a lot to mull over in the terms of my exploration of what Simon Gikandi in his comments on Majumdar's book labels " the vexed relationship between empire and modernism" and the other dimension of the book that Gikandi foregrounds, an enquiry into " the internal logic of the modernist movement" (Majumdar back cover). It is the contention of the present study that modernism's obsessive internal self fashioning, with its feverish and frenzied production of manifestos, also defined and coloured its response to the imperial question, often becoming the catalyzer to a self probing that obscured rather than foregrounded the visceral actualities of the colonial situation.

Saikat Majumdar's probings of course are concerned more with artists who come from the peripheries and the four writers at the heart of his study are Mansfield, Joyce, Wicomb and Amit Chaudhari. In the introduction he looks at length at the quotidian as an important resource for fiction. In keeping with his commitment to redress the under-theorized potentialities of the ordinary, Majumdar begins by casting Woolf as one of the most "insightful and polemical theorists of the banal"(14), both in her assertions of the myriad impressions that form the crux of daily existence and more particularly, in her recording of female boredom. However, the critic also remains aware of one of the defining ironies of high modernist aesthetics-on the one hand, its preoccupation with the fleeting, the random, the transitory, where the mind becomes an "enormous eye" as imaged in Woolf's essay on "Street Haunting", absorbing everything, it is implied, with undifferentiated voraciousness, inclusive of the routine, the mundane and the everyday, and yet modernism's pursuit of epiphanic moments, of moments of exaltation that would make undue investment in the everyday world equivalent to the unimaginative philistinism that would draw the ire of so many modernist writers, and would also signify a narrowing of their manifesto-driven aesthetic aspirations. As he says, "Quotidian details are often essential to flesh out the world of the novel and to produce the tangible immediacy without which realist narration, at least, cannot take place. But when such quotidian details define the limits of this fictional world, preventing aesthetic, psychic, or symbolic transcendence, that world, as Woolf implies, becomes dreary, predictable and banal "(10-11). Thus he records the paradox at the heart of high modernism's interest in the fibred density of the minutiae of everyday existence when he speaks of the simultaneous compulsive chafing against aesthetic narrowness in these innovating impresarios of the early twentieth century, such as Woolf's rejection of the overtly factual fiction of the Edwardians. It is a measure of the perplexing complexity of Woolf's oeuvre that while she was so seminally located in the dynamics of the weighty, Majumdar

chooses her as his first signpost for a discussion of the trivial. Coming to the core element of his thesis which is the strategic deployment of the everyday within the framework of the colony-empire paradigm, Majumdar reads the colonial periphery's aspiring towards the metropolitan mother country as a playing out of the yearning to surmount the banal and indeed impoverished nature of its existence by casting the imperial centre in the role of a "Tabernacle" in Fanon's terminology, the fount of bounteousness and plenitude (Fanon 13). The thesis he offers is that banality as studied through the prism of empire "embodies a fractured relation to metropolitan modernity: at the same time, it remains perpetually animated by a desire to heal the fracture, to inhabit the transcendence the centre holds out as a promise" (12). The most interesting part of his argument is his insistence on how micro-narratives, framed from the sidelines need to be reckoned with as qualifying and resistively intervening into the self validating ponderousness of the macro-narratives, historiographical, cultural and aesthetic.In my reading of Rhys later, I borrow from his frame to look at the qualified, even compromised, registers of oppositionality in her writing.

Two trends in recent writing on modernism thus reveal themselves − one, monographs such as Boehmer's that seek to trace the new voices from the colonial outposts that sounded in the metropole and modulated its aesthetic.The second strand is of writing that 'cosmopolitanizes' modernism −and hence preserves its vanguardist proclivities.

If one were to just turn very briefly to Rebecca Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style : Modernism Beyond the Nation,* since she looks closely at both Conrad and Woolf, one sees how she applies the rubric of an irreverent trifling with the solemnities of concerns acknowledged as pressing to read Woolf. Walkowitz locates Woolf's oppositionality in the demonstratedly 'irresponsible' turning away from momentous social events, in "The Mark on the Wall" for instance.

The critic puts cosmopolitanism and modernism in the same frame, arguing that each bolstered the instabilities of the other, that is, the heterogeneity that one understands to be a component part of the former is aligned to the expansive as also disruptive agenda of modernism. The elasticity that is conceptually linked to cosmopolitanism takes the form in writers like Woolf of an embrace of mix-up as a way to register 'insubordination' towards societally guided imperatives. That the climate of the European metropoles was becomingly increasingly cosmopolitanized in the early decades of the twentieth century is well-documented. Does this account of an aesthetics of expansion of artistic and intellectual horizons necessarily translate into an inclusionary societal fabric? It is this question that I believe gets sidetracked in theorizations such as Walkowitz that seem to gather even facets

that problematize such a reading into its folds. Her reading of a specific moment in *Mrs Dalloway* where Clarissa arranges her face into a dartlike pointedness as a metaphorical reminder of "the multiple attachments and unruly desires of cosmopolitan Britain" does not quite hold up since Clarissa's party reveals her shying away from even including domestic subjects whom she sees as not making the grade such as Ellie Henderson.[13]

Critics such as Walkowitz take the understanding of the intersecting trajectories of empire and modernism a significant step further. Walkowitz locates in modernism's suppleness a 'cosmopolitan style'. For the critic it is an index of modernism's ability to think globally. Its evasiveness, its slipperiness and its embrace of mix-up are read as a refusal on the part of the canonical modernists to cast their lot with English nativist and nationalist truculence. Though the current project urges the pertinence of the same, reprising but also warily treading this terrain of reorientation, as it veers more towards reaggregation rather than a dis-assembling, seems equally important. There is also Jessica Berman who has done extensive work in the area of modernism as a cosmopolitan formation. In her recent essay entitled 'Modernist Cosmopolitanism', Berman initiates the discussion by urging for a "nuanced" understanding of the issue (430). She reads modernist cosmopolitanism as a "sensibility or attitude that crosses and contests matters of identity" (Castle 431). And locates it in a "transnational critical optic"(431). She cites Woolf's *Three Guineas* as a text emblematising disaffiliation from the national narrative. To that extent, the radicalism of the modernist stance, in its unsparing look at the home nation's blindnesses, is to be recognized. But the discussion needs to be brought back to the question of how these texts are poised complexly and often ambivalently at the cusp of disavowal of home and embrace of the other- that is, does resistance to the one necessarily entail empathy with the other? It is indisputable that we have moved far ahead in critical responses to canonical modernists like Woolf- from primarily lauding her formalistic achievements or her honing of the stream of consciousness technique. It is undeniably a richer understanding of *Mrs Dalloway* that we approach if we take

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[13]Walkowitz's suggests through her reading of the moment in front of the mirror that the emotional intensity of Clarissa's youth survives under her socialized face. She extends her reading of the novel's sensitivity to outsiderness by reading "Septimus's stammer"(97) as Woolf's recording of the stutter in England's national narrative, increasingly under duress from the growing heterogeneity of the population.This is an interesting reading but again, Woolf's text largely metaphorizes foreignness rather than rendering it in its materiality.

full cognizance of the backdrop of empire or of how it shows a national capital full of foreigners and foreign attachments. There is a significant juncture in the novel when Woolf describes the spectacle of a car that is rumoured to be carrying an important royal personage and the overblown patriotism unleashed at the mere whisper. This is dictated by Woolf's gendered disaffiliation to the grand national narrative that she pillories as exclusionary in its male centredness. What she inserts as an addendum to this incident is telling. She recounts how in that surcharged moment when a colonial insulted the House of Windsor, a brawl broke out. Woolf is clearly ironising the intolerance of the English yet it is also quite obvious that the background of the colonial is not important, only the 'outsider' positionality that it evokes.While Woolf critiques the parochial and gendered national discourse, one has to ask whether that translates into an empathy with the 'other'. Thus these instances render in question Walkowitz's ascribing a cosmopolitan largesse to this work since the primary preoccupation remains the self constitution of the Western subject.

It is a measure of the dialogic scope of Rhys's work that she both anticipates and splices through such claims of a cosmopolitanized landscape. Just as what at that time would be the bacilli of contagion, whether colonials, creoles or natives, cast a spectral shadow over the imperial city, her work haunts that writing of colonialism whereby the brutal and regressive abrasions of colonial history are retrospectively subsumed into the more pluralistic folds of hybridity. In the following section, it is the criss-cross traffic of imperialist voyages, and negotiations of and by the alien that are looked at through Rhys's short stories. The thematics of contamination, bastardization and halfness that these stories foreground complicates utopian theorizations of cosmopolitanization.

"A Swarm of Outcasts"

(qtd in Callaghan 158)

In this first section, I look at three stories, "Overtures and Beginners'", "Let Them Call it Jazz" and "Till September Petronella". The commonalty that marks these stories is the ex-centric position of the women protagonists, two of whom are specifically tied to a Caribbean background. I look at their negotiation of the metropolitan milieu, and some of the strands that run through this study, such as Rhys's uncertain placement in terms of the modernist and the post-colonial, as also her excoriation of gender/ race hierarchies, are explicated through a reading of these stories.

"Overtures and Beginners" begins with the frame of halfness coming into play straight away- the narrator as she sees 'hail' falling outside, thinks back to how her training in English weather, had acquainted her with snow, yet she had no real knowledge of hail until only later

though in this first instance of being confronted with it, she tries to hide her ignorance-"I thought I'd be laughed at if I asked what it was"(*Stories* 312). This is in fact the 'beginning' of an idea that Rhys plays on throughout the story-how the distance between the colony and the metropole does not lessen but ironically gets glaringly reinforced with the 'voyage in'. The girl's education has not given her lexical or conceptual referents for the phenomena she is brought up against. Since this would only highlight her untutoredness in the eyes of her metropolitan interlocutors, hence her need to hide her lack of information. The 'voyage in' is more a confrontation with gap rather than its minimization. 'Halfness' continues to operate in socio-cultural terms even if the physical fact of distance is overcome.As the empire's subject, the girl is representative of those from the fringes of empire who were educated in the ways of the mother country and yet who are seen as alien to and fundamentally separated from its inside dynamics.Thus the gigantic shadow of the mother nation falls on their subject position, whether in colony or metropolis, halving their identity in two. The story begins on a note of disaffiliation- the English girl Camilla seeks to sceptically view the world of familial allegiances.The story hints at the cultural emplacement with which Camilla who is about to depart for 'home' can, in a spurt of teenage rebellion, be irreverent about it.The narrator, on the other hand, finds herself unable to as glibly dismiss origins. Paradoxically, Camilla's confidence stems from belongingness- the narrator's refusal to play along, which we are told 'annoys' Camilla, comes from her West Indian origins as perhaps the only certainty to hold on to in her present lack of rootedness. This question of disaffiliation as stance versus the same experienced as an existential condition is frequently iterated in Rhys's fiction.

Interestingly and tellingly, the category of exclusion is explored by Rhys at the level of the literary. Camilla, more securely positioned, makes jokes about how the girl will be subjected to elocution improvement exercises in the vacations, prescribed by Miss Born (again wickedly named by Rhys in terms of evoking an innate sense of belonging, a 'born' insiderness, to the privileged English narrative). The narrator is conscious of a constant scrutiny levelled at her by Miss Born, who seems to be taking her measure only to fix the lack in her. As the very embodiment of " breeding and culture", she makes the girl read only to round off her attempts by disparaging remarks-"That will do, don't go on, I really can't bear any more tonight"(313).The narrator, the reader learns, has been cast as Autolycus - perceiving her as a colonial upstart making a bid to one of the most redoubtable of English institutions, the plays of Shakespeare, Miss Born sniffs at the narrator's unfit intonations and sees her as an alien trying to breach hallowed English institutions. It seems that Rhys is playing on the minutest references to sites that would signify on the literary/historical

map.The girl alludes to how Miss Patey, who is teaching her to bicycle, slides on gracefully through the byways of Cambridge whereas the narrator charts a 'wobbling' path(315), once even falling into a ditch on the way to Newnham. Considering that this was the first college to admit women, and significantly, the site of Woolf's address to the girl students at Cambridge, is Rhys suggesting something here? Can this be read as a reference to how the colonial woman's access to insiderness is doubly ringfenced, with location/ colour/race intersecting with gender to exacerbate the fact of exclusion?

"Overtures and Beginners Please" is a story haunted by memories of another time and place, but stripped of any sentimentalized evocation of *gemeinschaft*. The story throughout engages with the question of 'origins' since the dynamics of belonging /non-belonging continue to traumatize the girl and become the trigger for her disparagement at the hands of her English classmates. Though in her conversation with Camilla, the narrator feels called upon to defend her 'origins', in her more private moments, she sees her memories as shorn of glamour.She constantly dwells on the question of 'memory' in fact and comments on how there is always a complex play between the imagined and the 'authentic' in the memories that are conjured up- "…I was astonished to discover how patchy, vague and uncertain my memory had become. I had forgotten so much so soon"(318). The girl acknowledges to herself that while sights and smells seem to linger, the faces of people seem to recede - thus highlighting the truancy of 'memory'.Writing as she was at a time when her fellow West Indian writers in England would strive to establish a Caribbean nativism, Rhys's fiction seems strangely, perhaps perversely, stripped of such articulations.This is where her own halfness seems to get projected. It has been noted that as far as Rhys was concerned, there was never any overt participation in West Indian politics and that she was in fact uncomfortable with the changing scenario in the West Indies. Kalliney conjectures that her earlier romantic identification with the disenfranchised blacks needed to readjust to the now altered/ altering power politics and that she couldn't quite manage that, given her dividedness (Wollaeger and Eatough 424-27). Her 'whiteness' can be conjectured as coming in the way of her participation in the new vocabularies of enfranchisement and that can be seen as a limiting part of her work. Peter Hulme reminds us of Rhys' uneasy place in anti-colonial thought , given her often conflicted response to the developing history of the Caribbean, her not being entirely at ease with the changing power structures for instance and most obviously her implication in white plantocracy which shaped her ambiguous response to the changing dynamics of Dominica post her re-location to England. And yet the utterances from Rhys that Hulme cites simultaneously point to her unflinching self-awareness of how the scenario in the West indies

made for compromised political stances and her all too human defense of her culpability is a measure of both the entangled history of the Caribbean as well as a look at her own schismed identity reflecting in her political attitudes-responding to a criticism of her story 'The Imperial Road', she says-

> Am I prejudiced? I don't know. I certainly wasn't. I really longed to be black & prayed for the miracle that would do the trick…But I am sure that I didn't notice or took for granted a lot that was unjust. Or worse. Of course a reaction was to be expected. All the same a great deal that is written & said about the West Indies is terribly one-sided & some is simply untrue.
>
> So one gets annoyed & fed up & drifts into seeming prejudiced.
>
> (Hulme 2000 n.p.)

The statement brings another kind of halfness into focus − how Rhys's work can be read as situated between fiercely anti-imperial and problematically racist − Rhys herself seems to understand the power of inherited attitudes as seeping into her desire to shed her whiteness- a desire that is inscribed into so many instances she records in *Smile Please* − her dissatisfaction with being the lightest in the family, her yearning for the darker rather than the fairer doll (39-40). An analysis of these recorded fragments certainly leads to a troubling picture emerging-of a romanticization of the marginal but it is also indicative, alternately, of how the 'expatriated' in Rhys manifested itself from early on, here in the form of a sceptical distance from the smugness of plantocratic society.

Given her own inside-outside position, the more troubling facets of Rhys's stance cannot be wished away, and would in fact directly stem from the theoretical frame of 'halfness' this chapter employs.Strangely, however, in terms of literary analyses, Rhys's slippery position vis-à-vis anti-racist thought, in precluding her from the insiderness of postcolonial renderings of 'home', becomes a way of commenting on the same. It opens out the possibility of an alternate perception-that of looking at the spurt in memory-driven diasporic fiction more sceptically as some postcolonial scholars such as Huggan have theorized. Her continued engagement with the category of 'memory' in many of the stories studied in this chapter makes for recovering the commentative in her fiction. Her insight into the vague, selective nature of memory ties in with the self-enquiries in the postcolonial field, of how 'memory' often recovers the sellable/marketable strands .When the narrator's school companions seem to be only (salaciously) interested in the exoticised details of her background, like the narrator in "On Shooting Sitting Birds", she too decides to satisfy their quest for fantasy

when the more humdrum facts fail to convince them, “But when I discovered that though they never believed the truth, they swallowed the most fantastic lies, I amused myself a good deal ”(316). Thus Rhys’s take on how “the imperial map is undercut by movement” is complex (Doring 102 ; I discuss the conjoined politics of cartography and colonialism at greater length in the chapter on Rhys and Conrad). While her protagonists are undeniably ‘mapped’ by their origin, they simultaneously play on their metropolitan interlocutors’ ignorance to break that stranglehold of colonial discourse through their irreverence.As the girl describes, she slices through the sneer directed at her by playing on the very stereotypes that her classmates deploy. In Rhys then, the ‘voyage out’ is often a sly reference to the colonial cliches that were housed in the minds of the armchair travellers who, never having travelled to the colonies, nevertheless expatiated on them quite glibly on the strength of knowledge encoded in texts. But can one also recover the other implication- how a certain category of diasporic,’nativist’ fiction is similarly a careful process of selection, based on an understanding of metropolitan culture markets of the West, just as the girl reads her interlocutors’ psychology as a prelude to her storytelling.

Her classmates’ derogatory references to her knowledge base of ‘coon’ songs brings the idea of a generalized racism into the ambit of the story as does a fellow student’s writing her a letter with ‘Dear West Indies’ inscribed on top, a reflection of how indelible is the mark of her alienness. In *Realism and Racism*, Bob Carter talks of “the reification and transhistoricization of race” and in the racist slurs directed at the girl (28), Rhys underlines the ubiquity of racist definitions where any suspicion of outsider status, especially when it can be traced back to a colonial outpost, provokes a voyeuristic curiosity (with the entire weight of the ‘pornotropics’ undergirding this). Read against the colonial backdrop and with that brief reference to Darwin, one can see how Rhys is probing the way alterity is both scientifically studied and ideationally fetishized by the West. Where Darwin “threaded the labyrinths of creation” the young woman negotiates her way through a web of signifiers fixing and denigrating otherness, a hierarchization whose inceptionary moment it is suggested can be traced back to Darwin’s theories (*Stories* 315). David Spurr points out that while Darwin, if one envisages a broader canvas “sees humanity as historically capable of improvement”, in the immediate context his thought “ reifies the existing hierarchy of human societies” (65). The reference to Darwin underlines how ‘otherness’ was overwhelmingly inscribed into texts as well as in the minds of the denizens of the imperial metropolis, the latter often in ‘unscientific’, hysterical, decontextualized,ways.

If as Spurr observes Darwin's work set off a hierarchical study of human societies into motion, the grip of this hierarchization on the minds of the populace is written into the story by Rhys.There is for instance this ostensibly unremarkable exchange between aunt and niece when Aunt Clare checks her for crying without reticence and the unspoken rejoinder is that the Aunt's wathchful policing of her is similarly unrestrained. The Aunt's observation is in line with conception of 'excess' within colonial discourse. From a literary/canonical standpoint, the idea of 'excess' associated with West Indian Creoles was of course enshrined through Bronte's *Jane Eyre.*

With a title like "Overture and Beginners Please" the story's events would chronologically tie in with Rhys's arrival and initial days in England but the operatic tenor of the title also suggests the first glimmerings of the girl's theatrical and musical aspirations. This occasions intensifies a straitjacketing of the protagonist, undergirded by the weight of gendered categories wherein the performative arena is looked at unfavourably, associated with freedom bordering on licentiousness. When her aunt wonders whether she is getting anywhere with her acting career the young woman tries to impress her with these lines from one of her starring roles,

" Now I am free and gay,
Light as a dancer when the strings begin
All ties that held me cast off…."(320)

Employing the lens of gender, the aunt's rejoinder "You'll find that very expensive" is a cryptic and stern reminder of the price to be paid for straying into these suspect artistic circles (320), and also a hint of how the career far from proving lucrative might cost her her place in the bourgeois fabric. Could one also contend that her aunt's discomfort might paradoxically stem from her beginning to belong too much? It is perhaps easier for her aunt to deal with the exasperation evoked by the girl's falling asleep when confronted by the architectural and cultural marvels of London for she can explain that in terms of the girls's fundamental alienness (through the type of 'climate') from the metropolitan English ethos. It is the possibility of the narrator's 'beginning' to find her feet in the alien milieu that the Aunt finds disorienting, since it would imply a dissolution of racial/ imperial separateness between colony and metropole. In these moments, Rhys shows an understanding of colonial praxis- how it stigmatized, yet also paradoxically relied on,the natives' incapacity to 'civilize' themselves. Though the colonial project was rationalised in terms of its civilizational underpinnings, there was always and paradoxically the lurking fear of divisions being

imperilled if natives did achieve equivalence. Her Aunt's sarcasm comes as a response to the narrator's recounting to her how she has begun to take fencing and more importantly elocution classes. And that she has entered the world of Shakespearean theatre with her playing Celia in *As You Like It*. In the Aunt's cutting response, Rhys exposes the paradox of colonialism-its denigration of yet reliance on difference as its raison d'être. Earlier in the story , there is a preamble to this when the narrator recounts how her Aunt refuses to buy her the prettier dress even though it is " a perfect fit" and buys her the drab one, which as the narrator dreads will only make her stand out amongst her classmates.(317) Though the girl's response is affectively transferred on to how she finds the street "hostile" and the bus "hateful" and dreads the collective sneer of "millions of perfect strangers" (318), Rhys deploys these moments to underline how the outsider contends not just with difference but the metropolis' phobic dependence on its continuance - too neat a 'fit' would disrupt the hierarchy.

Climate in fact is a recurrent trope in the story as the narrator constantly refers to the cheerless climate of her new abode. Rhys' repeated troping of the English weather acquires deeper resonance if one keeps in mind Bhabha's comment on that fluctuating yet "most immanent sign(s) of national difference. It encourages memories of the 'deep' nation conflated in chalk and limestone; the quilted downs; that corner of a foreign field that is forever England. The English weather also revives memories of its daemonic double: the heat and dust of India ; the dark emptiness of Africa"(169). Read from within this frame,in Rhys's fiction, the struggle with a perpetual blanket of greyness and bleakness is also shadowed by the daemonic double, the extreme, excessive greenness/lushness of the Caribbean landscape that proves unsettling for metropolitans such as the Rochester figure in *Wide Sargasso Sea* or Walter in *Voyage in the Dark*.Thus Bhabha's reference to the various markers through and in which a nation's identity is encoded can be found in Rhys as she interrogates/destabilizes stereotypes by adopting and then inverting them − where the greyness of the English climate becomes as much a loaded signifier as the 'heat' of the pornotropics was for the stay-at-home.

Rhys' narratives, stripped as they are, to borrow a phrase from Baldick, "intervenient moral commentary"(167) or of that self-probing angst that we identify so closely with the modernists, sometimes "vex efforts at rehabilitation", as Andrea Zemgulys puts it (Wilson and Johnson 21). But in line with Zemgulys's argument that Rhys's work resonates more widely on careful reading, this study looks at how in the crannies of her texts, an exposition of colonial practices and prejudices unfolds.

A probing of stories such as “On Not Shooting Sitting Birds” catalyzed my reading of the covert but sharp registers of oppositionality in her fiction, and how these are indelibly linked to her location. The opening line of the story,“ There is no control over memory” is directly linked to the whole question of memory in post colonial theory (*Stories* 328). In postcolonial thought, this revolves around the twin axes of erasure and recuperation, that is, the colonial regime’s overlaying of indigenous forms by willing that the indigenes erase all traces of these even from memory,and the postcolonial writers reliance on recovering these erased forms and modes of expression as a claim to prior identity.The former aspect is powerfully brought out by postcolonial writers such as when Ngugi recounts how the usage of the local languages was seen as a breach of what had to be remembered and retained and what had to be obliterated from ‘memory’.Fanon also records this process of assimilation in that the ground rules for what to retain in memory and what to expunge are clearly laid out for the children of the Martinician families aspiring to the standards of the mother country. The children are taught to shun the dialect and opprobrium is cast on anyone guilty of using creolisms(10). The arena of post colonial literature maps itself out as a reconstitution and re -evocation of these negated, dis- (re)membered aspects of native life. How far then can one study this thrust on memory in Rhys’s story about a Caribbean woman’s sojourn into England and her encounter with an Englishman from within this frame? Though as already suggested, Rhys’s ambivalent positionality precluded automatic claim to native idioms, she does look at many aspects that would form recurrent strains in postcolonial theory such as the whole question of recovery/ revitalization of memory − though her treatment is prescient of but also crucially different from later postcolonial writing.

The story suggests that memory exceeds a disciplinary repressiveness or alternately turns what has been dutifully ingested on its head by creatively recasting it. Her writings, in the stark vividness with which the corporeality of the West Indian experience is captured, become a poser to the controlling regimes of indoctrination, most crucially the code within which women of the planter class were expected to conduct themselves. The “plantocratic Negrophobes”, as Marcus Wood in a strongly-worded phrase labels them (142), certainly did set up elaborate boundary markers, so as to police contact between the planter class and the black labourers. Rhys’s fictional protagonists often display a mobility that challenges these boundaries, especially stridently enforced on the women of the planter class. Hester(*Voyage*), for all her metropolitan hysteria, does put her finger on the patriarchal values that undergirded the plantation ethos, with the men transgressing these boundaries at will- though

in her case, the argument presses against any possibility of intermixing, whether by men or women.

Richard E Burton's *Afro Creole* engages with the arguments of Peter Wilson in his *Crab Antics* , a text regarded as addressing the contradictions at the heart of West indian culture. Wilson describes the fundamental tension in Caribbean societies to be that between 'respectability' and 'reputation'. Respectability could be read as bourgeois/British in orientation, leaning towards standardized English norms of family, home, economy whereas reputation is oriented towards the creole, towards the carnival, mobility, trickery. The surface narrative of Rhys's Creole protagonists might enact a submission to and introjection of societal norms, the 'respectability' paradigm in other words, but the "interminable conversation", more inward than outward, covertly unsettles these.

Vis-à-vis the dualisms of reputation and respectability he talks of the gendered underpinnings of these configurations, summed up in his comment that while "self-restraint, even self-denial, lies at the heart of the respectability system, self-affirmation, even self-dramatization, is the be-all and end-all of the reputation system" (Burton 159). Keeping in mind the gendered division of spheres so much at the heart of the defensive cultural anxieties of Creole society, one can see Rhys's work as an early marker of how these oppositions become a part of the defining texture of social life in the Caribbean.

Though these theories more directly concern post-plantation Caribbean societies, the theses seems to be startlingly illuminative in reading Rhys's story. Creole society was especially paranoid about indoctrinating its women in the 'respectable' and in her encounter with the Englishman, in her play with memories, the young woman's open concern with details like lingerie pitted against the man's more stealthy pursuance of the sexual (the bedroom lurking at the back of the room where they meet for dinner) , the narrator challenges the borders of respectability and discipline. This is most obviously relayed through how her memories escape control.Commenting on "On Not Shooting Sitting Birds", Cheryl Malcolm talks of how the young Englishman cannot quite come to terms with how the protagonist seems both a lady and ,in her free acknowledgement of the sexual subtext, "unladylike"(467). Invoking the terms of Burton's analysis, particularly the reference to self-dramatization helps in comprehending how the story weaves its way into the complexities of the West Indian milieu from the point of a view of a Creole.The story begins with the young woman musing over how memories are often in excess of the pertinence of remembered events.Their unbounded nature thus poses a transgressive challenge to the installed filters of societal training, for instance the vignette that most immediately springs to mind when she visually evokes her

home is of the domestic help Victoria grinding coffee . It is also telling that Rhys juxtaposes this with the other visual fragment, of her father's bookcase. The bookcase assumes greater significance in the story as carrying the symbolic weight of the colonial library and this first mention already hints at the oppositionality between the tactility of local experience and the master narrative of the imperial motherland that seeks to obscure the immediacy of native experience by exalting the textualized authority of the mother country. Further dwelling on the undisciplined nature of memory, she wonders why a certain moment that has no significance in the schema of her life, the erotic pleasure of buying sheer satiny underclothes in anticipation of a proposed date, stands out. In the opening paragraph of the story, the narrator speaks of how "you find yourself being vague about an event which seemed so important at the time…Or unable to recall the face of someone whom you could have sworn was there for ever. On the other hand, trivial and meaningless memories may stay with you for life"(328). It this in this context that she places her vivid recall of the pleasure of buying the sheer underclothes when she arrives in the imperial metropolis. This is a part of her desire to transgress-by her own explanation, doing "bold, risky, even outrageous things"- as a way out of her loneliness (328). But her compendium of memories from the colony, with the vivid recollection of the servant girl grinding coffee, show how the challenge posed to boundaries, whether gendered or racial, is visible in both colony and metropole. Hilary McD. Beckles' reminder that plantation patriarchy sought "to idealize and promote the white woman as a symbol of white supremacy, moral authority and sex purity" translated into an insistence on distance between labouring population and plantocrat women (Moore, Higman, Campbell and Bryan 204).The fact that the girl's first recalled memory vignette is of the servant girl Victoria implies her putting little store by these divisions. White Creole women in Rhys's fiction often transgress these instituted boundaries.Taking this argument a step further,one wonders then whether the repeated reference to the underclothes might not simply signal the girl's willingness for "adventure" but also be Rhys's way of subverting race discourse that 'naturalizes' difference (pure/ impure, chaste/ decadent) between coloured and white women (328).Thus the young man's wariness of the narrator's Creole background, with all its hints of inter-mixture and cross-racial contact, becomes, for the writer, the leveraging point from which to deconstruct the fragility of race binaries- since the girl in his mind is white and not white, lady and not lady. Tellingly, that is the first query he directs at her-"But you're a lady, aren't you?" (329).

It might be argued that, and this would be much in line with how the Rhys woman is read, that this act of self-exploration is actually a form of subservience to patriarchal norms, as is

also emphasized by the story's conclusion where she envisages more fruitful encounters with other men. The sexual boldness of the protagonist is to be seen as firmly entrenched in the governing framework of sexual attractiveness as an entry point into relational possibilities. But as the story unfolds, the young woman's creative toying with symbols of authority, makes us question the subsumption of Rhys's women in a pliant passivity or their being perceived as "floozies". Even though she looks at the date with the Englishman as a way out of her loneliness, as soon as the meeting gets underway and she begins to read him, she remains one step ahead of him in already anticipating his stereotyping of her 'otherness'. The "wary, puzzled" way in which the man looks at her, feeling compelled to confirm her 'ladyhood', is Rhys's glance at how any suspicion of difference is met with a bristling re-affirmation of societal standards. In the girl's answer, "Oh no, not that you'd notice", Rhys injects her understanding of the prejudicial weight of colonial, racial and patriarchal norms (329). The girl decides at this point that her unbelongingness confers on her an alienness and this can only mean a 'yawning gulf' between them (329), where her Creolized origins render her remote.

The use of the word "gulf" to suggest the distance of the metropolitan centre from the peripheries is also Rhys' synoptic reference to the 'Anti-Caribbean' sentiment emanating from "cultural preservationists back home" (Sandiford 3). Sandiford goes on to talk about the Creoles' deep-seated anxieties about their colonial status, in view of the low esteem in which plantation societies were held. However, while the woman's awareness of the evaluatory weight of these frames of reference is obvious, her decision to creatively toy with its registers rather than become a passive victim to its condemnatory mechanisms, lends a resistant strand to the story.

That bastion of imperial authority and achievement, the colonial library then becomes the crucial focus. There are two elements in the story that stand out-one, that she talks of her dutiful 'consumption' of the redoubtable glories of the library, and secondly she confirms whether he has any substantial knowledge of the West Indies before launching into her 'insider's' account of it. The fact that she makes free use of the stereotypes about the colonies embedded in colonialist literature, even if it means challenging one inauthentic account with another, shows that as a writer/raconteur she reads into and exposes the blinkered nature of this 'ethnography'. If one sees an imperializing thrust not only in what to read but how to read, that model of readerly pliability and a submissiveness to being shaped by what Said terms the "the imperial lingua franca", is challenged by the girl's creative deployment of tools from the colonizer's arsenal (*Orientalism* 213). She concocts by her own admission a

story that conforms to the stereotype of the enigma and wildness of the colonies which ironically is made possible by her having ingested the colonial archive. Thus in the very act of a 'writerly' regurgitation of colonialist clichés, she stages a tactical reading of their constructedness.

The fact that her own account is figured as a reshaping of memory - "Then I began describing a fictitious West Indian shooting party and all the time I was talking I was remembering the real thing" and how Rhys intersperses her narrative reordering with her lived memories in fact suggests Rhys' chronological imbrication in and yet sceptical distance from both the modernist/colonial and post colonial frames (329). Rhys's fiction has been read in recent times as driven by an autoethnographic impulse. The genesis of the term is in Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*, where she defines it as the colonized subjects self articulations in conscious engagement with the colonizers' representations of them (9). Sue Thomas uses this frame delineated by Pratt to read Rhys' fiction as autoethnography in dialogue with other autoethnographic representations of Dominica (*Worlding* 9). This is I believe of great importance since both Pratt and Thomas do not endow such insider accounts with any primal authenticity but more as a rebuttal of the perceived partialness of other accounts. By looking more closely at how her fiction both challenges metropolitan representations but also ironically resists an incorporation into the category of nativist literature almost makes us wonder at Rhys's anticipation of the contemporary placement of diasporic writings within marketable parameters, summed by Marcus Wood in his comment on "the performative and promotional authorial role in which the contemporary post – colonial novelist operates or is made to operate by his agent" (57). A story that emphasizes both the palpable force of memory and on the other hand its selective summoning, even reworking, by the 'authorial' persona, circulates within the ambit of postcolonial writing but also contains a comment on its processes of sifting and selection.

As the narrative voice, in the throes of a creative burst, constructs an exoticized version of the shooting episode, the man finally cuts her short by asking in a horrified voice whether her brothers shot sitting birds. The protagonist has been so intent on demonstrating her own brush with adventure, which she also informs us is far from the actual memory of her fleeing from the sound of gunfire, that this question about the specifics of shooting leaves her floundering. The man's shock at the rules of the game having been flouted is of course a cruel reminder of the more grievous injustices and horrors perpetrated on West Indian soil by the English. As the date ends anti climatically, the bedroom at the back of the restaurant space in which they sit looms darkly. And the man's offer to take her to her room can now be interpreted by her

only as a desire to probe into where she lives, so that his judgement of her can attain a conclusiveness, fixing her remoteness and rescinding from metropolitan standards beyond doubt.

Through the employment of the trope of memory in the story, in its palpable urgency and its creative deployments, Rhys not only excoriates the hierarchies that made any easy assimilation of Creole whites within dominant metropolitan patterns impossible but more importantly invests in her protagonists a readerly capacity to transcend and even toy with authoritarian discourses, and thus while sketching their entrapment in these, provides them with at least the imaginative mobility of Certeau's resistant 'consumer'. Certeau, whose thesis offered in *The Practice of Everyday Life* is seminal to this study, talks of the binarism instituted between the energetics of production and the quiescence of consumption and ruptures its encoding by challenging " the inertia of consumption"(167). If "On Not Shooting Birds" be read with this in mind, this also helps in challenging the exclusive focus on the victimhood and passivity of the Rhys woman.

Rhys's story "Let them Call it Jazz" is an even more explicit take on a Caribbean protagonist's fraught passage through the imperial 'motherland'. Selina is one of those rare Rhys heroines whose Caribbean lineage is explicitly marked through her Creolized idiom. The story starts with the usual Rhysian motif of the émigré adrift and at a loose end in the imperial centre. There are some moments of delightful, deadpan, comedy stemming from Rhys's unabashed miming of colonial stereotypes − reversing the thrust, she passes generalizations on the English , such as when Selina says that the man who allows her use of his house is quite different from the English in general who take so long to decide on something that you would be "three quarter dead before they make up their mind"(158). When Selina moves into Mr. Sims' house, she has to contend with the xenophobic paranoia of the neighbours. Significantly, it is her art, her singing, that she turns to in at attempt to stonewall their palpable hostility. Selina's singing is given a centrality by Rhys in her attempts at oppositionality.

The story constantly uses the metaphor of 'walls' to indicate both fortification and breach- the neighbouring couple usually watch her from behind a window. When her breaking the glass pane becomes a direct threat to maintaining distance from 'contagion', the man emphasises that the glass is "irreplaceable"' - perhaps a xenophobic horror of the breach that seems to permanently threaten to alter/ deface the pristine exclusivity of the sceptred isle(167). Ian Baucom reminds us that since Victorian times, England was seen as imperilled by imperial deformation- the threat of the alien " trespasses and stains, carrying the imperial

‘without into the imperial ‘within’, blackening not the body of the English subject but the surface of England’s walls” (50). He mentions that this lurking danger was manifestly associated with trespass and riot-significantly, Selina is accused of both.When Selina is thrust into her prison cell and the door shuts with a clang behind her, she thinks to herself,” You shut me in, but you shut all those other dam’ devils out. They can’t reach me now” (171). For Selina, the walls of the prison imply only a different order of incarceration, since she battles on the outside the constricting imperial and racial sneer. Finally, when she hears the Holloway song, she correlates it to walls coming down. In fact, she reads the song as emanating from the walls themselves- as if the walls, mute witnesses to tales of injustice and misery, are seeking expression-“ …as if the walls themselves are complaining…” (173). Given the fact that Selina is cast as an artist figure, the ironic “I’m here because I wanted to sing”, where she dwells on how she finds herself in prison because of her desire to sing, is clearly self-referential - Rhys is examining the ordeal of the emigre artist negotiating her/his way through the art marts of Europe (172).

She feels at her confident best when making tunes. Her singing is not just imitative; she also has a composer hidden inside of her. As she explores that gift, she again comes up against the opprobrium of the neighbouring couple, who see her public singing as a sign of a wild creature let loose, and who label it ‘noise’. But that Rhys connects her singing to her subaltern status is clearly manifested in the choice of melodies-for instance, when the white couple deride her for bringing contagion into their neighbourhood, her rage and embitterment are expressed not only through gesture, hurling a stone at their windowpane, but also breaching the walls of sanctimoniousness in another way, through one of her grandmother’s songs that dwells on how the powerless are marginalized. Selina’s song-making is centrally tied to both the idea of creativity and to the idea of finding a voice.It is in fact revealing to follow the graph of her song-making to trace how the story speaks of the thwarted evolution of an artist. Her songs are initially a defence against the scathing sneer that the white neighbours direct at her and she usually taps on memory to draw a melody out. But she does reach a stage where the composer in her is revealed as tunes begin to come to her, and at one point she talks of how the joy of creation makes her forget the sneer that hems her in.That ‘voice’ of course is different from, and hence mocked by, the governing idioms of metropolitan society.Where Rhys’s other fictions articulate protest through excoriating Western cultural forms, the enunciative site of protest in this story resides in the alternately inflected ‘art’ of the protagonist. Peter J Kalliney reads the story as Rhys’s rather strategic transition from modernist forms to a post-colonial nativism, since that trajectory chimes with

the coming into prominence of the primarily black and male West Indian writers (Wollaeger and Eatough 415). Kalliney's theses assumes a consonance between Rhys's work and that of the enshrined modernist corpus -that in itself is debatable and it could be argued that the contrarian position taken by Rhys against the metropolitan core dates from her 'modernist' period.

In fact, her sceptical reassessment of the modernist quest for novelty as so often vocalized in its embrace of alien idioms is in evidence in this story as well. This is to re-visit the thorny terrain of whether the modernist embrace of alternate voices indicates an escape from isolationist aesthetics or in fact reconfirms its centripetal aestheticizing of its centrifugal geo-cultural wanderings. John Marx connects a 'many-tongued modernism' to its widening consciousness of other worlds-"modernist fiction made linguistic facility necessary for understanding, administering and mediating an infinitely divisible, multilingual,yet English-speaking globe"(8). Kristin Czarnecki links Selina's patois resounding through the imperial corridors to "dialect usage during the modernist period, when Rhys began writing and when experimental narrative harboured different implications for 'white' and 'black' writers" (22). She cites Michael North's observations on how high modernists like Eliot, Pound and Stein forged innovation through the use of black speech patterns (22). There is also the pertinent caveat that both Czarnecki and Kalliney insert into their articles- that Rhys's own position as a white Creole transcribing the idiomatic dialect of coloureds is a form of racial masquerade, so that even as she sharpens her attack on the 'inauthentic' cultural plundering of the modernists, she veers precipitously close to a claim to post-colonial 'authenticity'.

It might be suggested that the story is self-referential in working this implication into its ambit. Vis-à-vis the charge of appropriativeness, Selina comes quite close to that proclivity herself. It can be contended that her excitement at hearing the song, her being almost consumed by it, is not simply a register of its communally uplifting significance for the incarcerated residents of the prison, but more a response of a fellow artist to whom this creation from the margins is an addition to her native repertoire of songs about pain and injustice. Tellingly, after Selina hears it, she feels ravenous - so Rhys uses the vocabulary of consumption to show how Selina exercises selective agency as an artist, but in the process erases the material origins of the song, much like the modernists- as Selina tells us, "I don't hear the words, only the music".(173) She senses a tomorrow for this oppositioal crescendo- "One day I hear that song on trumpets and these walls will fall and rest"(173). Her response I believe is aspirational- that of an unsure 'othered' artist who now understands that these oppositional tunes have an audience. One possible way of looking at this is to suggest that

like other fictions in Rhys's oeuvre, Selina's artistry evokes no transcendent, collective, communal basis. Very seldom does Rhys write in terms of collectives. Though the West Indian context is so much at the heart of her other fiction, most explicitly in *Voyage in the Dark*, it is evoked through a frictional chorus of voices that form an unassimilable medley. Similarly, in "Let Them Call it Jazz", even as Selina hones her art in the crucible of post-colonial memory, the discordant notes push against an idealization of the past.Rhys's multiply interstitial positioning rendered impossible a homogenized valorization of her past that is often(though not always) so strategically important for post colonial fiction.

Thus rather than reading the story as consonant with either of the master-discourses of modernism and post-colonialism, what interests me more is Rhys's exploration of the artist figure through her coloured female protagonist. This is a rare case study where Rhys allows her disadvantaged protagonist a voice of her own, sometimes culled from past memories, and sometimes from the emancipatory rhythms that break down the incarcerating barriers of her present. That Selina finds sustenance in these hybrid consonants is as Czarnecki notes, a more enabling concluding note than that found in Rhys's writings as a rule. But that Rhys also comments on art that is nascent versus one that is more cued in to the processes of institutinalization becomes in hindsight an implicit comment on how her own untheorized insights predate the evolved discipline of postcolonial writing. Of course, Rhys is not Selina. With her close association with Ford behind her, she understood the workings of the art markets better than her protagonist does. In fact, by the end of the story, Selina also comes close to learning to effect a synchronization between individual talent and the demands of the commercial market. Her gift of 'fine handsewing' which was perceived as at odds with the demands of mass production is now channelized into the humdrum rhythms of " take in, or let out…" but in a significant break from her former work history, in a big, plush store (175). She gets the new assignment as much through her 'native' talent as by manufacturing a sophisticated career profile and effecting a mincing tone. As Selina says at the end of the story, after she realizes that the Holloway song which she privately saw as artistically transformative has been put out for public consumption -"For after all, the song was all I had. I don't belong nowhere really, and I haven't money to buy my way to belonging…"(175).The story is fascinating in the suggestive layers it carries. But what then does one make of her admission that she has stopped singing after that – in fact the man who recognizes its marketability overhears Selina whistling its tune? That could be an echo of Rhys's feeling of impasse - of being variously incapacitated by gender, location, history, circumstances, from capturing the market. The survivalism of Selina is admirable but it also disbars her from the

luxury of venturing into art except perhaps in private. Kalliney seems to be right in detecting a note of hurt in the story (Wollaeger and Eatough 427) - there is a sense, perhaps intensifying towards her final decades, of how others from the West Indian location could institute an authentic corpus that her in-betweenness historically and locationally precluded. The story's messages are evasive and complex. But what emerges ironically, and it is perhaps an irony that Rhys with her avoidance of modernist cerebralism would not have been too happy with, is that Rhys whose writing happens in a vernacular and uncerebral idiom was capable of anticipating so much of what twentieth century literary theory would discuss. For instance, the story's trajectory is in sync with the difference between a postcoloniality that attempts to decolonize expression to one where with Graham Huggan a circulation of otherness becomes a feature of the global art markets. So is Rhys ironising or begrudging how these cultural interfaces would come to dominate the art marquees of the West? Like much else in Rhys, concepts emerge from her position at the crossroads of periods, movements, nationalities. Thus I stay within the reading-writing schematics to suggest that though Selina 'reads' the potential change in trends correctly, she has neither the wherewithal nor the writerly preparedness to convert trauma into text.

"Till September Petronella" is another story from Rhys's oeuvre where the question of art circuits is foregrounded-the reference point clearly being the modernist coteries. Petronella, the proverbial outré figure, finds herself in close proximity to the swish arty set. Rhys casts an incisive glance at the vanitas of the art circuits of the West and their selective adoption of other cultures permeating the cosmopolitanized metropolitan landscape, as the urbanscape under the influence of Empire was rendered malleable. The story, as will be argued,looks at modernism's purported embrace of the 'other' and hence touches on the idea of 'halfness' at two levels – both vis-à-vis the protagonist as well as the modernist milieu.

As with many other female protagonists in Rhys's fiction, Petronella Gray's origins are kept obscure but her many asides on London and on the English seem to suggest that she speaks from the vantage point of an outsider. Marston in fact mocks her as a person with no background and she herself seems to want to erase her origins which she remembers as "bloody"(130).The question of origins is important to the story in another way. Petronella's 'placelessness' can be juxtaposed against the attempts by the two men in the story to cultivate a disaffected stance in keeping with their bohemian self-projection.However, both the men actually come from the class of the established rich. Frankie speaks of Marston as coming from a moneyed family and the elitism of Julian's background is mocked by her. The two women, Petronella as already discussed and Frankie, are not similarly well-placed. Though

the victims of the slurs levelled at them by the men, they are also in a position to offer a commentary on the men's entrapment in prevailing ideologies and class institutions, however much they may seek to cultivate a distance from these. When Julian wonders at Petronella, she shoots back that he cannot " make her out"(his words) since "Ruddy respectable citizens never can" (136).This has to be understood in terms of the men's constant desire to distance themselves from the ideal of the ruddy Englishness of the country folk and their ironic commentary on that. The women place Julian for all his avant - gardist pretensions within the same framework-as Frankie tells him," You're always going on about respectable people, but you know you are respectable, whatever you say and whatever you do…"(136).Their attempt to set up a difference between their 'openness' and the disapproving conservativeness of the 'ruddy' English citizenry thus collapses.This is clearly brought out in Frankie's painting Julian in the same shades of 'ruddiness' as his rural compatriots.The story then looks at the idea of halfness through another prism – not just in terms of Petronella's uncertain status in the metropolitan milieu, but also the gap between that milieu's self-construction, as cosmopolitan, disaffected, rebels and their ingrained English, parochial, attitudes.

A reading of the story as framed by the backdrop of the war, such as the one by Sue Thomas ("Thinking Through"), lends an added dimension to statements such as this by Julian-"Here's luck to the ruddy citizens…May they be flourishing and producing offspring exactly like themselves but far. far worse, long after we are all in our dishonoured graves" (133).This encapsulates the halfness that Rhys associates with the modernist milieu- its anti-establishment stance on the one hand, its 'sneer' at the conservative, jingoistic attitudes of the philistine middle class citizenry, and yet its own problematic entrapment within the imperial-patriarchal attitudes of its time - the progressive compromised by the regressive.

Rhys portrays the engulfing cultural anxieties as a lurking substratum to even the self-consciously alienated stance of the pursuers of high art. Sonya O Rose speaks of times of disturbance such as wars as leading to an outpouring of moral discourses. As she points out, "Moral discourses become especially intensified,I am suggesting, when perceptions of difference and the diversity within nations or communities become problematic" (Hall *Cultures of Empire* 247). Her comments are valid in terms of studying England's re-consolidation of its identity both vis-à-vis war and imperial strife. Significantly the critic analyzes the nation's anxieties primarily in the realm of sexual relations, as combative of forces that "threaten to blur the racial lineaments of white British national identity" (254). Both war and empire are terrains that call for a sharpening of notions of masculinity.

Rhys's tale encapsulates the above tensions and contradictions. To unravel the mechanisms of 'othering' becomes crucial. Some moments in this regard stand out, for instance when Julian labels Frankie a 'Phoenician'. This is Rhys's oblique allusion to the avant gardist cosmopolitanized embrace of primitive cultures celebrated for their sensual freedoms.Significantly, this casting of Frankie as "Phoenician" comes at the point when Frankie's astute comments on Julian's innate English 'respectability' rile him.In a bid at disparagement, his labelling her as Phoenician is a reiterative gesture at entrapping the woman in the instinctual. He sees her percipient reading of him as a futile attempt on her part to cultivate cleverness and counsels her to remain in her place-"You keep out of it, Phoenician….You've got nothing to say. Retire under the table, because that's where I like you best" (136).The 'primitivism' enjoined on her is not only a denial of intellect at the cost of instinct but also evidence of racial and gendered biases.This then belies the art intelligensia's claim of liberalism, as also problematizing its cosmopolitan anti-insularity.

The other image that stands out in the story is that of the "gigantic maw" in Frankie's retelling of how a presumably Nordic artist is taken up in the first flush of novelty by this set and then when his "sordidness" begins to bother them, in a show of English solidarity, the 'other' is cast off (135). By placing as in *Quartet* these echoes of a more multicultural ethos squarely within the ambit of the art circuits, Rhys's purpose is clear- to show how in these libertine circles, engagement with the 'other' is selective and motivated.

In his diatribe against Petronella, Julian configures her as a "female spider" (137).The story seems to trace a contiguity between a phobic fear of both otherness and female sexuality. Rhys, in a story framed by the empire and the war, shows how while the swish arty set' 'sneer' at the 'respectability' of their middle class compatriots, the landscape of their own transgressiveness, visually exhibited in Marston's silk pyjamas with dragons crawling all over, devolves into a re grouping bolstered by an English contempt for the defiling and contaminatory potential of the 'outsider' figure, whether it be in rejecting the 'sordidness' of Petersen or in the branding of the un-placed Petronella as " fifth rate" (136).

"**Half-Way House**"- Homing in on the Unhomely

(*Stories* 278)

This section looks at stories from Rhys's oeuvre that sketch the reverse scenario-metropolitans attempting to make a 'home' in the colony. Interestingly, while the Caribbean protagonists who are made acutely aware of their unhomeliness in the metropolis are all women, the stories that foreground the adventuring into unfamiliar realms have male protagonists.This is clearly indicative of how Rhys pits the female 'voyage in' against the

male ‘voyage out’.The category of halfness continues to operate, cutting through and complicating the characters’ homing in on the unhomely. “Pioneers Oh Pioneers” is the first story I look at in this section.The events of the story are focalized through the perceiving consciousness of a young girl, Rosalie. Tellingly the story begins with an argument between Rosalie and her sister Irene. Rosalie is drawn to the figure of a white woman who is regarded for her curious ways as something of a freak. And Irene considers Rosalie’s interest in the woman as an example of Rosalie’s preference for “crazy people” (275). The market scene sketched at the beginning plays upon the predictable differences between the black women and the white-with the woman who draws Rosalie’s attention challenging/complicating these neat binaries. The lady in question, Mrs Menzies, exemplifies the dilemmas of halfness, and the opprobrium it breeds, signified here in the snicker of Irene. The woman on the one hand clings to a dark riding habit bought in England a decade back, and on the other flouts norms of Europeanness by riding into town herself to buy ice, rather than having it sent for, like other ‘respectable’, normal, European gentry.Interestingly, even as Irene jeers at the woman, she mentions that the black people laugh at her oddities.The dynamics of the non-belongingness of the Creoloized vis a vis both colony and metropole is evident here-the woman is derided by both the local as well as the expatriate population. Thus the fate of Ramage’s embattled attempts to find/ found a home in the colony is prefigured. When the girls reach home, they find their father sitting in the gallery, surrounded by English and West Indian newspapers, another pointer to the in-betweenness of the European population in the Caribbean.

Rhys’s fiction, given the psychogeography of her own life, usually remains suspended in that fraught in-between space. In the story in question, this patterning is evidenced in the case of Ramage, newly arrived from the West and seeking to buy land in Dominica, ironically in a quest for peace. Rosalie can be read as a counterfoil to Marlow in her romanticization of Ramage who enacts the “fascination of the abomination”(Conrad 10). One way in which Rhys’s tale redraws Conradian territory is in the framing consciousness being that of a young girl whose fascinated engagement with Ramage’s eccentricities Rhys links not only to her turbulent adolescent sexuality but also a gender inflected apprehension of othering.

If one were to read “Pioneers Oh Pioneers” against *Heart of Darkness,* the results in terms of inter-implication are intriguing. Since Kurtz’s elevation rests on the pioneering intrepidity with which he epistemologically romances the dark realms, the title of Rhys’s story as also her chronologically marking its events as unfolding in 1899 , which is the turn of the century publication date for *Heart of Darkness,* assume significance. The looming figure of Conrad’s

'pioneer' begins to haunt our interpretation of the story. In terms of Rhys's portrayal of the distortions written into as also bred by the imperial fabric, the story narrates at one level the 'troopenkollering' of Ramage. There are in fact frequent references in the story to how he has lost his sanity from too much exposure to the sun. The idea of excess implied in the extreme heat of the sun in the tropics,and the related riotousness of vegetation,came to function as a metonym for a licentious way of life.This aspect of "tropical climatology" (Driver and Martin 4) taking on the status of a value-laden trope is commented on by critics such as Callaghan (84).

Ramage's search for a home on the Caribbean island debars him from the circle of white planters on the island-"So the Ramages were lost to white society". His looking for a " half-way house" (in an early conversation with Dr Cox he speaks of how he wants to be away from island society and yet not too far " along the road") leads him to a point of no return (278). As Stoler says on the subject of the fragility and breachability of the category of 'European' in the colonies, "The colonial measure of what it took to be classified as "European" was based not on skin colour alone but on tenuously based assessments of who was judged to act with reason, affective appropriateness, and a sense of morality" (*Carnal Knowledge* 5-6). The incoming voyage seems to split open the notion of Europeanness for both Rhys and Conrad. But while Conrad seeks to recover a transcendental resonance from that site of rupture, Rhys stops at the point of impasse.

Rhys poses a perplexing question for the reader- how does one read Ramage's zealous embrace of the 'native' way of life, his gesture of choosing a coloured girl to be his wife being a measure of that. He is seen to distort the fabric of island life- the expatriate community lacerate a man for his 'pioneering' into territory that they covertly covet but imbue with prohibitive censorship. Is Ramage's marriage a dalliance with 'going native' or is it a genuine attempt to overcome ingrained European biases? Rhys asks a question that would be pertinent to a reading of Conrad's text-are these pioneering efforts at a more syncretic way of life or ultimately an acting out of European fantasies of transgression? J Michael Dash reminds us that "the desperate need to see the Tropics as utopian, alternative societies" was often the romantic obverse of the dystopia of plantation society, and Rhys's story never loses sight of that (17).The attitude towards the coloured woman Ramage marries is Rhys's way of indicating that prejudices remain in place. The woman is cast as loose and lax in her morals. Even Dr Cox, who seems to allow space for individual eccentricities, sees her as something of an upstart ("dressed up to the nines") and "not a nice coloured girl"(279). These portraits of a society cross-cut by varying inflections of racial admixture are thus never free of

stratifications based on race and degrees of miscegenation .Ramage's slide is figured through a gradual sartorial disinvestment-from being a man who arrives fitted out in full tropical regalia-white suit, red cummerbund and topee, he is soon reported to be moving around stark naked with just a leather belt holding a cutlass. Where the grandiose scale of Conrad's geographical voyages maps universals onto the geopolitical, Rhys's vision is more attuned to the historical impasse that marks these journeys.The ambivalence of Ramage's project rests on his relationship with his wife-in people's eyes, that becomes the test of his success(or otherwise) in the experiment of 'going native'. And the accounts that emerge are largely negative.As the rumour about his suspected murder of his wife does the rounds, he is found dead.Given the history of abrasive power structures governing race relationships, Rhys seems to see only a bleak end to these attempts at racial mixing as long as colonial mentalites remain in place.

And a constitutive part in that particular narrative slant to his story is played by the opprobrium cast on him by the flag bearers of cultural and racial superiority, as they uphold the imperative of separateness as especially incumbent on the settler figure. Philippa Levine talks of how the British in the process of colonization were both drawn and destabilized/repelled by the possibility of more 'expansive sexualities" (*Gender and Empire* 151).Though her reference is also to internal transgressions of sexual mores, such as homosexual arrangements, and not necessarily to cross-racial ones, the 'experimentations' of Ramage can be viewed in this way. With an unerring finger on the conflicted pulse of British settler initiatives, Rhys uncovers the accompanying and accreted layer of phobias. Her story in fact not only foregrounds Rosalie's ability as also her eagerness to enshrine and consecrate the unclaimed spectre of Ramage , much like Marlow's zealous efforts to preserve Kurtz's imperious persona, but there is a brief insertion of another female consciousness through which his unorthodoxy is perceived. My reference is to Mrs Eliot, the wife of the owner of the adjacent estate, and perhaps the most strident voice in the hunting down of Ramage. For her his remarks on the ugliness of her appearance and attire exacerbate her recognition of the hypocrisies of the marital bind since she reads into it her husband's indifference towards her. Though one can see the dubious feminist politics of her stance, her reaction certainly gives an interesting and alternate twist to her husband's outright condemnation of Ramage. However problematic his own effort at cross-culturality might be, but for her, as for Rhys, he becomes a catalyst to unearthing the hollow pieties of the colonials. This is where Rhys details the paradox at the heart of the colonial endeavours; how Europe moved in its colonizing mission

towards an unsealing of borders but how this was simultaneous to its burrowing even deeper into entrenched Eurocentric cosmogonies.

Rhys' fiction is saturated by references to colonial and racial paradigms.She shows how mongrelized and unstable positions can critically unspool the master narrative of empire since at a remove from its self-fetishizations. The very opening of her "Fishy Waters" abruptly lands the reader plumb in the middle of a battle that brings to the fore the suppressed tensions of Caribbean society. The writer brings in the multivoicedness of the Caribbean context through a use of different fora-the public as well as the private. The subject of Longa's trespasses is discussed both through the pages of newspapers as also through private correspondence between Maggie Penrice and a friend.

The story offers no conclusive word on Longa's guilt or otherwise. But the beginning of the story establishes clearly his status as a vilified figure among the 'genteel' expatriates. In the bitter exchanges for which the newspaper columns become the site, the simmering feuds in Caribbean society come to the fore. Rhys deploys these clashing perspectives as a pointer to the multilayered, racially riven, society in the Caribbean.The first letter writer for instance centres on Longa's marginality, as a carpenter with socialist leanings, and the 'Disgusted' voice traces parallels between Longa's persecution by the powers-to-be in the island and the planters' perpetration of atrocities on the blacks (*Stories* 298). The response to his letter by an Ian McDonald lambasts such attempts to "stir up racial hatred" and in fact holds up the fact of Abolition as retrospectively dissolving British culpability – "Who would think to hear them talk, that slavery was abolished by the English nearly a hundred years ago?" (299).These two facts taken together add up to the way the abolition question played itself out in England since the imperial imaginary at that time often conflated the crowded slums of England to the dehumanized conditions under which the slaves laboured. James Epstein elaborates on these overlapping trajectories when he speaks of how "missionaries, journalists, novelists and sociologists frequently mapped the urban jungle" in terms of the racialized registers of marginality that abolition propaganda foregrounded (Hall *At Home* 273). Abolition debates brought to the fore anxieties about possible revolt and insurgency both in the colony and the metropole. Writing in the context of that backdrop, Rhys brings the two in line with each other- that is the working class politically aware man and the question of the slaving population. Pertaining to the latter, McClintock points out "In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the urban crowd became a recurring fetish for ruling class fears of social unrest and underclass militancy"(118). It is the fear of this insurgent spirit that seems to

heighten the querulous tone of McDonald's letter.The trumping up of Britain's vanguard position in abolishing slavery is clearly ironised. In a book that addresses the question of how the way transatlantic slavery is remembered is selective and motivated, Kaplan and Oldfield write – "How we choose to remember slavery is neither haphazard nor unmediated…In Britain's case, adjustment to the reality of an empire without slavery necessitated a reordering of priorities. In practice, this meant absolving them of responsibility for transatlantic slavery and instead highlighting the role Britain had played in bringing slavery to an end. Such selfless actions it was argued legitimized Britain's role in the world, the country's stewardship over countless millions"(8-9). It is this selective nature of remembrance that seems to be in operation in McDonald's letter, since the trauma of slavery, and the empire's stake in it, is written over by Britain's role in putting an end to it.

All these instances highlight not just the layered engagement with imperialist history residing in Rhys's spare prose but also how her being outside both frames, that of the colony and the metropole , affords an insight into the hysterics and theatrics of empire . It is that hysteria that we hear in the voice of the white settler McDonald who sees mavericks like Longa as responsible for tarnishing the imperial fabric. Rhys laces with irony his claim that those who insistently excavate the unsavoury chapters in the history of empire such as the slave trade "are long on diatribes but short on facts" (299).This is also a hint at newspaper reportage as factual which Rhys undercuts by making the newspaper columns a forum for divergent, contestatory and even acrimoniously divided views rather than a bald report on the event in question. What is also important is the 'absence' of Longa from the story. He occasions an intricate look at the workings of empire and the fact that he never appears in person suggests that his role is to bring to the narratorial fore suppressed 'histories' and tensions , both private and social, in the core-periphery relation. His othering is thus crucially linked to the dangers of boundary crossings and the distortions this breeds in characterological terms. He of course in terms of his political leanings is already allied to a dangerous anarchic sensibility even before he enters Dominica.

Significantly, continuing with the stylistic device of written 'voices' on the subject, the next testimony is of Maggie, the wife of Matt Penrice who is to give evidence against Longa. The colony-metropole dynamic is evoked as she writes to a friend who resides in England. As Caroline has stayed in the island for a short while Maggie feels she would understand better the burden of negotiation that the white settlers bear-" No one at home would understand why all this is looming over me so much , but you know the kind of atmosphere we get here sometimes, so I think you will "(301). It is also revealed that it was her exhortations to which

her husband yielded in deciding to take up residence in the West Indies, and towards the end of the story, the reader learns that it might have something to do with Maggie finding the cold in England hard to withstand, and that the beauty of the island (its beauty is mentioned by her husband) might have seemed a potential source of rejuvenation. This leads us into debates about the spur behind embarking on the "colonial odyssey" (Adams's theoretical frame in his book of that name) and Maggie's case seems to be poised somewhere between escape and adventure. Maggie configures the colony, for instance, as an alternative to the 'cold' of England. Rhys also plays with usual patterns here since the initiative of embracing the empire usually rested with the male figure. Here the scepticism towards the 'project' is initially voiced by the man and by the end of the story the white woman too begins to lapse into fears of degeneracy and breakdown brought on by the alien climes, doubts whose first stirrings can be heard in the letter to her friend.

The figure of Longa who Maggie describes as on his way to becoming an " honorary black" is also implicated in these complex cross currents of inter racial tensions since his statement far from bespeaking a mind sympathetically disposed to the marginalized, comes across as something of a misanthrope and more exercised by his own injuries , the "jeering" directed at him, than by the iniquitous conditions prevailing in Roseau (300,307).As he resorts to frequent generalizations , such as the raucousness of the black/ coloured children or their unclothed state, Rhys shows that his perceived difference is more a matter of class than of his posing a challenge to racial categories. Rhys excoriates the unremitting circulation of racial hierarchies spanning the core-colony. The laxity and mental unhinging that is hinted at in the case of Longa, and implied vis-à-vis Matthew Penrice resonates within the dense context of McClintock's vocabulary of crossings of thresholds as threatening 'dissolution'(72), the onslaughts on the physical sensorium unsettling the psyche, a reminder of the cranial pseudo-science of the company doctor in *Heart of Darkness*. Though Rhys does not entirely opt out of this explanatory web, where new terrain and environment do act in transformative ways, she is also casting a wry look at this becoming a convenient cover up to scuttle signs of aberration in the colonizer figure.

"Fishy Waters" provides another perspective on how the homely and the unhomely criss-cross in complex ways- for Maggie Penrice the Longa episode reveals her husband to her in the guise of a stranger-"She was trying to fight the overwhelming certainty that the man she was looking at was a complete stranger"(311).The idea of estrangement, then, works in multiple and inter-connected ways.Removed from familiarized contexts, the unfamiliar in the 'familiar'(the spouse figure in this case) comes to the fore. Though it is Longa's trial that the

story narrates, it is Matthew Penrice's unravelling that we actually witness.Although it is Longa's image that is visibly tarnished, the taint of suppressions, the shadow of the illegitimate and the clandestine, actually attaches to the figure of Matthew.

The fact that the man who is on trial never appears in the story is a clear indication of how the trial is to be read more as a narrative commentary on the tensions bred in West Indian society by colonial/racial history. The story foregrounds various voices on racial configurations as also their tenuousness and constructedness- when the doctor is called to the stand and questioned on the continued silence of the coloured child on what occurred, the doctor offers a psychological explanation. This is mocked by the counsel who wonders whether such subtle psychological explanations would hold for an illiterate Negro child. The doctor replies-"I do not believe that the result of illiteracy is an uncomplicated mind-far from it" (306).Though it has been said that Rhys writes from within about the planter class, her memoirs and letters testify to a resistance to stereotypes and binaries, and a desire to breach racial boundaries, though with the accompanying self-awareness of how her sociohistorical location would render difficult such an attempt. The Doctor's statement is an instance of her attempt to deconstruct binaries - understood in a more expanded way, it problematizes homogeneized readings of black, white, or Creole.

What Rhys's stories detailing the lives of the expatriate population in the Caribbean offer for reflection is how racial categories are rendered fragile, even as they are sought to be enforced with redoubled hysteria by the whites. The final word on the inter-penetration of the 'homely' and the 'unhomely' rests with one of the letter-writers who articulates their distress at how "in this country the custom seems to be more honoured in the breach than in the observance"(299). Rhys undercuts the aspect of adventurism inscribed into the trope of the male voyage and focusses instead on the friction between implanted ideals (embracing 'nativism', 'back to nature' etc) and local realities.

Metropolitan 'Marginals'

In this section, I attempt to study stories where the women protagonists, though belonging to the metropolis, seem to be nevertheless caught in an in-betweenness and an insecure positioning related to indices of gender, class, background. Having said that, it must be iterated that Rhys's writings offer perplexing reading models for interpretative frames based on feminism, since they reveal both an interrogatory impulse as well as a bleak, circular reiteration of the status quo. That is another kind of 'halfness' that one contends with in any analysis of Rhys- the most wickedly astringent, anti-institutional asides, co-exist with a perpetuation of iniquitous gender arrangements. Her undefined place often translates into her

not taking a clear stand on issues. Her shifting stances and cryptic responses on topical issues can prove to be exasperating. To argue that she steers clear of a heavy cerebral component in her writings is not to ignore that her writings do seminally engage with issues of gender and patriarchy and can to that extent raise quite a few stumbling blocks for feminist critics in particular. “The Insect World” makes for disturbing reading in particular.To read a story like “The Insect World’ is to recognize that there are few models of sisterhood in her writing and that her fiction so often about women in close proximity does not paint a picture of ‘communities of women’. This will be taken up in the side by side reading of Rhys and Woolf later but one way in which this can be viewed is in terms of the un-sublime poetics of protest in her writing, that her exposes are unrelieved by a projected or nascent utopianism. However to recognise the antipathy that Audrey feels for other women is disturbing for anyone studying Rhys in terms of her engagement with the questions of gender.The story in fact makes for a frustrating case-study in ‘halfness’ vis-à-vis the writer’s stance, since it both reads racial and gendered stereotypes with punishing clarity, and yet shows its protagonist as alternately impatient with and reliant on them.

The two stories that I look at “Illusion” and “The Insect World”, are seminally concerned with exposing the gendered undergirding of national narratives, this time through the consciousness of metropolitan English women. In “Conflicted Textual Affiliations- Jean Rhys’s ‘The Insect World’ and ‘Heat’ ” Sue Thomas comments on the over zealousness of post colonial theory in subsuming all non metropolitan writing under the broad rubric of writing oppositional to cultural imperialism (Maes-Jelinek, Collier and Davis 287).The capacious folds of the ‘writing back’ school of theory she says often eliminate other pressing and pertinent discursive contexts. This is a useful reminder since this is a story which does frequently turn to the metropolitan inscriptions of the tropics but this time the narratorial perspective is of an English woman.

The story comes at the question of ‘halfness’, an in-between placement between metropolis and margin in another way-by opening with the image of a woman placed in the metropolis reading a book about the tropics. The book that the protagonist Audrey reads, *Nothing So Blue* ,is a Western-centric take on the tropics. So what I call the ‘reading back’ model assumes pertinence. Audrey’s scepticism as a reader is continually emphasized. She in fact describes herself as a ‘twinned’ being, subscribing to current structures while simultaneously aware of their troubling inequity (351). The story begins in fact with a contemplative passage on the dynamics of reading. Audrey begins by investing faith in the ability of books to take one away from the agonies of real life and declares her willingness to allow herself to be

seduced by them. But in a turn around she then says that the feeling that lingers after the reading is done is akin to indigestion.If one were to take the book that she is engaged in reading, *Nothing So Blue*,as a case in point, then Rhys seems to be commenting on the imperial library's peddling of colonial stereotypes, and Audrey's uncomfortable ingestion of these. Thus some of Rhys' holding up of a reading model that resists passive consumerism comes into play.The pronouncedly tendentious narratives that made up the imperial library produce a feeling of undigested matter, at once " hollow and uncomfortably full" , that is a lurking suspicion of being 'stuffed up' as a character in *Voyage in the Dark* says (350).There is a constant stress on Audrey's meek submissiveness to prevalent norms and it is primarily the reading motif that offers the first, faint glimmerings of dissent which is imaged as a cleaving between the obedient Audrey and that other twinned self, that more subterraneously inclined reader/explorer , "the wanderer in a very dark wood" that can see / read into " the essential pottiness" (351).

Rhys also comes back to the question of memory which is dually inflected- in terms of what one is allowed to remember and what one is asked to erase- "But she still accepted all she was told to accept , tried to remember all she was told to remember. The trouble was that she could not always forget all she was told to forget" (350). Placing this statement within the reading-writing matrix that I am employing in studying Rhys and its pertinence vis-à-vis post colonial theory, Timothy Bewes places post colonial fiction within the framework of the burden of shame. He argues that such fiction often struggles to articulate realities so horrific as to be inarticulable. Explaining the provenance of his critical enterprise he says, " One of the lines of inquiry to be pursued in this book concerns the reasons why , in the aftermath of the enterprise known as colonization… the literary representation of individual and collective experience repeatedly comes up against a sense of shame as a limit"(3-4). "A block, a residue of unprocessable material" haunts the writer and the memory of excesses that shape the writing approach the unsayable, thus posing a dilemma for the writer engaged in recording (4). I wish to read these many deliberations on memory in Rhys, especially on its rebellious uncontainability, and its hauntedness, against the framework of Bewes' formulations, especially since her in betweenness would render painful but also urgent the spectre of colonial memory. Given her familial links with plantation history in the Caribbean, the writerly process of sifting material that foregrounds the 'shame' of her imbrication in these incommunicable memories, the unequal colonial structures of her early childhood, makes for the suppressed rage in her writings.

Her protagonists, even the metropolitan denizen Audrey, negotiate their way through a sense of impotence intermixed with a desire to break through the gag of mute capitulation .The stark image of Audrey as a reader frenziedly removing the marks of previous ownership from a second hand book that she has bought - "She always wrote her name on the fly-leaf and tried to blot out any sign of previous ownership. But this book had been very difficult. It had taken her more than an hour to rub out the pencil marks that had been found all through it"(351). The feverish energy that Audrey invests in her obliteration of previous inscription and her desire to retain the space to stamp her own interpretation onto the written word becomes both the impulse and the shame of post colonial writing. To re-inscribe is the spur but always accompanied by a brooding shame at making creative mileage out of the worst inequities in history. How much of this dis-ease is written into Rhys's writings, then? I am suggesting that, to bend Bewes' thesis a little, the shame of origins certainly lurks at the margins of her writing and in fact can add another dimension to Bewes' statement that "writers of literature are in an ethical and aesthetic quandary: How to write without thereby contributing to the material inscription of inequality?"(11). He is also aware of how such a position might run the danger of appearing romanticized , since it would mean consigning the realities of the subaltern's position to silence. The "quandary" that Bewes refers to becomes in writers like Rhys, ambiguously positioned, or twinned as Audrey would have it, a pressing need to make transparent the "inhumane obscenities" prevailing in the peripheries and also a conflicted sense of one's own locational complicity in these (16) .This story, though told from the point of view of an ostensibly more securely placed woman, is nevertheless plagued by a sense of brooding rage and dissatisfaction interspersed by moments of doubt about one's own self.

Audrey is portrayed by Rhys as inside but also outside, as is clear from the many contradictions that the story uncovers. Her horror at the previous reader's misogynistic pronouncement of women as abominations , yet her own failure to forge any naturalized female bonds given the abrasive competiteveness between women that patriarchal society spawns ; her incorporated status vis a vis colonialist tropes and yet her ultimately transferring these to the English ; and her caustic comments on the mother to-be Roberta's self-concern as distasteful against the backdrop of the second world war and yet her own desperate attempts to combat its prolonged bleakness by turning to clothes.It needs to be borne in mind that the story is written against the backdrop of the second world war and again fluctuates between Rhys's extremely acute sense of a particular place and time and a lack of overt ideological inscription.As Maggie Humm points out,"Rhys is an indirect historian but she is not an

ahistorical writer" (*Border Traffic* 81). The story combines certain recurrent tropes in the writer's oeuvre with a sense of the war-affected world. For instance, Audrey's scepticism towards macro-narratives spills over into the grand national narratives that a war of that scale unleashes. There are several oblique references to the practice of reading-in a conversation with Roberta, Audrey testifies to her awareness of perspective in reading and writing when she says," It all depends on how people see things. If someone wanted to write a horrible book about London, couldn't he write a horrible book? I wish somebody would. I'd buy it" (355). There is also a later exchange between Audrey and Monica, where Hitler's repressive policies vis a vis women are discussed- interestingly, Audrey rounds off that exchange too with her acerbic reference to whether it is any different in England. Rhys clearly sees the national narrative as a motivated one, and suggests its marginalisation of women.

The image that plays out through the story is of the Tropical insects 'jiggers'. Audrey transfers her phobic apprehension of the jigger to the denizens of the metropolis-"Jiggers got under your skin when you didn't know and laid eggs inside you. Just walking along, as you might be walking along the street to a Tube station, you caught a jigger as easily as you bought a newspaper or turned on the radio. And there you were infected…" (356).The colonialist phobia of contamination is turned inwards, as Rhys suggests the parasitism of the imperial enterprise. This is a story where the distinction between writer and character needs to be kept in mind-so that the exaggerated affect of Audrey's perceptions can be expanded to suggest a more commentative thrust on the part of the writer.Most revealingly, the notes on the margins of the text that Audrey reads are also jigger-like in symbolism- Rhys suggests how predisposed mentalities feed on the written word. By erasing the marks, and setting into play her own reading of the text, Audrey brings into operation Certeau's suggestion of the creative reader-a reading practice that roosts on the margins of the inscribed text, takes it over, makes it its own. The image of the jiggers that 'roost' in another's body thus becomes indicative of both the colonisation of the other as also the insurrection of the written text.By using a metropolitan perspective, Rhys portrays how the woman's disaffection from the national master narrative co-exists uncomfortably with the grip of ingrained xenophobias.

A reading of Rhys's "Illusion" similarly foregrounds questions of affiliation/disaffiliation with national discourses vis a vis women.In "Illusion",we get to know the central figure Miss Bruce through the perceiving consciousness of the narrator. The initial part of the story deals with the ' illusory' Miss Bruce , constructed in accordance with the narrator's over-eager assimilation of her into the stereotype of the exemplary solidity of the English.The complacent surety of the narrator's attempts to pigeonhole her acquaintance as also the

suggestion contained in the title prepares the reader for the proverbial twist in the tale. It comes, but not in easily assimilable terms.

The story plays on the thematics of belonging/non-belonging in a rather different way-it revolves around the the figure of the painter, Miss Bruce-"…a shining example of what character and training-British character and training can do", the narratorial voice informs the reader(1).Miss Bruce is an Englishwoman in Paris, negotiating her way through its artistic milieu, of it and yet not of it.The narrator announces that" After seven years in Paris she appeared utterly untouched". Rhys, no stranger to categorising imperatives, deliberately seems to play off one kind of national ethos against another- stolid Englishness against Parisian license. The entire burden of narrative in the first half of the story seems to be an attempt to construct Miss Bruce in terms of a national discourse of 'Englishness'- work-oriented, a life sans frills, a "tidy","neat" existence (2).The second half of the story complicates this evaluation of Miss Bruce- Rhys shows how categories and definitional gridlocks prove inadequate in explaining human reality.

When Miss Bruce is suddenly taken ill, the narrator is called upon to carry her essentials to her in the hospital. As the narrator stands in front of her cupboard prior to her unlocking it and muses on its solidity, quite in character as far as the narrator is concerned,, the reader awaits a revelation that will take us beyond the surface of things. The wardrobe is a veritable gallery of the most sheer, sensuous and flowery dresses. The narrator desperately seeks refuge in common sense explanations of this phenomenon but knows that she finally needs to confront the illusory aura she has built around Miss Bruce. As the narrator confronts her friend's need to nurture a fantasy existence, the story revises the more conventional interpretative nuance of the title.The story focuses on the necessity of sustaining illusions, that form the underlying fabric to the tidy exterior of Miss Bruce's existence .In this tale about the gap between reality and illusion, surface and substratum, Rhys's thrust is on showing how women's secret lives are an artistically crafted attempt at defying circumscription. In an article entitled 'The Make Up of Rhys's fiction' Rishona Zimring links the realm of cosmetic makeovers with consumerism and urges a reading that though aware of the insidious forces of commodification implicit in consumer brands promising beauty, also remains sensitive to the make up table as a performative arena.A significant treasure lodged in the wardrobe is a carnival costume and this subtly connects with the reference to rouge, since both imply a masquerade, a performance. Zimring's description of the story in question as a "closet tale" (217) resounds with significance since at the end of the tale, the narrator

looks anew at her acquaintance's interest in women as perhaps another aspect of her internal world opens up to counteract the professional briskness that Miss Bruce cultivates.

The lush excesses of the wardrobe are a stark counter force to the plainness of Miss Bruce's existence: the force of her fantasies undoes the lived tidiness. This is also Rhys's own poser to her often monochromatic construction of Englishness and to that extent ties up with Antoinette Burton's reminder of women's writings in the postcolonial ambit as negotiating with both patriarchal colonialism and patriarchal nationalism (Levine 288). Miss Bruce is representative but only till a point since women are often the most conspicuous targets of the prohibitory economies of national discourses.For instance,given the homoerotic undertones,the story can be read against the contemporaneous debates on lesbianism, especially as one bears in mind the imperial-national formation's demonizing of it. In *Sapphic Modernities*, Laura Doan and Jane Garrity refer to how the interwar reaction to lesbian sexualities was to see it as a menace to the nation and regarded in Britain for instance as co-terminous with the problem of 'surplus' single women.Perceived against the backdrop of racial purity theories, eugenicist concerns and the rallying calls for a reinvigoration of imperial potency, the "unreproductive, masculinized body" of the lesbian was seen as controverting the procreative ideal that was the necessary shot in the arm to the continued dominance of the imperial nation (8).

Since the story centres around the contents of the closet and the discovery of rouge is centrally foregrounded, it would be interesting to read it in conjunction with Max Beerbohm's turn-of-the-century essay 'The Pervasion of Rouge'.Following his argument through its fascinating twists and turns, one finds him avowedly offering a defence of rougedom. For instance he sees it as salutary for intellectual women since behind these opaque masks "their minds can play without let" (115). He posits the cult of rouge as especially suited for the restless woman who can satisfy her hunger for a more protean existence and dip into that ever varying palette to don different guises and deploy the brush to break through the constricting shackles of sameness, a desire so much at the heart of women's verbalizations in quest of expansiveness (129). Women's aspirational mobility is transposed onto the arena of the toilette. It is important to remember that the essay was published in the inaugural issue of *The Yellow Book* that ran from 1894 to 1897. That Rhys was familiar with the publication can be gleaned from the implicit as well as explicit allusions to it in *Voyage in the Dark*. The Book was known for its iconoclastic agenda and its flaunting of decadent aesthetics.Since the periodical touted its flagrant, transgressive modernity, it would be tempting to read Beerbohm's essay in that light. One can certainly see

the challenges that he poses to convention by elevating the decadent rituals of make up to an art form but in doing so does he release women from bondage or encase them in alternative one, that endows creative fluidity at the cost of actual mobility, where their quest for an empowering widening of horizons is compressed into the alluring accoutrements of the dressing table?

The sexual politics of the *Yellow Book* were avowedly heretic, and in sync with that tonality, Beerbohm's essay looks at rouge culture as an art form.Rhys's position is more from the inside. The transgressive potential of urban women's consumerism, vis a vis making up the self as against reading that consumer story as a variant of women's further entrapment in the beauty cult- that is the schism, the halfness that Rhys's story reprises.That said, Rhys's story, given her decided familiarity with *The Yellow Book* , can certainly be analyzed in terms of its recognition of women's increasing claim to urban space and their contact with consumer culture. In *Modernism and the Marketplace* , Alissa G Karl registers the definitive presence of the urban consumer landscape in the novels of Rhys and I wish to extend her formulations as interpretative frames for stories like 'Illusion'. Karl's comment that commodities could both enhance as well as contest national, cultural, sexual and racial identities is apposite to my reading of the story and the two faces of Miss Bruce (17).The initial part of the story reflects how she constructs a commodified persona in neat accordance with the narrator's bracketing of the English while the second half of the tale is where the riotous excesses of her stored cache pose a challenge to any such co-option into the disciplinary regimes of English womanhood. While the other deracinated protagonists of Rhys, as Karl points out, seek refuge from their marginalized histories in the transmogrifying capabilities of rouge, this story one must remember is about an Englishwoman in Paris.

The story addresses the question of avant gardism and Miss Bruce's uncertain place in that economy as an expatriate Englishwoman in Paris.If one were to date the story, one cannot but help reading it in context of the bohemianism of Paris in these decades. Carole Sweeney writes of the libertarian atmosphere of the Parisian art circles around this time and how *la culture negre* in particular ushered in an aesthetic climate of uncensored and libidinous space (1).She speaks of the unabashedly eroticized atmosphere of the clubs (30).Another facet of continental aesthetics was of course the recourse to the non-traditional in art by mining the cultural resources and artifacts from the colonies, as with a curating narcissism " masks and fetishes were dusted down and put on display in art galleries, salons and national expositions" (21).All the conspicuous facets of Parisian life , be it experimental, dissident sexuality, or an interest in art forms drawn from the peripheries, constitute Miss Bruce's secret life. I believe

that Rhys holds on to the stereotype of Englishness as she does so often as a weapon to critique but in this story she also looks at Miss Bruce as challenging a particular construction of Englishness.The story's ending deepens its ambivalence since Bruce's eye for female beauty is now drawn towards a dark girl. In her lingering glance at the dark woman Rhys inserts a reminder of the racialized registers of avant gardist artistic experimentation. The narrator's eulogizing of her as a shining example of British character and training and the terminology used to expound this character definition – how anything unwholesome or exotic is shunned and the healthy adopted – is rife with racial undercurrents.Miss Bruce then is placed half-way vis a vis the modernist and avant garde milieu-not seen to embrace its registers of racial alterity in her public persona, yet attracted to it privately and in some give-away moments. Miss Bruce both mimes and diverges away from the avant gardist embrace of the 'othered'- she differs in that the self-exhibitionism is missing, but she is implicated in the avant gardist aesthetic-libidinal appropriation of alterity.

In the case of Rhys one often writes against a body of critical opinion that negates locational markers in her fiction.In an article as recent as the one by Sabine Coelsch-Foisner in the *Blackwell Companion to the Short Story*, the critic nods towards the varying topographies of her fiction only to minimize their significance by arguing that "relevant as these places are to a character's experiences they are frequently sketched in a few telegram like phrases and of little importance in themselves" and in fact bolsters this thesis by critically re-enshrining Ford Madox Ford's obscuring of the spatial specificities of Rhys's vision (Cheryl and David Malcolm 110-111). By choosing Paris as the locale for an unfolding of Miss Bruce's clandestine fantasies, Rhys both ironizes the English for secretly fetishizing what they pathologize in imperial discourse, and here the reference to the carnival costume with the mask becomes important as also Miss Bruce's fascination with the dark girl, and also renders conversely a plain woman's desire to explore her sexual and erotic self. The story visits the question of 'halfness' at various levels- in terms of a woman's negotiation between the personal and the public, women's divided relationship to the national discourse and lastly, modernism as a half-way house between radicalism and a blinkered inwardness.

As a West Indian émigré who compulsively dissected England's national narrative,and by extension as a bastardized, placeless , wanderer in Europe, Rhys's suspicion for totalizing national narratives is delineated in these two stories through the eyes of metropolitan women in an uneasy relationship with those overarching affiliatory paradigms.

"Illusion" also casts a look at the racial and libidinal undercurrents that went into the self-construction of the modernist avant garde. This early story can be read as a precusor to

Rhys's fuller depiction of the Parisian milieu in *Quartet*. These fictions open up the schism at the heart of modernist formations- its unorthodoxy often entailing a problematically eclectic, aestheticized, appropriation of the other. From her own vantage point of 'halfness', Rhys was able to comment on the 'halfness' of the artistic milieu of her time- its fluctuation between the centrifugal and centripetal- from a critical distance. The following chapters focus on side by side readings of Rhys and other writers placed in the modernist milieu, and looks at intersections and departures.

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Chapter Two

The Rooming/Looming Question: Rooms/Spaces/Sites in Rhys and Woolf

"This damned room-it's saturated with the past…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 procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms…"

(*Good Morning, Midnight* 91)

In a letter written to Selma Vaz Diaz in 1953 , in response to Selma's communicating to Rhys how someone had commented on the "dated" nature of Rhys's work, Rhys says -" After all books and plays 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" (Wyndham and Melly 101).This makes one ask whether Rhys's reputation and her place in course curriculums resting so much on *Wide Sargasso Sea* might not stem from its semantical complexity being more amenable to current theoretical debates. This places on the backburner the 'dated' value of her other works- their pressing, even stubbornly repetitious, engagement with their immediate space and time.This is what Rhys seems to be suggesting- to look at those early works as steeped in a politics of rooms and spaces (imperial, racial, patriarchal, cultural) of a particular time. In many ways, the overwhelming importance of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in Rhys's oeuvre has led to insufficient attention being given to certain other leitmotifs in her work. A familiarity with Rhys's overall body of work brings with it the realization of how seminally the trope of the room, in other words, the examination of the sneer through the dynamics of space, saturates her work. This chapter seeks to bring into focus this aspect of Rhys's fiction. In the first section of this chapter I attempt to isolate the elements crucial to her delineation of space - for instance, where would one place the idea of the room in Rhys in terms of women's quest for privacy, and how she sets up in fact a continuity between "rooms, streets, streets, rooms", that is, how the discriminatory apparatuses come into play in both the sites equally. Most importantly, where can one locate the transfer points between the affective and the analytical in Rhys? A rage against imperial patriarchy, and how it manifests itself in an act of reading that is searingly expository, is where the creative province of the woman's room comes into play in Rhys. In the next section of the chapter, working within my chosen frame of looking at Rhys's work in juxtaposition to that of the high modernists, I look at the relational axes along which Woolf's and Rhys's thematics of the room can be studied - with a close focus on Woolf's *A Room of*

One's Own. What emerges as of particular interest here is how the role of anger in relation to women's creativity is foregrounded, though with telling differences in these writers. With the idea of mobility so crucial to the work of these two writers, in the following section I relate that to Woolf's *The Voyage Out* since from within her oeuvre, that is her most explicit foray into the space of the colonial. The other factor that impels my discussion of this text is that in many ways, it engages with the question of the room. Woolf's iconoclastic critique of the empire in *The Voyage Out* is largely self-referential, for instance as she looks at the subject of imperial loot and how it is inducted into the art circuits of the European capitals. Rhys covers similar territory but from the vantage point of the voyage in. Thus my reading of *The Voyage Out* is interspersed with moments from Rhys's novels that foreground Rhys's perspective on the imperial metropolis and how in the gaze turned to the rooms and sites therein an anti-institutional critique takes shape. In the final section, I focus on the perspective of the two writers on the urban metropolis and look at how many of the facets of modernity, such as consumerism and cosmopolitan flux, as also the imperial centre's space being marked by empire such as in terms of imperial exhibitions, are viewed by them.

" **This Business of Rooms…**" (*Good Morning, Midnight* 33)

Good Morning, Midnight is Rhys's most explicit engagement with the trope of the room. In an implicit acknowledgement of how seminal the architectural metaphor is to Rhys's work, Victoria Rosner begins her book, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, which otherwise focusses largely on Woolf and Bloomsbury, with a brief look at *Good Morning, Midnight*, commenting on how it "reflects a deep understanding of the values and hierarchies implicit in the design of living spaces" (1). How does this text from within Rhys's oeuvre enter into the very dynamic enquiry into spatiality and gender initiated by Woolf in her landmark text? That space here is almost given a volition and its carceral agency in the text is cryptically inscribed into the room's leering aside to Sasha, which is also incidentally the first line of the novel-" Quite like old times" the room says, "Yes?No?" (9). This could well be a smirking lover's nudge to a former love interest. The opening line also announces that this text too, like others from its writer affords no relief from a grim, unsparing, scrutiny of the varied co-ordinates of material oppression. This is an indication of the self-reflexivity that subtends Rhys's work, where the repetitious, flat toned, obdurate enactment of women's entrapment itself becomes a statement of protest.

In the undulating procession of impermanence and vagrancy that constitutes the life of Sasha Jensen, as of most of Rhys's women , the rooms are symbolic of constrictedness, yet paradoxically (given their changeability) they are also the most intimately known, consistent

features of these women's lives.What is significant is that the 'rooms' do not invite a quiescent indifference from Rhys's protagonists. Each change of locale is minutely assessed, with these denizens turning a commentative eye on the minutiae. Even the slightest break from the norm is observed and fixed with a penetrative eye. In the contiguity between room and street that Rhys sets up in her texts, both spaces are a comment on the 'disreputable' nature of these women. But it is in the reverse gaze that these women train at the interiors of these sites that speaks of Rhys's pointed engagement with the dynamics of space.Her protagonists move through a never ending procession of rooms, all of which signify the 'sneer' that indicts their itinerancy - but in the recorded apprehension of the spatial particularities of each, Rhys's texts negotiate their way between sameness and specificity, between a bleak repetitiousness and a pointed politics of space.

In another letter written to Selma Vaz Diaz who was working on an adaptation of *Good Morning , Midnight* and had written to Rhys asking for suggestions, Rhys writes that she has not much to add but certainly has clarity about one aspect that she would like to see incorporated-"That the thing should start by the patronne(a hard, metallic voice) saying-'Bon soir madame, le numero 24(or 72) nest ce pas?'"(Wyndham and Melly 140).That Rhys portrays her characters' lives as implicated in this endless scenario of rooms is incontrovertible - but the fact that she mentions room numbers indicates how the shifting locations are not to be read as a blur. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia by her own admission looks at her present room when the novel opens as a place to tide over the crisis triggered off by the breakage from Mackenzie and yet, the room that she inhabits invites a detailed response from her-for instance, when she speaks of its having a "one-eyed aspect" (7). That could be a comment on her own life being askew but it is also a wry acknowledgment of the societal squint that seems to follow 'low' women like herself , so that even rooms seem to have the license to wink and look askance at them. The room has a one-eyed aspect since the solitary window it has is " very much to one side"- again reinforcing that the rupture from Mackenzie leads to Julia's increasingly (silently) vocalized awareness of the asymmetry of social/ gendered configurations (7) .With her inside knowledge of such sites, Julia also notices, and in fact finds provocative and stimulating, the predatory iconography of the wallpaper design which as she says makes for a change from the striped wallpapers that have formed the fabric of her existence till now- to her mind, this endows the room with an "individuality"- "A large bird, sitting on the branch of a tree, faced, with open beak, a strange creature, wingless creature, half-bird, half-lizard, which had its beak open and its neck stretched in a belligerent attitude. The branch on which they were perched sprouted

fungus and queerly shaped leaves and fruit" (7-8). In a novel that goes on to speak so directly to the idea of the hunter-hunted, and where the boundaries between human and bestial are constantly blurred, this iconography surely carries meaning.

Rhys's women become the connoisseurs of seedy rooms and decrepit bedsits. Their acquaintance with the intricacies of these sites gives them a unique vantage point from which to decode the hierarchies and power equations that in fact follow them from street to room. Rhys positions her protagonists somewhere between the rooms and the streets that alike signify their non-belongingness. The writer collapses the inside-outside dichotomy to show how the feeling of being continually invaded is a part of the lives of the marginalized. As far as the inside is concerned, the assessing, sharply critical gaze of the landlords and patronnes of these establishments, is often the repository of the 'sneer' they experience on the outside- in *Quartet,* Marya commenting on her *patronne* says-"Madame Hautchamp was formidable. One heard the wheels of society clanking as she spoke"(31). Rhys's characters are piquantly placed in terms of the private and the communal. Alienated in the crowd, they conversely find themselves hounded within what should be the private - the ubiquitous presence of the commis in *Good Morning, Midnight* a haunting example of that.Their being is constantly invaded into- amputated by the societal sneer, they all envisage strategies and supports to stay afloat- claws, artificial limbs, new dresses, masks, or the consolations of alcohol.

Rhys establishes a contiguity between macro and micro, inside and outside, street alleys and rooms. It is the rituals that define public spaces that often come up for examination in Rhys's texts − she satirizes the proprieties and solemn rituals that are attached to different rooms and spaces. In *Voyage in the Dark,* Anna recounts with wry detachment how both Walter and the waiter at the posh establishment to which Walter takes her at the beginning of their acquaintance evince horror at the wine being corked. A breach of the carefully designed protocols and ceremonies that govern these places is viewed as nothing short of sacrilege - "The waiter sniffed. Then Mr Jeffries sniffed. Their noses were exactly alike, their faces very solemn. The Brothers Slick and Slack, the Brothers Pushmeofftheearth.I thought to myself,' Now then you mustn't laugh. He'll know you're laughing at him. You can't laugh"(17-18). Anna's keen insight into the ironies of the highly ritualized gestures by which the *savoir faire* of these institutions is maintained is an indication of how the reverse sneer works in Rhys - though given Anna's being on the margins, her unmasking of these facile pomposities necessarily remains unarticulated, whereas Walter, backed by his superior standing, can (and does) with impunity cut into Anna's selfhood on many occasions. And Anna's observations are surely backed by Rhys's larger thematics of how all elements threatening the reputation

of these fortresses of exclusivity are concertedly 'sniffed' out and expunged. That implication is corroborated when Anna admits to feeling an acute sense of hostility coming her way in Walter's house - "Sneering faintly, sneering discreetly, as a servant would. Who's this? Where on earth did he pick her up?" (43).The reference to the servant and waiter in the two passages underlines that it is not just class-based gestures of exclusion that Rhys is pointing to here - it is the raced and gendered registers that are brought to bear upon Anna. Thus Rhys studies the mechanisms by which society defines and exorcises the abject along multiple axes- those of nationality, race, gender and class.

Rhys shows how public spaces are defined as much by exclusion as by inclusion, as much by the elements that give them their 'character' as by contaminating traces that need to be kept out. As Marya in *Quartet* speculates on her experience of visiting Stephan in the prison tucked behind "magnificent trees"- "…people are very rum. With all their little arrangements, prisons and drains and things, tucked away where nobody can see" (44). The societal machinery's pathologizing of elements that it then removes to the margins in order to preserve the health of its cosmopolitanized, 'pluralized' ethos, is thus architecturally inscribed into the cityscape itself. Yet while the integrity of these public domains relies on cordoning itself off from all unwelcome strains or intrusions, the iniquity lies in the casualness with which the privacy of the down and out is on the other hand trifled with. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia mentions a restaurant which she frequents and her remarks focus on the surveillant gaze of the proprietor- "When she came in the proprietor of the place wished her good morning from his strategic position on the stairs leading down to the kitchen. From there he could survey the waiters, the serving-up, and the legs of the women customers" (12). Even as he carefully guards his own property, the proprietor however thinks nothing of this blithe invasion of the privacy of his women customers. It is in these parenthetical asides that the full force of Rhys's dissection of the unequal power structures that undergird public spaces resides. Speaking from an understanding of how both the nature as also the adjudication of justice in society is equally arbitrary, Julia, significantly just before receiving the 'settlement' letter from Mackenzie's lawyer, comments on " the lights coming out in the Palais de Justice across the river like cold, accusing, jaundiced eyes" (13).Thus public institutions and the biases that underlie their 'writs' and codes are read from a critical standpoint consistently. As Marya tries desperately to track down her husband who has been arrested, her brush with labyrinthine bureaucratic processes culminates in this view of the city scene through her restive consciousness -"Yellow lights like jewels, like eyes that winked at her. Red lights, like splashes of blood on the stealthy water" (25). It is in such

passages that the subjective/ affective and the critical/ analytical come together - in the immediate context, this is Marya's awareness of both the lure and the predatoriness of the city, strands coming together most obviously in the Heidlers, But it is subtended by Rhys's foregrounding of the violence and ruthlessness that the writer reads as the substratum to these expansive, cosmopolitanized urbanscapes.

Her protagonists' creative fulcrum is the anger that tears through the norms by which they are judged and found wanting. These rooms are hence spaces where their anger is nursed. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, the room that Julia occupies is where the aftermath plays itself out- " She had told herself that she would stay there till the sore and cringing feeling that was the legacy of Mr Mackenzie, had departed"(9). The room in Rhys is a not a creative crucible but a place of exorcism, not a space to birth legacies but to wrestle with them. But at the same time, it needs to be said that the exorcism from Mackenzie is not routed through transcendence of anger but rather the building up of it. It is through the nursing of anger that the passive and seemly withdrawal that the forces of "organized society" demand from those they discard is resisted- "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. Often she would talk to herself as she walked up and down. Then she would feel horribly fatigued and would lie on the bed…"(9). The passage seems to suggest a building up of rage to a feverish pitch, such that Julia is not able to carry its burden. Thus it is in these crevices, between compliance and non-compliance, between the room as a place of retreat from the derisory gaze and a place where the counter-gaze is honed, that Rhys envisions the limited possibilities of oppositionality available to her protagonists. At another juncture in the text, Julia after vociferously chastening a man on the street for making sexual advances at her, returns to her room feeling curiously exultant - "She could not have explained why , when she got to her room, her forebodings about the future were changed into a feeling of exultation. She looked at herself in the glass and thought: 'After all I am not finished. It's all nonsense that I am. I'm not finished at all' "(45).That Julia says this to herself standing in front of the looking glass makes the moment doubly significant- she pits society's attempts to hold up to her a version of herself as done for against her own discovery of the still throbbing centre of rage inside of herself. In one of her letters to Francis Wyndham, Rhys objected to someone having called her "meek" - " Meek!! When I long to slaughter for a week or more. All over the place" (Wyndham and Melly 172).This co-presence of a forced compliance and a resistant, unreconciled,consciousness is the prism through which the thematics of protest in Rhys can best be viewed.

Considering that the question of privacy and even 'boredom' in the lives of middle-class women of the nineteenth and early twentieth century has recently come up for a fair amount of critical discussion, such as in work done by Allison Pease and Patricia Meyer Spacks, it is revealing to note how far Rhys, with her focus on underclass women, diverges from that debate. It is telling how many of Rhys's characters are set up as readers. The rooms are then primarily spaces of reading.While discussions of the nineteenth century are increasingly looking at it as inaugurating women's privacy in the reading act, Rhys completely departs from that ideal. If in their lack of power, her women are rendered completely 'penetrable', their reading persona is a counter-penetration of citadels of authority. At the start of the *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, there is an important linkage established between Julia's tenuous sense of 'safety' in the hotel room rented by her after the severance from Mackenzie and the act of reading - "Julia was not altogether unhappy.Locked in her room-especially when she was locked in her room- she felt safe. She read most of the time"(9). The passage about how the room is also the site where her anger against the Mackenzies of the world is harnessed comes soon after. Thus the affective core of her hurt is also a conduit to her 'reading' of social/sexual inequity and the room becomes the locus for these ruminations. When *Voyage in the Dark* opens, Anna is busy reading *Nana*.This can be understood in terms of how Anna chafes against narrowly defined models of womanhood - an implication that is present throughout the text. She questions the premium society places on women's chastity. She frequently expresses impatience with the constriction implied in the label of 'lady' - when Maudie admiringly tells her that she always looks like a lady, Anna's response is telling-"'Oh God,'I said,'who wants to look ladylike?' "(10). Her deepening suspicion of virtuous labels that patriarchy pins onto women but that take no cognisance of the handicaps that women fight again finds expression in her later desire to choke the life out of that word 'lady' (120).

The opening scene where she reads *Nana* can then be interpreted as continuous with Anna's desire to explore all facets of womanhood. In fact, it is Maudie who places the book in a moralistic economy by calling it "a dirty book"(9). But if Anna's reading choice speaks of a desire to rise above such binds, how does one explain her feeling of menace and dis-ease as she reads? She admits to feeling "frightened" - " It wasn't what I was reading, it was the look of the dark, blurred words going on endlessly that gave me that feeling"(9). This could be viewed as in line with Rhys's examination of how scripted codes strangulate any attempt at difference and autonomy - and perhaps there is also a suggestion of the power that the male writer/ adjudicator enjoys over his character's eventual fate/ downfall. And this insight is inscribed into *Voyage in the Dark* - Anna's attempts at difference, her non-subscription to

sexual codes for instance, collapse into the 'difference', read depravity, that is imposed on her −her 'forwardness' read from within the frame of her 'lush' origins. Rhys again treads deliberately the space between reading and being read. Much of the conversation between Anna and Maudie hinges around the act of reading- from Anna's reading of Nana where Maudie warns her that all books are "just somebody stuffing you up" (9) .That it is Maudie who also points out that "a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way or another" is significant (9). While Maudie seems to comment on the sedulous nature of the narrative act, in her it leads to a scepticism with the act of reading itself −whereas Rhys's argument would be that the selective biases and the seductive power of the enshrined narrative need to be put under the reading scanner that much more urgently. Anna's province is so much that of the reader. Later in the text, Maudie wonders why Anna should invest her readerly energies in a series of poems lambasting London Anna discovers in her room. Rhys seems to suggest through Maudie's outraged reaction how heresy rests as much in the act of reading as of writing.Their rooms are spaces where they reach a deeper reading of society's exclusionary machinery. It is primarily in the reading act that their strategic cunning resides. In Rhys's rendering, the room's creative province lies in the excoriation of hierarchies.The women that she writes of, trapped as they are along various axes of powerlessness, cannot traverse the distance from the reading to the writing act. Though they can hollow out the societal script, they do not find themselves equipped to write an alternate one.

Rhys views the question of privacy from within the prism of differential power equations. She constantly circles back to how the sexual non-conformism of her women characters only exacerbates their disrepute in the eyes of the world while the men who consort with them, interestingly mostly upper middle class, can use their resources to build a *cordon sanitaire* around themselves. This is in evidence in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* where Mackenzie after playing out his sexual experiment with the 'exotic' (he admits to being compulsively, voyeuristically drawn to "strangeness") deploys his wherewithal to block off any unwelcome disruption from Julia to his well-ordered world(19). He uses the services of his lawyer to deal with her and when he sees her coming into the restaurant, supposedly to enter into a confrontation with him, he finds that the loyal proprietor, Monsieur Albert, 'telegraphically' relays his support (22). Though Mackenzie airily brushes off any suggestion of his being in trouble, he nevertheless counts on this fine mesh of protection and insulation that appears as if of itself around those with the resources to command it.

Most of the men in Rhys's texts are more 'placed' than her women, not only in terms of their social position but also in terms of being indoctrinated into the dominant script, though what

they have in common is also a desire to maintain an appearance to the contrary. In the nomadism of women like Julia, Sasha and Anna, they see both an accomplishment of their fantasies to get a taste of the wild side and a safe escape route, since they know that these women lack agency. Even the ones who are seen as 'vagabonds' such as Stephan are thoroughly attuned to the social game.Through Marya's recollections we are told of how he had gathered information about Marya's background "adroitly" enough while his own vagabondism actually translates into slipperiness-"Stephan disliked being questioned" (14). This is directly related again to the question of privacy and how the men zealously guard their own space.

Mr Mackenzie functions in the text as the embodiment of a code that allows for carefully calibrated forays into the unfamiliar, but with no obvious damage to the guise of respectability- "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 …which attracted him to strangeness, to recklessness…though when it came to getting out of these affairs his business instinct came to his help, and he got out undamaged"(19). The women in these texts understand that the sexual indiscretions of the men count for nothing but that their own sexual expressiveness leaves them vulnerable to societal opprobrium. In *Good Morning, Midnight,*vehemently turning down Rene's suggestion that he come up to her room or rent a room in the same hotel as Sasha, she understands how this would only reconfirm her louche existence in the eyes of the world- " The patronne saying:' L' Anglaise has picked up someone. Have you seen?'"(67). As Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* studies the painting on the wall in her present abode, she sees a conjunction between its suggestion of sensuality- the half-opened bottle of red wine, the piece of cheese- and the plush sofa in the room, both representing in her mind a certain "perversion" (8). She understands that these motels are often the cover for the furtive sexual self-expression of rich men and hence their iconography seems to reflect the sexual act- a single woman housed in these houses would then live under the 'gaze' of these inscriptions, the patriarchal sleight of hand again lying in how the men would escape relatively unscathed. Rhys's women tread slippery territory between sexual autonomy and how given their powerlessness, it is read as sexual availability, such as by Rene. Thus the sexual space in Rhys is shown as riven by gendered hierarchies- while the men can separate public from private, the plush mansions from the "tawdry hotel" which Mackenzie later recalls with distaste as the scene of his assignations with Julia (19), for the women, denied the luxury of subdivisions of space, it all happens in the realm of the visible and hence comes under scrutiny. Soon after the conversation with Rene, Sasha imagines to

herself a room with a giant bed as its centrepiece - “In that hotel there is a room with the biggest bed I have ever known the biggest bed in the world, the bed of beds…Everything in the room is red. And there is nothing in it but this huge bed…Shall I go and lie in it again tonight, when everything is a caricature, a grimace?”(67). Sasha is acutely aware that given her subordinate status in the social hierarchy, her gestures towards sexual independence remain only a caricature. The bed that magnifies out of context in her thoughts then is the register by which the lone woman in Rhys is defined. When Maudie comes to meet Anna, she stares pointedly at the bed in the room - “Maudie stared at the bed, which was small and narrow” (39). In Maudie’s mind, the only truck that can happen between a man of Walter’s stature and Anna lies in the sexual act - she is of course proved right, but Rhys manages to suggest the difference between Maudie who is thoroughly attuned to this cynical sexual economy and Anna who is more ambivalently placed vis a vis its utilitarian mechanics. Since Rhys writes from the inside about displaced women like Anna, there are disturbing passages in the novel that record with fortrightness how Anna even inhabits the room differently once the “crackle” of money animates her existence (23). But that in her placelessness she also emotionally anchors herself in Walter is commented on by Maudie, Vincent and by Walter himself. Interestingly the men in Rhys’s novel speak from a perspective completely entrenched in the appropriative economy of such liaisons and expect the women to do the same.Walter berates Anna for not wanting to “get on” (44) and Mackenzie is suspicious of a woman like Julia who does not possess the all important instinct for “self-preservation”- “Almost he was forced to believe that she was a female without the instinct for self-preservation. And it was against Mr Mackenzie’s code to believe that any female existed without a sense of self-preservation” (20). In *Quartet* Marya is formally instated as Heidler’s mistress when he instals her in a room at a hotel and it is again the bed that becomes the fulcrum of how Marya finds herself configured − as one in the unending line of libidinal indiscretions of the male representatives of ‘respectable’ society-“An atmosphere of departed and ephemeral over hung about the room like stale scent, for the hotel was one of unlimited hospitality, though quietly, discreetly…” (87). In cities that are otherwise inhospitable to the recalcitrant otherness of Rhys’s protagonists, the erotic underbelly of these sites is where they find hospitableness. Again, Marya reads the co-ordinates of the room with deliberation- how the plush mauve colour of the wallpaper tells a story of voluptuousness unleashed in its confines. It could be argued that the reading is impelled by her personal situation - yet as Andrea Zemgulys points out it is a crucial facet of reading Rhys to recognize how “complexly her fiction represents one narrator as so many others who suffer in the modern

world" (Wilson and Johnson 28). Zemgulys sees this also as one way to move beyond "the repeated self-centring of Rhys" (28). This is where the latter half of the above quoted passage becomes crucial − as Marya turns her assessing gaze to the erotica inscribed into the topography of the room she admits that " It was impossible, when one looked at that bed, not to think of the succession of *petites femmes* who had extended themselves upon it, clad in carefully thought out pink or mauve chemises, full of tact" (87), the last a nod towards how men like Heidler expect discretion from the woman, in an ironic counterbalance of indulgence and 'tact. The relationships that emanate from or centre in these rooms are then placed within a tacit code.

The attempts on the part of Rhys's heroines to chart their own course, sexually and otherwise, are lost in the indices of forced conformism, where the recalcitrance of their surrender gets muffled. Poised on the cusp of a helpless conformism and a toxic recalcitrance, their readerly insurrections into the skewed sexual politics that leaves them trapped in a world of recycled labels and cliches, while for their lovers it implies libidinal adventurism, needs to be heeded. In a conversation between Lois and Marya in *Quartet* where Marya's uncertain future after the arrest of her husband is the point of discussion, Lois, already trying to lead Marya subtly into an arrangement with Heidler, counsels her that men are always an option as long as it is all done cautiously-"Of course…men…But that sort of thing must be done carefully, my girl, or it's the most ghastly fiasco" (43). In response to Lois's urging her to plan this course of action circumspectly if she decides to go that way, Marya's reaction is swift and vehement-"I don't think I'd ever plan anything out carefully…and certainly not that. If I went to the devil it would be because I wanted to, or because I don't give a damn for my idiotic body of a woman, anyway. And all the people who yap" (43).It is hard to fit Rhys's women into a straightforward rubric of sexual autonomy, but such statements from her women do display an understanding of the sexual stereotypes, especially as these social attitudes are inscribed into language, that bind women. One of the striking features of *Good Morning, Midnight* is its circling back to the question of language itself. Sasha's moments of humiliation in the novel are fundamentally linked to how power over language is directly proportional to the power position of the user - Mr Blank's condemnation of her is founded on her non-fluency with French when in fact her confusion arises from his own mispronunciation. And again recalling that moment when, deploying the asphyxiating power of labels, a male voice from her family pronounced her a failure, she says -"That's what I was told when I came back to London…'Why didn't you drown yourself, 'the old devil said,' in the Seine?'…These phrases run trippingly off the tongues of the extremely respectable. They think in terms of a

sentimental ballad. And that's what terrifies you about them. It isn't their cruelty, it isn't even their shrewdness-it's their extraordinary naivete. Everything in their whole bloody world is a cliche, rests on a cliche and survives by a cliche" (36). Sasha is seen to deserve her fate in her non-subscription to family values and in the moralistic ballad that constitutes the world of the 'respectable', the whole weight of the vocabulary of respectability is brought to bear on her wildness. It is through the derision inscribed into language that the stability of their universe is maintained.This again would have direct pertinence vis a vis the route from the affective to the analytical in Rhys since she almost seems to anticipate later work done in both race and gender studies on how racism and patriarchy work through language systems.

Since the idea of the room is so fundamentally linked to the women's quest for solitude, Rhys completely departs from that rubric in positing the idea of transparency as against that of opacity - the lives of her women are fair game for public consumption, even in the precincts of the room. Early in *Voyage in the Dark*, when Walter and his friend casually try to pick up Anna and Maudie on the streets, the other man's reaction when Maudie asks him his name is telling-"The tall man didn't answer. He stared over her shoulder, his eyes round and opaque"(11).This can be directly counterpointed to how Anna finds herself being sized up by Walter-" The other looked at me sideways once or twice- very quickly up and down, in that way they have"(10). In *After leaving Mr Mackenzie,* Julia's constant feeling of ghostliness is related to her selfhood being whittled down by social opprobrium to the point where she experiences a feeling of non-being. Though critiquing the gendered distribution of private space is the premise of Woolf's idea of the room, Rhys relates the question of a productive solitude more pointedly to questions of class, economy, race in addition to gender.The politics of her vision lies not in the area of possibilities but of non-possibilities, and her excoriating the latter becomes a readerly response/ addendum to Woolf's vision. Whereas the economy of the 'room' would atleast in its utopian dimensions promise privacy for women, Rhys complicates that proposition by making the interior co-terminous with the exterior. She thus departs from the modernist scenario of the room as a space of consuming inwardness.Writing to Diaz while she was working on adapting *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys insistently points out what is anomalous in Diaz's version - " First and foremost is the start…In that sort of shabby Montparnasse hotel breakfast is (or was) brought up by the chambermaid. Drinks perhaps if you tip her. Anything else is out of character. There aren't any luxuries. That sentence comes later when she is remembering a 'swing high' period…I know that yesterday today and tomorrow are all mixed up in her mind-but don't you think it is a good thing to anchor your character and her background firmly at first. Then the

confusion might be led up to smoothly and convincingly"(Wyndham and Melly 60). This underlines how Rhys's understanding of space operates squarely within the material, perhaps even as a reply to those naysayers who find only a blurred rendition of female suffering in her books. In an implicit comment on the stream of consciousness method, Rhys seems to be suggesting that interiority should not blur specificity. A measure of her unflinching focus on the material lies ironically in how rooms are both the marker of her protagonists' entrapment but also the possible signifiers of an alteration in their fortunes. At one point in *Good Morning, Midnight* Sasha Jensen decides to change her room. Where rooms are a measure of the repetitiousness of her protagonists' existence, they are also the material bearers of a possible alteration in their fortunes. Sasha is so fixated upon a room that is first offered to her and then withdrawn that she feels she must have it-"Suddenly I feel that I must have number 219, with bath-number 219, with rose-coloured curtains and bath. I shall exist on a different plane at once if I can get this room…It will be an omen. Who says you can't escape from your fate? I'll escape from mine into room number 219" (32). This is at one level the desperate superstitiousness of a woman trapped in a sordid sameness. Yet that she still sees the room's promise as grounded in its spatial features shows how the experience of expansion and contraction in Rhys is centred in the material. Again, Rhys writes forthrightly, though the gender politics is problematic, of how the room expands for Anna once she has Walter's support, emotional as well as financial.As Anna luxuriates in Walter's attention but as much in the voluptuous contemplation of the dresses she will buy with the money she has, she finds that the room seems to grow bigger and that in her conversation with her landlady, even her voice changes -"My voice sounded round and full instead of small and thin. 'That's because of the money,' I thought" (24).Though this reinforces the idea of women's dependency, viewing it from within the trope of the room, it is an indication of how Rhys understands space through the lens of material, social and economic power.

It is worth examining why Rhys's work seldom comes up for discussion even as the idea of women's sexual autonomy and bodily self-expression as gathering force in the early decades of the twentieth century is increasingly debated. So many of Rhys's characters display a suspicion of labels attached to womanhood. There is ironically much that resides in Rhys's women characters that echoes the parameters along which early twentieth century women's literature was defining autonomy for women - their non-compliance with family values, their resistance to the figure of the paterfamilias, their hunger to see the world, their setting scant store by regressive sexual norms - yet Rhys's depiction would certainly not qualify as progressivist. These are grim narratives of failure. An open expression of sexuality in women

rendered marginalized by other factors such as age (Sasha, Julia) or race (Anna) is read as doubly disruptive. Though Rhys's novels have a squarely urban focus, this narrative of the lone woman negotiating the city does not make for an exemplary test-case. Not surprisingly, the most-focussed on aspect of Rhys's work is how far her women are sucked into the machine, with most critics dwelling on their masochism and low self-image. Though this is certainly one way of studying her female characters, what this study strives to highlight is that the experience of victimization does not take away from their capacity to disrobe and 'unmask', albeit from the margins. Having said that, one has to concede that there are no enabling narratives of feminist revolt in Rhys. But my argument is that veiled protest, in its quotidian rather than epiphanic aspects needs (and here I am indebted to Saikat Majumdar's foregrounding of the potentialities of the quotidian) to be recovered in all its potency, as the unsophisticated underbelly of what Majumdar calls "the resplendent moments of revolution" (177).

Thus rather than hastily dismissing these as stories recording women's subordination, it is important to recover the scathing critique of socio-cultural prejudices that these narratives of failure unleash. One needs to look at them not through the lens of perpetuation (which is how critical focus on the passive, suffering Rhys woman works) but rather of exposition- in other words, not to regard these portraits as perpetuating victimhood but as contesting the factors which perpetuate it.This chapter will look more closely at the interleaving of gender and urban existence since though these novels chafe against the gendered (and in Rhys's case raced) sneer that marks the cityscapes, it is also important to remember that marginalized figures like Rhys present a grimmer, and in fact, edgier picture of women making inroads into this urban landscape. While acknowledging the pioneering relevance of Woolf's adversarial crusading, it is also helpful to read writers like Rhys alongside so as to see the debate getting fundamentally altered as gender's intersections with race and class are inserted into the script, with the purpose not to negate it but to expand its scriptive scope. For instance towards the end of *Quartet* as Marya feels herself being rejected by Heidler the room at the hotel brings back the sexual functionality of these alliances - in her mind the suggestiveness of of the wallpaper with its lurid colours seems to merge with the sexually assessing gaze of Heidler. If in Woolf the walls of the room are inscribed with tales untold, waiting to break through the fetters of censorship placed on women's expression, in Rhys the room is a signifier of the gaze that continually sexualizes women-"Then she mounted the stairs to her room, where green yellow and dullish mauve flowers crawled over the black walls. She undressed, and all the time she was undressing it was if Heidler were sitting there

watching her" (113). The room, the wallpaper, and Heidler's eyes form a continuum in Marya's imagination as the spatial walls separating the predatoriness of street from privacy of room are erased.

This study probes more closely these nagging yet in the final analysis enriching discrepancies since it seeks to examine how the writings of one writer (Rhys) can be a readerly expansion on the gaps in another, more recognized writer (Woolf).The reason I believe a side by side reading of Rhys and Woolf in fact enhances the diagonistic scale of their writings is because of the startling incidence of convergence but also decided divergence. Since Rhys evokes and re-evokes the same trope of rooms, it would be challenging to explore how Rhys's stories of women's survival in a hostile culture help modulate and add a necessary adjunct to Woolf's formulations.

Going through Rhys's letters I was struck by the fact that even though the subject of space and the quest for it come up repeatedly, and she seems to reprise what we designate Woolfian territory when she talks of her desire to have a 'corner' to write in, she never once mentions Woolf, though so many other writers are named in the course of her correspondence. This makes one look anew at relational dynamics between writers. Studies that focus on the cross-traffic between two contemporaneous writers, such as Angela Smith's looking at Mansfield and Woolf as *A Public of Two* have a well-documented history of an extant relationship to work on. How does one assess Rhys's response to Woolf? I believe that her silence, resounding as it is, itself be read as a riposte.Since the territories they explore are so startlingly similar in some respects, Rhys's non-acknowledgement is an attempt at extricating herself from the rather long, formidable shadow of the better known writer. It is thus directly pertinent to this study's interest in questions of textual and canonical space. An instance from her letters would perhaps explain this – speaking of how she craves some moments to herself to be able to write, she says in a letter to Morchard Bishop-"The really important difficulty is the place, room, cave, cabin to write in" (Wyndham and Melly 98). In an echo of this in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha overhears a conversation between the *patronne* of the establishment where she is staying and a prospective client looking for a room for his girlfriend and even as Sasha hears the landlady promising him just the ideal room, Sasha sees cockroaches crawling all over. And her awareness of the material decrepitude of her existence is built structurally into the dying cadences of the next sentence-"A beautiful room with a bath. A room with a bath. A nice room. A room…"(29). The variously defined and narrowing registers of space here foreground how conscious Rhys was of privilege versus non-privilege in any discussion of space, that her textual recording of it was a matter of self-

conscious positioning. Again it is in fact in the most peripheral asides that the resistant resides in Rhys, such as when Anna is asked by Walter : "Do you always stay at these rooms in Judd street" and she replies,"Room. There's only one"(18). Rhys's works contribute in their non-heroic yet obdurately material focus to an expanded understanding of the contours of space. If one then reads her treatment of this subject as individual and even combative, it would also complicate recent trends in the remapping of modernist studies. One needs to look afresh at the belated zeal in making 'room' for writers like Rhys in the modernist canon since her own work and self-positioning seems to suggest a mind sceptically engaged with the writerly discourse of her times. Recovering the resistive strain in her writings is to see her work more profitably as a dialogue with the high modernists.

"Blue Murder In My Wicked Heart" - Rooms, Creativity, Anger

(Wyndham and Melly 205)

In looking at Rhys and Woolf together, my focus is drawn to how they concertedly give a spatial form to women's desires and journeys. However, what emerged from these side - by - side readings was whether it would be more challenging to read Rhys's writings on the subjects of 'rooms' not merely as complementary, but as a necessary supplement to those of Woolf? Over zealous attempts to enfold late entrants like Rhys into the modernist canon would perhaps replicate precisely what was the greatest anathema for the writer - taxonomical and assimilative procedures that iron out differences. And it would kill off her off-kilter insights into the ethos, literary as much as social, in the midst of which she wrote. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* places the debate on the constrictedness of women's lives in a spatialized economy. The idea of the spatially manifested sneer that operates to keep women out of centres of learning runs through *A Room of One's Own*. The text in fact begins with the question of anger, as the narrator, at the end of a day wherein she has borne the brunt of the exclusionary mechanisms that undergird the halls of learning, conjures up the figure of Professor Von X , "very red in the face" and animated by a furious anxiety to keep women from breaching masculine strongholds (39). Almost 'jabbing' at the paper in his zeal to record *The Mental, Moral and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex* , the Professor becomes an emblem of masculine rage against the spatial incursions of women (39). Thus this early passage from the text brings together the ideas of space and the gendered sneer that guards it- "All that I had retrieved from that morning's work had been the one fact of anger. The professors…were angry"(41). This brings the dynamics of anger into the text, an aspect that I believe has been under-discussed in scholarship on *A Room of One's Own*. As the narrator ponders over these discriminatory gestures, the narrator's doodling to draw out the

monstrosity of Professor von X makes her aware of her own enraged consciousness. It is at this point that the narrator tries to come to terms with this emotion. She draws a distinction between "the red light of emotion" and "the white light of truth"(41). One wonders how to read this. At one level, it could be an ironical comment on how male scholarship passes off as 'truth' its insecurities and fury at the insurrection of women into their bastions – how that 'black snake" lurks in the ostensibly dispassionate, scholarly, productions of the Professors(40). But it is at the same time an attempt to see whether anger directly feeds into creativity or if it can in some ways be an impediment to it. The narrator's thoughts on the "heat" that distorts the minds of the professors helps her get a perspective on her own anger, till as she says, the rage is expended and curiosity remains (41).This leads one to ask whether this can be expanded into a statement on the creative processes of the two writers – while for Woolf, the anger is the starting point of the enquiry, for Rhys it is the central facet of the creativity of her protagonists.

It is with her comments on *Jane Eyre* that this looming question seems to approach some sort of resolution. Commenting on the text, Woolf objects to how Jane's imaginative incursions into a variety and breadth of experience for women is broken into by the laugh of Bertha- "That is an awkward break I thought. It is upsetting to come upon Grace Poole all of a sudden. The continuity is disturbed. One might say … that the woman who wrote those pages had more genius in her than Jane Austen; but if one reads them over that jerk in them, that indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly" (76). Cora Kaplan is of the view that the rejection of Bronte here is based on this being "the type of nineteenth century women's fiction she wished her modernist aesthetic to transcend and of a pre-20th century feminism too freighted with female anger and too concerned with the personal and the domestic"(18). Since the hunger that is expressed here is for mobility and expansion, so much at the heart of Woolf's feminist vision, that part of Kaplan's interpretation is debatable. But her suggestion that it is the spectre of naked rage that Woolf finds disorienting needs to be looked at. It is important to remember here that Woolf would know that the laugh is actually Bertha's. Given recent recastings of Bronte's text, Rhys's own being at the forefront, and how Bronte portrays the figure of Bertha as aberrant and disruptive, Woolf's vocabulary of twistedness and abnormality can be problematized. It is different forms of female expression that are at the heart of the discussion – and it is not just the thematics of protest but the form that it takes that is also at stake.In Woolf's admitting to

a sense of discomfort at the raw anger in the piercing cries, her stance seems to be not very different from Bronte's. The jerk or break in continuity that she implies is because that is how Bronte portrays it, as Spivak's groundbreaking analysis points out, the urgent yet poised self - articulation of Jane set against the incoherence of Bertha. The 'high' sneer, that of Jane is to be distinguished from the ' low' sneer, that of Bertha, Bronte's text suggests that Jane learns to manage and channelize her anger against patriarchy productively, whereas Bertha's remains at the level of inarticulate, animal rage. Woolf too is disturbed by the nakedness of the anger, its unaestheticized nature. Woolf's protest primarily stems from a break in continuity- that as the narrative at that juncture is building towards a grand peroration on Western women's desire for emancipation, Grace Poole's aka Bertha Mason's demonic laugh rends the air. Can one see Woolf as in some ways re-enacting *Jane Eyre's* racially selective emancipatory counter-plot?

Throughout *A Room Of One's Own* Woolf deliberates on the question of anger as if it seems to be an unresolved issue and as if she cannot quite figure out whether it is seminal to women's expression or not.The passage that she invokes while revisiting Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is almost entirely concerned with women's desire to expand the spatial frontiers of their existence. Jane's argument, though made while pacing the terrace at Thornfield, is a controlled and analytic one where she speaks of an upsurge of feelings in the most accomplished argumentative tenor, as if answering an obtuse interlocutor.

Jane's circumspect and qualified embracing of emotion is meant to highlight how far she has come from the rebellious child of Gateshead, since it is a sign of her development that she can now intellectually defend her aspirational emotions. Though she constantly foregrounds her discontented restlessness, physically manifested in her pacing on the rooftop, it is also undeniable that she makes her case with a verbal dexterity that belies agitation of the mind. It could be argued that the narrative is written after the fact, but that logic does not dilute the incendiary rages of the first part of the book. Thus one can only conclude that the developmental trajectory that Bronte traces is of a female individualism that has to learn to articulate its desires even to itself in a measured tone. In fact the greatest display of raw instinctual emotion here is in Jane's confessing to being completely unnerved by the piercing yells. I am not arguing against Bronte's endorsement of a passionate feminism that nonetheless must win its victories by articulating itself in a dispassionate and systematic manner, managing to defeat its imagined critics, their ghostly outlines lurking in Jane's statement,"Anybody may blame me who likes…" and a little later , "Who blames me? Many no doubt "(129). I am more interested in suggesting that Bronte's tonality is then not so very

different from Woolf's and that what they also have in common is a suspicion of a more un-sublime poetics of protest such as is figured in the inchoate sounds made by Bertha . Jane's extremely masterful dissection of constraining gender stereotypes is counterpointed to the "eccentric" inarticulate cries of Bertha (130). It is also to be borne in mind here that Jane's mobility, however limited in its scope, but still in evidence through the novel, is to be counterweighed against the incarcerated status of the woman whose screams she hears. This framework is interpretatively significant since both Bronte and Woolf pit stasis against mobility and their respective works under discussion here enact the latter, as in *A Room of One's Own* the narrator/s weave their subversive way through the bastions of male authority and in Bronte too, the developmental trajectory of Jane is integrally tied to the novel's changing locales.

Through recurrent references Woolf juxtaposes her ideal of the incandescent mind against a mind in turmoil. The latter is seen as an unproductive condition. She is of the opinion that personal rancour can interfere with the integrity of the artist and she reads Bronte's creative lapse as dictated by rage at her own circumscribed parsonage existence. Woolf seems to suggest somewhat earlier in the book that the incandescence that she celebrates can somehow be safeguarded from, and then become the wry bane of, repressive patriarchal regimes. If the Beadle in the book is quite literally the gatekeeper of patriarchy, then the narrator defeats his authoritativeness thus: "I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries, if you like; but there is no gate, no lock,no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (82). This is to be read in juxtaposition to the passage right at the beginning where the narrator, as her perambulations veer dangerously close to trespassing onto hallowed academic turf, is stopped in her tracks since "Gate after gate seemed to close with gentle finality behind me. Innumerable beadles were fitting innumerable keys into well oiled locks; the treasure-house was being made secure for the night "(22-23).The lock takes on a metonymic authority allied to a staging of exclusionary mechanisms and so the narrative voice poses a direct riposte by pitting the treasure house of the mind against the treasure troves housed behind those formidable bolts. While the idea that the mind can retain a creative transgressiveness in spite of gags being placed on it is central to any adversarial narrative, what stands out in Woolf's argument here is to distance that adversarialism from a toxic poetics. A text that places itself squarely within the dynamics of oppositionality, its first word being 'But' also seems to argue for a creativity that necessarily must wean itself away from the infantilism of self absorbed emotions such as rage and personal bitterness.

That it is forms and modes of protest as much as protest itself that have a bearing on Woolf's depictions is further corroborated in the portrayal of Miss Kilman in *Mrs Dalloway*. In many ways the recounted history of Kilman revolves around the question of anger-"that violent grudge against the world which had scorned her, sneered at her, cast her off…". Kilman's 'otherness'- her German connections, her plainness, her oddity- is sneered at by the rich, represented in her mind (and quite rightly) by Clarissa (141). So much of what resides in Kilman- her rage against the apparatuses of discrimination, her acute consciousness of being a freak if judged by the standards of the patriarchal sexual economy, the cramped space available to her, her seeking compensation in material pleasures, in her case food, her reverse gaze at the culpability of the society that marginalizes her - ties in quite interestingly with Rhys's portrayals.There is a moment in the novel when Kilman, glancing at all the consumerist luxuries that lie elegantly scattered around Clarissa's drawing room wishes that Clarissa get a taste of the space of the other-" she should have been in a factory; behind a counter"(136), the space often occupied by Rhys's heroines. It seems almost a self-reflexive moment on Woolf's part. And yet the fact that the text seems to re-enact Clarissa's antipathy to Kilman problematizes the debate. In a book that records so empathetically the psychological scars of peripheralisation, the bitterness in Kilman resulting from the material indices of her deprivations is treated suspiciously. It gets subsumed in the text's larger thematics of the forces of conversion and coercion.While the suggestion seems to be that she is the embodiment of these, she could alternately be seen as the victim of these forces (patriarchal, nationalistic). Ironically, even if one were to regard Kilman as indicted by the novel's narrative thrust on critiquing the repressive regimes of conversion and proportion, then Kilman, seen as guilty of the former, could equally credibly be read as defying the latter. It is in fact the 'disproportionate' intensity of her hurt in this instance that is presented as offensive. The manifestations of resistance in Kilman are dissonant and unsublime. In giving short shrift to the enraged Kilman, Woolf betrays an ambivalence towards the often mired politics of resistance. The vocabulary of poetics is not always co-extensive with experiences of marginality.

As against this is Rhys's recording of how society turns one into a victim and yet wants the grisly truths of victimhood to remain out of sight. Sasha recounts an incident where a man who is trying to pick her up in a restaurant endlessly subjects to analysis a letter written to him by a former girlfriend and his instinct is to distrust the 'genuineness' of the letter, all this while his hand rests on Julia's knee under the table. As they move out together, Sasha mentions to him that she has had nothing to eat for three weeks, exaggerating by her own

admission, and the man quickly disappears – Sasha comments on humanity's unease with those without agency " pitching you their own little story of misery sometimes" (75).That Sasha dramatically exaggerates her condition is an enraged,almost vicious attempt, to discomfit humanity, or as Rhys called it elsewhere, its " collective face that killed a thousand thoughts" (Wyndham and Melly 205).

Both Rhys and Woolf write from the perspective of irrreconciliation.Both share a suspicion of society's mechanisms - authoritarian as well as conciliatory- that work to ensure capitulation. It is in that unreconciled strain in their writing that anger can be located. Their consciousness of how space carries the impress of the patriarchal/imperial sneer becomes germane to how the 'room' takes on meaning in their writings. In Woolf, it is the space that needs to be guarded and preserved as the crucible of creativity- the movement from outside to inside implies a break, a crossing of a threshold. In Rhys, there is no severance from the outside – there is instead a contiguity. The street comes into the room- the sneer makes inroads into her protagonists' being. Sasha sits in a tabac in Paris, hoping to find solace in drink. And yet, as she says, there is no refuge -"Then you see outside into the street. And the street walks in. It is one of those streets-dark, powerful, magical…" (89). The sinister registers of "that rosy, wooden, innocent cruelty" are inscribed into the dark menace of the street and room alike (81).

Considering that the genesis of *A Room of One's Own* lies in the explorations of a woman reader, there is much that moves along the readerly axes in Woolf's work- her reading of modernity's varied guises- fashion, transport, as also the reading of architectural and spatial landmarks. Yet the metaphor of the room remains the binding force, the creative nook, the space where 'the upheavals of modernity' (to invoke Marshall Berman) are processed and narrativized. Rhys's women are found in their rented room engrossed in a book.Woolf's women are as much writers as readers – Mary Datchet's room in *Night and Day* displays the writerly implements, the pen and the quill, and though Clarissa spends her seclusion in the attic in reading books as well as Richard's blind spots, to counter-balance that is her self-narrativization through her parties. Liz and Peter Brooker speak of how Woolf was rather hurt by Vita's casual charge that she looked "upon everything, human relationships included" as "copy" (Humm *Edinburgh Companion* 221). Both writers unpick the complex weave of the urban fabric but with important differences as already noted. Here the distinction lies in how the sinister that the reading process bares is channelized into the writerly, such as in

'Street Haunting', whereas Rhys's women cannot even voice their readerly deductions openly.

If one thinks back to how a story that is so centred in the room but where the material object, the snail's, triggering off of the contemplative is prioritized over its specific nature being decoded for the reader , we see how Woolf's focus often moves from the banal to the speculative. In Rhys on the other hand, there is no relief from the mundane. One wonders whether the title *Good Morning, Midnight* might not at one level be read as looking back at modernist aesthetics − its interest in the nocturnal, its endless harnessing of the crannies and recesses of the psyche. The first paragraph of Rhys's novel makes it abundantly clear that there is no escape from the realities of space. In fact with the room nudging Sasha into admitting her continuing enclosure in the clawing decrepitude of her existence-" it's quite like old times"(9), space becomes a character in the text. With such a decided form being given to the realities of space, Rhys forges a counter-stance to modernism's fluctuation between outer space and inwardness.

There are innumerable asides in Rhys's texts which point to how she is engaging with the Woolfian trope of the room- where the room's privacy is a crucible for creative reflection and output. The 'rooms' that Sasha boasts an inside knowledge of are the lavabos - which she measures in terms of how charitable or otherwise the mirrors in these are to her. There is a telling moment in the novel where Sasha sits in a room in one of the many hotels - "hotel of Arrival, hotel of departure"(120), as she says - that make up the fabric of her impermanent existence, and she spots a girl in the window opposite, painting her face.Her gaze is for a brief second arrested by the woman performing that ritual –" A girl is making up at an open window immediately opposite. The street is so narrow that we are face to face, so to speak. I can see socks, stockings and underclothes drying on a line in her room. She averts her eyes, her expression hardens. I realize that if I watch her making-up she will retaliate by staring at me when I do the same thing. I half-shut my window and move away…"(30). In quite a marked way, this scene is reminiscent of that quintessential moment of bonding between women in *Mrs Dalloway,* and to that extent the scene is a more gendered equivalent to the integrative talent that is the art accorded to Clarissa in the text. The scene in Woolf's text hinges around the idea of privacy. It comes in fact soon after Clarissa's (class bound) reflections on how forces like Kilman lack all balance and represent a crass, "eavesdropping", intrusiveness. The scene's resonance is spatial - the reference to eavesdropping speaks of the idea of an infringement of consecrated private space. The solitary rituals that the old lady performs are a reaffirmation of Clarissa's privileging of

private space.The mutually respectful gaze is based on the need to value one's own and other's privacy- Clarissa finds a 'solemnity' in the old lady's private, unobtruded, existence. Woolf's argument in *A Room of One's Ow*n about how male turf is sanctimoniously guarded and its inner sanctums mysteriously sacralized is reflected in such scenes where she writes a counter-narrative in that she argues here and at other places in the text, for example, vis-à-vis marriage, for women to be able to preserve an autonomous space of their own. From within that rationale, Kilman's consuming grasp is suspiciously treated. And yet Woolf's text fails to take into account narratives/ situations where most women live cramped lives, that renders the solemn communion between Clarissa and her neighbour statuesque. As against that moment is Rhys's low life take on it – two women whose interlocking gaze uncovers the 'bare' secrets of their existence, where even the room does not guarantee a dividing wall between public and private. In *After leaving Mr Mackenzie* Julia back in Paris in new lodgings, gazing at the houses around imagines to herself "that at each window a woman sat staring mournfully, like a prisoner, straight into her bedroom"(129). The window then becomes a mirroring, an infinite doubling of Julia's own incarceration. This is perhaps the only qualified model of sisterhood that Rhys can offer. Sasha remembers how she was informed by her disapproving male relation that she had been left a legacy by a female relative.And she notes, "I was very surprised - I shouldn't have thought she liked me at all…when I saw the expression in his eyes I knew exactly why she did it. She did it to annoy the rest of the family" (36). This points to the fact that the connection between women in Rhys is based more on disaffiliation (from patriarchy) rather than affiliation (between themselves).

That in interaction between women, the common frame of gender might be fractured by factors of class, race and position is an implication present in the fragment that Julia recounts to Horsfield in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie.* She describes how she began to sit for a sculptor when she first arrived in Paris. The woman Julia tells us bracketed her as 'stupid because it was outside her scheme of things that anybody like me should not be stupid." Julia also speaks of the woman as 'fanatical'-"Only she was all shut up…And she thought everything outside was stupid and that annoyed me. She was a bit fanatical, you know. She had something of the artist in her."(39) Julia one day recounts the intimate details of her life to the woman, telling her about her failed marriage and the death of her child, and feels at the end of it that her life has been rendered unreal in the very act of revelation, since the woman clearly doesn't believe her and brushes its reality away by terming it rather 'hectic' (40). Julia feels as if her life floats away from her like smoke and tells Horsfield how she digs out

papers, photographs and documents that restore its reality. In the aesthetic economy of these rooms of art, underclass women like Julia can be objects but not subjects. In telling her own story, Julia temporarily seizes control of the narrative act and hence breaches her designated place within the aesthetic economy. The woman artist's presumption of superiority precludes the brief feelings of womanly togetherness that Julia admits to experiencing.

Disempowerment renders moments of sisterhood untenable in Rhys. And powerlessness in Rhys also translates into her protagonists' "being on the boil", their rage the bridge to their expository readings (Wyndham and Melly 96).[14]

In Woolf, the subject of anger remains a looming question. In all of Woolf's speculations on the subject of women's writing in the text, a certain troubling hierarchizing of subjects and emotions fit or not for writing begins to emerge. In the fifth chapter, she moves to the crucial subject of how women are beginning to write differently through a test-case - *Life's Adventure* by the hypothetical Mary Carmichael. As a preamble to her comments on the 'novel', she notes approvingly that "the impulse towards autobiography may be spent" (85). That Woolf is not just talking about the personal but that her ambivalent stance on the subject of anger forms the undertow of her formulations is in evidence when she sets out to decide whether Carmichael "has a pen in her hand or a pickaxe"(86). Her own irresolution on the topic comes to the fore when she notes the experimental thrust of Carmichael's writing, her breaking up of sentences, her "terseness", and wonders whether this might come from a desire to purge women's writing of sentimentality (86).The conflictedness could be seen in terms of how the purgatives of feminism and modernism seem to coalesce here. Since Woolf's schematics of writing were poised so complexly on the cusp of the counter thrust represented by theses two currents, her relationship to a personalized mode of fiction (inviting suspicion for being both limited and "flowery", a word she uses in the passage) becomes doubly problematic (86). In fact though the text chooses Shakespeare as the centerpiece of a masculine literary tradition that is so overwhelming as to efface the nascent stirrings of a female creativity emblematized by the imagined figure of Shakespeare's sister, Judith, it nonetheless regards him as the model embodiment of the 'incandescent' mind (103). Woolf lauds him at one point for a writing unimpeded by presumable bitterness at hardship.

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[14]This is a phrase from a letter written by Rhys to Selma Vaz Diaz, where she speaks of how after a three year lull, she is 'simmering' and 'on the boil' to get down to writing. Thus this is an explicit statement of how being astir with unrest and indignation feeds directly into her writing process.

Though one would be tempted to read this ironically since the hardships all seem fall to the sister's lot, that Woolf does mean to hold up a model of writing whose maturity for her is premised on transendence rather than foregrounding of rage is a statement that the book tables at various junctures, too numerous to be bypassed.

Though the victories won by women were substantial enough for Woolf's feminist tract to have a tone of utopianism, it must also be kept in mind that this feeling could not be seen as an undifferentiated one, since London's landscape was by now too variegated, permeated not just by differences of class and station but also race and cultural location, to voice a vision that suggests proscribing a mode of writing emanating from bitterness or rancour. As a text that relies so much on the collective, it also needs to be said that, borrowing from Amy L. Brandzel's argument, that in feminist arguments the 'I' of the feminist subject moves towards the unisonant 'we' (509-510). In this context, she also quotes Robyn Wiegman who speaks of "a normative feminist subjectivity, one still deaf to the sociopolitical origins of its enunciation" (Brandzel 510).Thus when the narrator in chapter five again evokes the landscape of the library and now casts a look at the more heartening sight of contemporaneous female literary endeavours, ranging from archaeology to history to travel, it brings on this hopefulness about the expanding contours of women's writing: "She may be beginning to write as an art, not as a method of self-expression". And yet the narrator locates this in the sloughing off of the personal. The writerly ideal drawn up for the reader relies on a casting off the morbidity of the personal. This is even more disturbing in a text that otherwise investigates the material impediments to women's creativity. Snaith is right in saying that "*A Room Of One's Own* segues between pragmatism and a utopian or even messianic tone" ("Introduction" *Room* xvi).The text seems to enact the problematic and troubling ways in which Woolf weaves her path, here as elsewhere, through the categories of the corporeal and the incorporeal. A little after Woolf describes the room's creative properties, she recognizes that the writerly cannot remain distinct from the readerly role but even as she thinks of Mary Carmichael's slipping into the role of an observer she hopes that Mary will not " be tempted to become, what I think the less interesting branch of the species-the naturalist-novelist, and not the contemplative"(93).This is a comment that seems to be in line with Woolf's modernist suspicion of the naturalist focus on the fabric of things as espoused by the Arnold Bennett school. Though female flânerie, the centrifugal movement, is crucial for the field work of the creative mind, the ultimate trajectory is centripetal as the room becomes the

space where the philosophical suggestiveness of experience is culled from the 'naturalist' accoutrements.

Woolf's is a sustained exposition of the impoverishment, material, economic and intellectual, that constrains women's lives. It is in this spirit of excoriating the entrapments of women's existence that Woolf inducts into the text the hypothetical figure of Judith Shakespeare. Here it is not just the economic constraints but also the prejudicial machinery that straitjackets women that Woolf explores. In fact the idea of the societal sneer runs through the book in its gendered registers. Women's desires are derided and belittled whether in terms of Jane Eyre's comment on how people laugh at women for wanting more or in the way the manager 'guffaws' at Judith's desire to enter the world of theatre or when Woolf speaks of women writers who struggling against all odds have persisted in writing in defiance of the "sneers and the laughter" (55,67). This is a text that at one level celebrates the creativity that nestles in the quotidian banality and oppressiveness of ordinary women's lives. While Woolf 's text registers up close the limitations and hemmed in nature of the lives of women less privileged than herself there is at the same time as Felski says "a stigma attached both to representational art forms and the regressive, sentimental texts of mass culture" (28).

Deirdre Lashgari in her write-up 'To Speak the Unspeakable' comments on how literary norms carry a laden Eurocentric inflection such that it is difficult for women writers writing from an oppositional stance to shed, for instance "the bias towards authorial distance"(2). For the woman writer, she argues, this often means silencing the rough-edged, the strident. But as an exhortation to challenge, she cites poet Janice Mirikitani's call for women to "birth our rage" from "the mute grave of patriarchal history" (9). While oppositionalty is written into the very fabric of Woolf's 'room', such that its imprint permeates even its spatial co-ordinates (the walls of the room), one must not lose sight of the fact that it is ultimately a book that is so much about writing and hence its formulations on that subject need to be looked at carefully.

Looking to foreground the presence of a robust, seething anger in Woolf, Jane Marcus invokes the fury and violent anger in Woolf's statements and drafts, "ferocious" as she terms it (138).That Woolf was deeply troubled by and engaged in voicing the "perplexities" of women's lives is incontrovertible (qtd in Goldman 43), but the action field she envisages leaves unsaid the grim and bleak and unheroic battleground in which most women operate. In the same book, Marcus offers an interesting instance, this time by way of a feminist fantasy.This is an admittedly delightfully irreverent vignette of a master coming back to find his lair, that sanctified masculine domain of work, learning and culture, taken over by his

women servants, one lazily occupying the sofa and perusing Plato while another is on the piano and yet another unknots a mathematical puzzle. Marcus reads this as an implicit counter-argument to interpretations that point to Woolf's delimited sphere of operation, since here she is "not in her own room, but in a meeting room with other women" (135). This projected model of sisterhood in fact reaffirms Woolf's model of the 'room'. The room originates in common domesticity but houses what Woolf's own tone recognises as a moment of cataclysmic and radical upheaval. Marcus measures Woolf's radicalism in making exceptional scenarios the aspirational model- could it however alternately be read as a failure to record the inglorious circumstances in which marginalized women nevertheless register some of their minor, unremarked, rebellions? Writers such as Rhys and Mansfield, as I argue in detail in Chapter Four, bring in a delineation of the compromised, qualified, truncated or half-articulated nature of rebellion.

Both Woolf and Bronte start from a point of enquiry into the material drudgery and constrictedness of women's lives - and in both anger is the breeding ground but co-present is a concern with control over it, a more refined expression of it, such that rage should not be allowed to detract from the felicity of articulation. Rhys's province on the other hand is of raw and even purposefully shocking/ provocative displays of rage. Measured by a sexual economy that looks at age in a woman as the end of her, Julia Martin is the emblem of aging 'folly' and misdemeanour. Rhys looks at Julia's pent-up rage at a system that denies women the chance to break out of a slavish compliance to pre-formations, such as that women advancing in age are squeezed into even narrower brackets – when after their mother's death, Norah tries to explain away Julia's outbursts as resulting from her feeling "miserable" and "sorry for everything", she is faced with an enraged Julia who retorts-"Sorry? But it was rage. Didn't you understand that? Don't you know the difference between sorrow and rage?"(97). Julia then goes on to express a desire to spit in the hideous and composite face of social respectability -"If all good, respectable people had one face, I'd spit in it" (98). These are the 'unseemly' registers along which anger in Rhys is expressed. In *Good Morning, Midnight,* Sasha almost enjoys the moment when in full public view, her drawers fall off, much to the discomfiture of a man who has been flirting with her. This toying with public space, displaying their animus against the sham respectability of society, is a measure of the rage in Rhys's women. Rhys's women hold on to their anger − it is what endows them with the creative force to infiltrate the scripts that bind them into compliance. Sasha performs a flouting of the deadening consensual matrices that govern communal space with adversarial relish. Rhys turns even a peripheral aside on the dyeing of hair into a searing comment on the

coercive brutality of homogenizing processes: “First it must be bleached, that is to say, its own colour must be taken out of it- and then…another colour must be imposed on it. Educated hair…” (44). This is a starkly expressive image of the violent gestures of indoctrination wherein individualising traits are bleached out and the principle of uniformity reigns. And Sasha’s rage finds even more explicit outpouring when finding herself in the claws of this constricting societal machinery she visualizes in a disturbingly graphic image taking a hammer out to as she imagines “crack your little skull like an egg shell. Crack it will go, the egg shell: out they will stream, the blood, the brains” (*Midnight* 45). The stolid, unsavoury, materiality of such depictions of oppression blocks any co-option into a metaphysical or sublime picturesequeness as a counter-narrative to the poetics of protest verbalized in the high modernists.

The Space of Voyages: Inturned and Outbound

While most critical accounts of Rhys, even and especially ones that point to much that has gone unremarked in her writings, do not shy away from the more problematic aspects of her writings, I find that the most recent handbooks on modernism by way of re-situating Woolf ultimately enact a reinvigoration by deploying the current critical paradigms. For instance in recent attempts to instate a postcolonial Woolf, I believe that insufficient attention is paid to how Woolf’s writings are a complex negotiation between mobility and stasis, between spatial movement and spatial pause. In an article entitled ‘Colonial Encounters’, Laura Doyle, in an otherwise enriching survey, reads Woolf’s multi-perspectivism in terms of her sensitivity to a world made porous by the empire’s expanding reach. Interestingly, Doyle begins by inveighing against the “ borrowing model”, wherein the metropolitan text is always the flag-bearer of innovation, of which the post-colonial writer then partakes but by labelling her section on Woolf ‘ Intimations of Post/ Coloniality’ she comes close to endangering her own disclaimer. (Brooker, Gasiorek, Longworth and Thacker 250, 259).There is a certain compulsiveness which makes these studies continue to flirt around the established figureheads and more revealingly, to keep their iconoclasm at the forefront.

The Voyage Out makes for a revealing test-case in terms of studying Woolf’s globally oriented vision since it also circles back to the question of the room. The two strands run parallel in the text. In fact it is in the colony that Rachel finds herself with ‘a room of her own’. The colonial locale in many ways becomes the backcloth to the stirring of the nascent potentialities in her. The repeated reference to her aunts and that for much of the South American sojourn she is away from the shadow of the father is to read as a liberation from a moribund patriarchy , set free from “ sheltered gardens and the household gossip of her

aunts"(113). Helen's nurturing of her hinges around Rachel discovering the joys of space she can savour as her own-"Among the many promises that Mrs Ambrose had made her niece should she stay was a room cut off from the rest of the house; large, private – a room in which she could play, read, think, defy the world, a fortress as well as a sanctuary. Rooms, she knew, became more like worlds than rooms at the age of twenty-four. Her judgement was correct, and when she shut the door Rachel entered an enchanted place, where the poets sang…" (112). She reads absorbedly, even by her aunt's standards, the too modern books of Ibsen, full of 'harsh wrangling' (113).Woolf does gently ironize Rachel's nascent and naïve philosophizing when post her reading of Ibsen comes that eternal poser : "What I want to know is this: What is the truth? What's the truth of it all?"(112). In a rather troubling way, however, the space for Rachel's romance of transgression is co-reliant on the autonomous geographical space of the colony being breached.

Woolf's dissidence comes to the fore in the way she turns her full force of irony onto the self-absorbed community of English expatriates. It is to be borne in mind that Rachel's first glimpse of the English community at the hotel is from the outside. Woolf thus resists the co-option of her protagonist into a clique mentality. She carefully reserves the 'insider-outsider' position for Rachel. Thus Rachel's bildungsroman/ kunstlerroman becomes the driving force of the narrative and her distance from convention is underlined by her 'gazing' at the grouping of the expatriate community from afar in that first instant. But the focus remains more inward rather than outward and the trauma of death has more to do with Rachel's being caught in a moment of transition vis a vis gender than vis a vis empire.

The two strands, the inward and the outward, that is, Woolf's favoured ideological tropes and her ironizing of the self-delusions of empire, exist in an uneasy balance in the text.The satirical savvy of Woolf's text is certainly on display in the way Woolf exposes partisan attitudes in the most quotidian details. In fact her delineation of how the English cast of characters transplant their ritual mode of existence onto foreign territory is very close to Rhys's ironising of these processes. As Erica L. Johnson points out, Santa Marina "disappears in the British vacationers' 'worlding' of it… The narrator reveals the tourists' tendency to build their social identities on a foundation that bears no relationship to their immediate physical or social context.The tourists do an almost comically thorough job of reconstructing their English lives abroad, rather than relocating themselves on foreign soil and according to foreign customs"(77).

There are many junctures where Woolf's satirical insights are turned on imperial megalomania. At one juncture, the narrator observes how the expatriate community does not

consider news read unless it be disseminated from the authoritative fount of the English newspapers. Or in that other delightful vignette where, when the round of mail from back home is distributed among the English guests, their greedy absorption of it is conveyed through the caustic Hirst's eyes who likens it to "animals being fed" –"their silence, he said, reminded him of the silence in the lion-house when each beast holds a lump of raw meat in its paws."(162) Where Woolf in satirising the self-absorption of the English expatriates deploys the space of the unhomely to study the homely from a sceptical distance, Rhys defamiliarizes metropolitan spaces through her characters' inroads into that space, that is , their voyage into the imperial centres.Two instances from *Voyage in the Dark*, both examples of the room as a space carrying cultural inscriptions read through the counter-gaze of the voyager Anna, exemplify Rhys's politics of defamiliarization. For Woolf, the space of the South American hotel becomes the site for a detailed look at the self-delusions of her own civilization. In Rhys, the rooms in the imperial metropolis become the point of leverage to read its cultural, artefactual panorama, thereby excoriating its racialized and prejudicial underpinnings. Where Woolf's voyage out is turned inward, in terms of self-critique, Rhys's is a reflection of her own existential condition of unhomeliness - the voyage in of the colonial ward is a forever deferred one.There is no sense of arrival - the prior knowledge of the power asymmetries of colonialism in fact only exacerbates the sense of distance from the imperial centre, and that critical distance is conveyed in the scrutiny of the its spaces and sites.What is common to the delineation of the voyage in both writers is how other spaces and rooms (modernist, feminist, Bloomsburian in Woolf and Caribbean in Rhys) superimpose upon the ones under consideration.

While themselves under the eyes of the institutionalised Western world, the reverse gaze Rhys invests in her women comes into operation most explicitly in the reading of the cultural ephemera that dot the rooms of her characters. Rhys' references to the cultural landscape of the Western world, scant and barely registered, gather interpretative significance when carefully balanced against the context in which they are placed. In *Voyage in the Dark* , there is the briefest of references to a print of the painting 'Cherry Ripe' that hangs in Anna's room. The 1880 painting by John Everett Millais was of a captivating little girl and the painting's title derived from the cherries at her side. In her exhaustive analysis of the picture, Laurel Bradley comments on how the timeless purity of the young English maiden made the painting an apt emblem of the virtuous nobility of the British empire - as Bradley says, "The girl child symbolized all that was prized, all that the manly soldier pledged to protect"(192). Reading its timing as significant, Bradley argues that it undergirded Britain's increasingly

rose-tinted, sentimental sense of the nobility of the imperial mission. As the reprints of the painting, numbering over half a million , flooded the homes of the Empire's English speaking citizens around the globe, it appealed to their Anglo-Saxon values. But I would like to bring in an alternative interpretation of the painting by Pamela Tamarkin Reis also published in *Victorian Studies* as an exchange with Bradley. Reis focusses on the suggestive and provocative body language of the figure to argue that Millais, perhaps unconsciously, endows the girl a sensual allure, a come-hither quality (204).

How then does one read the mention of the painting in Rhys's text? To first look at the immediate context in which it appears, it is at the juncture when Anna is in a relationship with Walter and Maudie comes to visit Anna in the new rooms Walter has arranged for her to stay in. The conversation hinges almost entirely on Maudie's attempts to indoctrinate Anna into the harsh, unsentimental, rules by which the amorous game is played. Throughout the scene she talks down to Anna, casting her as a child. This denial of maturity to Anna, an insistent desire to frame her as childlike, so much a subject of later postcolonial theories about the native as instinctive and childlike, is seen even in Walter's treatment of Anna. The picture 'Cherry Ripe' is then both a reflection of the child Anna, while paradoxically representing a model of English womanhood that she is judged against. The painting in Bradley's interpretation insistently plays on the idea of white purity, while the 'sneer' directed at Anna is premised on her coming from a 'lush', 'hot' place.

The fact that the painting can invite such divergent responses, Bradley emphasising the figure's innocence and Reis reading it as flirtatious, I think has a bearing on the label of the child sneeringly pinned on Anna, working as it does in conjunction with her racially suspect status. A similarly conflictual response is directed to the 'childlike' Anna and Rhys fictionally anticipates what later postcolonial critics would theorise. More pertinent to the context of the novel however is how Rhys evokes through the painting the nature of the double bind that constrains women- how Walter, who in a moment of self-consciousness about his age describes himself as " tottering" and thus looks to (re)establish his manhood, values the voluptuousness he ascribes to Anna(35), but that is meant to function as the covert undertow to the overt configuration of his paternalistic tutelage of the 'simple'(referred to by Walter as a "baby" and by Vincent as " infantile Anna" (44, 69). In this alternation between the binaries of depravity and innocence pinned onto the 'native', Anna stands equally damned.

The overall significance of the painting lies in how Rhys probes into race-specific models of womanhood. It is in fact Maudie who berates Anna for being "soppy" and sentimental about

her affair with Walter and tries to induct her into the extractive, mercenary, logic of such exploitative liaisons (38). The imperially self-congratulatory nature of such artistic productions is thus reassessed by Rhys. The raced and essentialized nature of female virtue as signified by the picture comes under the scrutiny of Rhys's corrective rewrite, as she shifts focus to the compulsions and insecurities that hound alike the lives of women like Anna and Maudie.Maudie is quite forthright about how English patriarchy devalues women and tutors Anna to get her own back at them by "swanking" (39) it as much as she can. In fact, the subject of rooms is quite at the forefront as she urges Anna to make Walter buy her a flat in a posh area. That it is just after this conversation that Anna shows Maudie the poems by the former occupant of the room, poems that revile London, brings another dimension into play. In Maudie's visibly bristling at the preposterous prospect, as she says, of someone not liking London, Rhys records how the insider exercises the luxury of self-critique but at the same time quickly marshals a sense of belongingness when challenged by the deracinated outsider.

During her stay at Ethel's house Anna chances upon a 'Cries of London' print. She mentions them as a part of her describing the setting of Ethel's house and her insistent claims to respectability, even as Ethel attempts to extricate her own enterprise from the other déclassé places that advertise massage. The placing of the reference to the 'Cries of London' is thus pertinent since we are in the referential economy of selling and advertising wares. Ethel's chant of respectability is belied by the goings-on that Anna participates in and describes, where the services of the masseuse function at the borderline of the advertised portfolio and hinted-at assignations.

In *Images of the Outcast : The Urban Poor in the Cries of London* , Sean Shesgreen provides a history of the series and looks at the differences between its four main practitioners, Laroon, Boitard, Wheatley and Sandby. The 'Cries of London' etchings chronicled the lives of urban street hawkers. The spectrum of individual styles – ranging from pastoral, romanticized/ eroticized to harshly realistic- is masterfully explored by Shesgreen. If Wheatley for instance sentimentalized and prettified the face of the hawker, Sandby as Shesgreen says "recreated the vulgarity, the feel, even the smell of hawkers" (125). In these four artists Shesgreen traces the varied and divided history of the genre, ranging from pastoralism to antipastoralism, and from a picturesque depiction of hawkers to the "historical actualities of street hawking" (125). For instance, discussing the depiction of the flower-girl, Shesgreen argues that Sandby removes the veil of innocence sentimentally and stereotypically attached to the profession of the flower-seller, and shows her embodying a knowing sexuality and playing on it to ply her trade, thus describing Sandby's flower-girl "as

the least euphemistic" of such etchings (129) .Wheatley's prints on the other hand embody a rural "lyricism" (136).

Mary Lou Emery is probably right in conjecturing that Rhys is referring to a Wheatley print, (Wollaeger and Eatough 65) since Ethel's manufactured respectability and fervid Englishness would lean towards the more sanitized, bucolic English version. And yet it is the euphemistic sleight of hand which the prints perform that ties in with Rhys's thematics of the overt and the covert- that all that departs from the idealized is suppressed as sub-text. As Anna says in one of her many flat-toned yet gall-infused statements in the novel, "This is England and I am in a nice, clean English room with all the dirt swept under the bed" (27).Wheatley's 'Cries of London' as Shesgreen explains, would signify a similar sleight of hand; the sweat and grime of the hawkers' milieu is transformed into a consumable artistic rendition of healthy English virtue. As Emery points out, the 'Cries' evoked the "global commerce of the street" (63). She also observes that the defining element of peddling, the 'cries', "the distinctive shouts, rendered visually are … silenced"(63). She cites Shesgreen to underline the fact that these cries would most likely have sounded bawdy and transgressive.

The 'Cries of London' then allow Rhys to emphatically suggest how the indignities of the lives of the underclass are suppressed for the narrative of progress to sustain itself. The assimilative pressures that city life exerts exist alongside how it also expects you to fight hard for survival. Thus Anna has to earn her upkeep with Ethel by participating in the suggested allurements on offer yet she must not voice her discontent or even bring what is transpiring to the level of articulation, only to perform it behind the curtains of propriety. Emery reads Rhys's use of the iconography of the 'Cries' as the author's way of portraying her protagonist as a silenced woman (Wollaeger and Eatough 65). Alternately however it might be argued that Rhys turns around the dynamics of the overt and covert here so that while Anna cannot voice her critique overtly, she reads with a covert readerly acumen the euphemistic veiling of social realities. Certeau's argument of how reading as an activity is far from passive and that those who are enmeshed in societal grids find tactical spaces of creative resistance is the domain in which Rhys's work seems to function.This is also pertinent to how Rhys's work moves from the affective to the analytical - that is how the enraged responses of her women are a conduit to the more deliberate scrutiny of the Western narrative of exceptionalism by the writer.Thus these deliberately chosen though brief references to Western cultural artefacts that constitute the iconography of the rooms her characters inhabit are not to be dismissed as peripheral since it is by directing her protagonists' gaze to these that Rhys splices through the veneer of culture to the subsumed power politics coded into it.

While Rhys's protagonists have to negotiate the discriminatory sneer coded into the unhomely, Rachel's Bildung is explicitly cast as in negotiation with her own ethos. The purported internationalism of the tale is compromised since the animus that broods over the text is self-referential and precludes any genuine engagement with the colonized other. In an article on *To the Lighthouse,* Urmila Seshagiri voices some of these concerns when she says-"While Woolf's objections to British imperialism are widely known, I find that her critique of the British empire is self-reflexive, focused on imperialism's damage to England rather than to subject nations. Woolf always challenges the master narratives of patriarchy and British imperialism, but she does not additionally trouble England's representation of the world outside itself. And because her anti-imperialism does not manifest itself through claims about racial or cultural equality, Woolf's novels often reproduce a wide range of assumptions about non-white otherness as well as inscribe tropes of racial difference onto white English identity" (61). Even as Woolf's text sets out to de-monumentalize England, ironically even in that act of disavowal, it remains the centrepiece of the probe. Given that her homeground was so dominantly inscribed on her psychosphere since Woolf's battles for womanly and aesthetic autonomy were being fought there, it is not surprising that her excoriation of the perverse rituals of male authoritarianism do not take the colony as the originary point of enquiry but as one of its symptoms.

It is significant that the English party first gaze at the colony from an aerial perch. The vastness of the scene that confronts them draws from them a hushed recognition of their place in the scheme of things-"One after another they came out on the flat space at the top and stood overcome with wonder. Before them they beheld an immense space-grey sands running into forest,and forest merging into mountains, and mountains washed by air, the infinite distances of South America…The effect of so much space was very chilling. They felt themselves very small, and for some time no one said anything"(120). This is a familiar moment in modernist literature, wrought as it was against a backdrop of rapid, kinetic and in some cases, destructive change. This sense of the finitude of human existence as against the vastness of the cosmos is of course reminiscent of *Heart of Darkness,*and one also recollects that moment in *Sons and Lovers* when Clara watching Paul running into the water from afar , sees him as a little speck. The moment, though purportedly a confrontation with the native land,functions within the epistemological frame of modernist fiction, where extreme scenarios unravel startling, unsettling truths, the "strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves" as Walter Pater once put it (Marcus and Nicholls 295).

That the moment indeed triggers a transformation in Rachel is suggested in the following conversation between Helen, Rachel, Hirst and Hewet where the normally withdrawn Rachel seems the most willing to bare her soul.This in fact prompts Helen to say that Rachel is like "a puppy that brings one's underclothes down into the hall "(132). Woolf suggestively shifts from a moment when the human self is exposed in its bareness to the growing boldness of Rachel in bringing taboo subjects out of the closet. This is also directly evocative of the Bloomsbury spirit of bringing sexuality out into the open. That 'climatic' moment when Strachey uttered the word semen in the drawing room, becomes the apocryphal tale in the narrative of Bloomsbury's vanguardism. Helen's assessment of Rachel's statement as an example of her 'bravery' places Rachel in the same space – it is evoked in fact in a similar matrix of how domestic space is libidinised, with a defiant outspokenness echoing through its private boudoirs.With the Bloomsbury rooms making their presence felt, Rachel's Bildung moves in accordance with Woolf's oppositional nerve centres and the alternate locale primarily acts as a catalyst.

Rosner mentions that Woolf's memoirs carry the suggestion that good writing is dirty. Speaking of the sanitized atmosphere of the Victorian home, in the spirit of self-examination, Woolf writes: "The Victorian manner is perhaps- I am not sure-a disadvantage. When I read my old literary supplement articles, I lay the blame for their suavity, their politeness, their sidelong approach, to my tea-table training" (qtd in Rosner *Architecture* 76). Bloomsbury of course was for the Stephen sisters a release into the world of eros.Though the sexually inhibited Rachel can hardly be placed within the transgressive sexual economy of Bloomsbury, in her shy willingness to question entrenched pieties, she certainly takes her place in the Bloomsburian genealogy of sceptical irreverence. Rachel's shared confidences about her aunts then resonate beyond the immediate context- "They tidy their drawers a good deal" (129). Rachel's statement clearly carries the impress of the writerly voice here - the sanitized, desexualized atmosphere preserved by the aunts is the locked drawer whose proscribed spaces are unlocked by protagonist and writer. Rachel's sojourn in South America is then an experiment in unlocking the drawer, of rifling through spaces on which a delayed Victorianism has enjoined a silence.

The Bloomsburian frame enters the text in other ways. Chritopher Reed argues that the radicalized politico-aesthetic agenda of the Bloomsbury group found its materialization in bringing the unhomely into the homely (3).This enters the novel through Mrs Parry's parties and through the Flushings. Anne McClintock dwells on the paradox of how domestic spaces

in the imperial capitals "became a space for the display of imperial spectacle and the reinvention of race,[while] the colonies…became a theatre for exhibiting… the cult of domesticity "(16-17). This observation is interpretatively useful in studying the symbolic significance of the repeated references to Mrs Raymond Parry's parties. The self-important Hughling Elliot regards a vividly coloured scarf that he has purchased off a local man as the perfect aesthetic addition to Mrs Raymond Parry's vibrant parties. Mrs Raymond Parry's parties take on a metonymic status in the novel.This is directly pertinient to how, read against the backdrop of Empire, the overhauling of the domestic, the salons and soirees, partook liberally of the undomestic, that is, the Empire's polyvocality. Similarly, the consumerist cannibalism of the Flushings is the target of Woolf's irony as Mrs Flushing is shown to declare with considerable relish their dexterously pulled off twin duping- of the natives as well as the fashionable London circuits- displaying the loot gathered from the native villages to Rachel, she confides in Rachel about how "'My husband rides about and finds them; they don't know what they're worth, so we get them cheap. And we shall sell them to smart women in London,' she chuckled, as though the thought of these ladies and their absurd appearance amused her" (222).In her book on commodity spectacle as an indelible aspect of modernity, which in fact looks at Rhys and Woolf in tandem, Carey James Mickalites argues that readings that look at the inward turned Woolf detract from her insight into commercial modernity. As she says, "There is a rich critical history analyzing Woolf's fictional interiority…in their attention to Woolf's aesthetic project, a generation of formalists … highlight a socially and politically detached will-to-style , her 'inward voyage' …not to mention her stream-of-consciousness technique, to secure her a place in the once grand shrine of monolithic modernist antipathy towards a degraded commercial modernity "(134). Woolf's examination of this modernity includes a look at the bohemian salons that were constitutive of this narrative of modernity, as the repeated mention of the evenings hosted by Mrs Parry highlights. Reading this phenomenon vis a vis Simmel's essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life", Janet Lyon focuses on how he dwells on self-performance as one of the ways in which the individual negotiates the bustling and cacophonous overload of the metropolis. What Simmel in fact importantly says is –

> There is the difficulty of giving one's personality a certain status within the framework of metropolitan life. Where quantitative increase of value and energy has reached its limits, one seizes on qualitative distinctions, so that through taking advantage of the existing sensitivity to differences, the attention of the social world can, in some way, be won for oneself. This leads ultimately to the strangest eccentricities, to specifically metropolitan

> extravagances of self-distantiation, of caprice…the meaning of which is no longer to be found in the context of such activity itself but rather in its being form of 'being different'- of making oneself noticeable (qtd in Lyon 18).

Lyon places the salon within this conceptual economy of how "the modern urbanite feels compelled to self- differentiate, to perform with a degree of perceptual eccentricity his or her 'qualitative uniqueness and irreplaceability' amidst the indeterminate morass of the modern metropolis"(689). That the metaphorical valence of Mrs Parry's do's is placed within this metropolitan grid is clear from various references to her 'amusing' parties with odd people at their centre. These artistic ensembles were circuits where imperial consumerism was absorbed into modernist eclecticism, just as the indigenous handicraft appropriated by Hughling Eliott will be exhibited at Mrs Parry's party. That Woolf ironizes these processes does not deflect focus from the fact that Bloomsbury was an upper class, more cerebral, cousin of such formations.

To stay with the subject of the arty bohemia, Rhys's 'voyage in' entailed a growing familiarity with the coteries and art circuits of these metropolitan centres. In *Quartet,* the Heidlers' dos are the Parisian variants of Mrs Raymond Parry's parties. Lois is explicitly depicted as the salonnière .Where Mrs Parry's soirees depend on a display of curiosities culled from around the world, Lois attempts to pack that cosmopolitan flux into her drawing room through an eye for human curiosities. As Marya observes, "It was evident that she took Montparnasse very seriously indeed. She thought of it as a stepping stone to higher things" (48). She also mentions that Thursday was the day for Lois's weekly gatherings, where "the women were long-necked and very intelligent and they would get into corners and say simple, truthful things about each other"(50).That this is an instance of Rhys's searing insights into the ethos of these arty 'clubs' and 'rooms' is clear from Marya's adding that "they were both intelligent and wealthy and would come to Montparnasse seeking cheap but effective proteges"(50). That implication of undercutting the idea of art as the ascetic pursuit of higher 'truths' is most in evidence in Rhys's depiction of Heidler. Introduced at the beginning to a world of bohemian and free pursuit of art and how patrons like Heidler facilitate that, Marya soon finds his hand on her knee "heavy as lead"(13).That image is suggestive of how there are utilitarian(sexual, commercial) undercurrents - a give-and-take economy- that run the show. With her deeper knowledge of colonial structures, Rhys writes of the way the human element is written out in the metropolis's ingestion of colonial collectibles.That Bloomsburian experiments like the Omega workshops drew for inspiration from the colonies means that Woolf's world is a part of Rhys's critical survey.

That her view of these increasingly multicultural cities penetrates down to the inscribed hegemonies of class, race and social position that underwrite them is clear from her story “In A Café.” The café’s cultural openness is suggested through the range of music played there. Its patrons too exemplify its modish heterogeneity, the staid (‘stout’ in the story) conventionality of the businessman in happy co-existence with the foreigner and the bohemian (Rhys 13). Rhys works to exaggerate the respectability of the place − it is described as being “respectably full”. The café is shown to have developed a fine balance over time in that disparate elements co-exist as long as none impinges on the other. So the stoutly establishmentarian sit in a distinct group, as do the bohemian sort and this cosmopolitan mix is crowned by the foreigners. Another interesting aspect is of how sartorial styles announce allegiance, with the women accompanying the businessmen ‘neatly’ turned out and the artistic rebels shabbily dressed with their women making a style statement with their turbans.The café works on the principle of an artfully created harmony. But the carefully constructed bonhomie, the carefully achieved equipoise between distinct elements, is disrupted by the entry of the “extraordinarily vulgar” newly hired singer (14). This also underlines what is the bottomline for Rhys, that this claim to cosmopolitan assimilability is more dramatized than real and especially that the embrace of marginality by the avant garde is essentially a cultural performance, their sartorial iconoclasm a sign of that. The singer brings into the café the spectre of the delinquent when he sings of the ‘grue’, the tart, who lurks at the fringes of respectable society and whose function derives from her remaining in the shadows. When the tale of marginality brings the ‘othered’ in its corporeal reality into the cafe, the ladies take refuge in donning make-up and the men drink their beer “thirstily” looking “sideways” all the while (14).The reactions suggest that the singer’s rendition both stirs libidinal undercurrents yet disturbs the calm of the cafe.The applause that follows the song is “tumultuous” (14). How does Rhys mean us to interpret that? It could be a glance again at avant grade experimentalism- its qualified embrace of the ‘other’ so much at the crossroads of centripetal and centrifugal. The applause could indicate an excitement and provocation at the spectre of the unfamiliar intermixed with a sense of relief at the restoration of familiarity. The narrator, whose eye it is that presumably uncovers these hypocrisies and undercurrents, is the only one who buys two copies of the singer’s creation. A tenuous calm returns with the next piece on the list, celebrating how “ Mommer loves Popper. Popper loves Mommer” with the offending silhouette of the disruptive ‘grues’ expunged from that marital circle (15). The last line of the story restores the spirit described in the first line- the established ritualism that the opening line announces, “The five musicians played every

evening in the café from nine to twelve"(13) resumes after the brief disruptive interlude and "Peace descended again on the café"(15). Rhys splices through the myth of Bohemian openness and again brings into play here and more so in *Quartet* the dynamics of overt and covert-that its inclusionary spirit hides a differential paranoia. Here I would like to say that in line with Betsworth's detailed work on how specific references to the cafes of Paris stand out in her stories, to transhistoricize Rhys as a writer speaking for the underdogs of the world would be to effect an erasure of the sharp specificity of her vision.

How far the spoils of colonialism animated avant garde modernisms is similarly noted by Rhys and perhaps more unsparingly than in Woolf, given the latter's inside-outside position in this debate. This is vividly brought out in the scene from *Good Morning, Midnight* where Sasha visits the studio of Serge Rubin, the painter, at Delmar's behest. Derek Gregory's comment on how vis a vis colonialism one circulates within "an economy of representation in which the modern is prized over-and placed over the non-modern" sets the terms of the argument (4) ; the masks and fetishes erupt into a scene where the stage was set for the renewal of what was increasingly denounced as calcified art. To extend Gregory's point, cultural transplantation vis a vis empire too was "inherently asymmetric"(4). Rhys's prescient critique can be judged from Gregory's comment on how "other cultures are fixed and frozen, often as a series of fetishes, and then brought back to life through metropolitan circuits of consumption" (10). As soon as Sasha enters Serge's studio, she spots the African masks, and the response of the artist to Sasha's query is telling. When she turns to ask him about the West African masks, his reply is-"Yes, straight from the Congo…I made them"(76). This is an implicit glance at the metropolis's imperious assumption of cultural centrality. Linda Camarasana reads it as a deliberate disruption of the essentialism of the native 'authentic' (65). That Rhys remained wary of such nativist ethnographic claims for her writing is undeniable, and that may be one of the implications here. However, the entire experience in Serge's workshop is in fact that of a colonial art mart- his dancing to the tune of Martinique music and his use of Japanese cups originally meant for *sake*. We are in a space where colonial collectibles underline the eclectic taste of *le peintre*, and he bolsters that impression with the narrative he chooses as his conversational centrepiece. In an extension of the cultural miscegenation of which his studio speaks, he recounts a tale of his encounter with a mulatto.

Both Camarasana (64) and Emery (*World's End* 158) imply that Serge's status as a Jew can also make possible a commonalty between Sasha and Serge in their shared experience of surveillance and displacement. But as in a rather monologic recital, Sasha commenting on his penchant for "speechifying" (79), he narrates how the woman confided in him about how she

was hounded on account of her difference, the problematics of his prejudicial attitudes, at the level of race, patriarchy and aesthetics, come to the fore. While the woman sobs helplessly, Serge seems to be following the "music" in the sound - his repeated references to how she seemed made of stone strangely seem to indicate how she is perhaps already petrified into sculptural form in the imagination of the European artist (80). He confesses in fact to not really embrace the 'other' at a more tactile level. In response to Sasha's expressed hope that he was kind to her, he replies in the negative. In fact, in diagnosing her cure to lie in his having sex with her, he unleashes another stereotype, that of the people of other races as primarily cued in to the language of the libidinal. His presumptuous reading is indicative of his own racism. The scene ends with an image evocative of modernism's and colonialism's own taxonomical understandings or rather 'framings' of the 'other'-Sasha observes that as Delmar arranges the paintings before her so that she can choose which one she wishes to buy, the "canvases resist. They curl up; they don't want to go into the frames" (82). It is in these asides, I believe, and how they point to such broad and complex conceptual categories, that Rhys's fiction becomes much more than merely self-referential. Most importantly Rhys is defining the generative energy of her own writing written explicitly in opposition to 'enframing' discourses, or to return to the readerly, reading the fissures in modernist iconoclasm back to its progenitors. In her continued toying with the categories of high and low art, Rhys shifts that spatial axes from the ideational to the material, and shows that in her fiction the basest registers of dereliction and disenfranchisement are explored. It is precisely this claim then -of a supple embrace of the other - that Rhys sets out to interrogate by keeping the art marts at the centre of her sceptical vision in *Quartet*.

As a one time lover of as high-profile a figure as Ford, Rhys was on the fringes of the metropolitan art-scene and as such, would certainly have been witness to its matrix of coteries, clubs and manifestos. Comments such as the one made by Sasha to Rene (already cited; *Midnight* 131) on the clubby, cliquish, feel of London demonstrate the readerly incisiveness with which Rhys' protagonists splice through the beguiling accounts of cosmopolitan fluidity to excoriate the exclusionary sensibility beneath.

On the other side, writers like Woolf and Conrad are being increasingly cosmopolitanized and read as inaugurating, or at least as empathetic to, the early glimmerings of "geomodernisms" (Brooker et al 250). Even as Doyle places upfront the globally oriented vision of Woolf , the critic does concede that canonical modernists like Woolf and Conrad come close to erasing the psychospaces of the subject people yet that England is looked at anew from outside. The many references to Mrs Parry's 'cosmopolitan' parties give Woolf an

opportunity to satirize the cliquish yet facile communality of this disparate group (the English party in Santa Marina) who seem to come a little closer in shared pride at being the privileged insiders to Mrs Parry's soirees- "Mrs Parry's drawing room, though thousands of miles away, behind a vast curve of water in a tiny piece of earth, came before their eyes. Those who had no solidity or anchorage before seemed to be attached to it somehow, and at once grown more substantial" (134-35). To borrow the phraseology of Rod Mengham, used in a different context, Woolf shows "the panoramic and myopic…held in tension" (Marcus and Nicholls 367).This reads as an admission on the writer's part of how the exoticised interior spaces of the imperial metropolis are more real for its voyaging denizens than a face to face encounter with the native habitat. Each movement outward leads back to the heart of the metropole. In remaining more of an auto ethnographer herself, the registers of the 'voyage' fold inwards. If Hughling Elliot displays a singular incuriosity about the handloom's origins, only seeking to induct it into the cosmopolitanised ethos of London, then Woolf too remains divided- the concrete realities of the unhomely are subsumed into the consuming scrutiny of the homely. Woolf figures Rachel journey around the twin tropes of reading and of rooms.As against Rachel's readerly autonomy evidenced in her choice of Ibsen, Hirst posits the authority of Gibbon.His rather brusquely expressed scepticism of her intellectual potential as also his dismissive comments on her inexperience, all of which culminates in his walking off, leave Rachel in a fit of rage - "Rachel looked around. She felt herself surrounded, like a child at a party by the faces of strangers all hostile to her, with hooked noses and sneering, indifferent eyes." The sneer directed at her enrages Rachel. Hirst's abruptness makes Rachel feel "as if a gate had clanged in her face"(142). This image sets itself up against Rachel's reading of Ibsen's plays, where the reverberating ripples of a shutting door (*Doll's House*) signify for Rachel as for her creator a liberation from the patriarchal room. Rachel's 'voyage' is powerfully imagined along the notion of expanding and contracting spaces. The colony however comes to function as the space where encoded taboos are flouted or at least tested, tying up with what Mengham says, though his field of analysis is more the thirties fiction – "The apposition of the homely and the unfamiliar is an invigorating technique that sharpens the analysis of British social and cultural forms […]But it is very rarely the case that the perspective of the truly alienated is intrinsic to the focus of novel or poem "(Marcus and Nicholls 377).

The novel flits between the space of the metropole and its actual spatial setting, that of the colony. Woolf's focus on the 'room' is most clearly associated with Rachel's trajectory. Rachel discovers the novelty and importance of having a room of her own in South America.

Chapter ten and thirteen of the text function at an almost parallel thematic level since they posit one room against another. Rachel's voyage of self-discovery, where the room bears witness to her articulation of female autonomy, albeit routed through Ibsen, is set against the scholarly clutter of Mr. Ambrose's private apartment, whose disarray in fact bespeaks a mind engaged in formidably concentrated, weighty, study. The books strewn on the floor as he works on his edition of Pindar form a kind of fortress of erudition around him, which warded off unwanted intruders who could only call out to this "idol"(136), surrounded by his white-leaved books, from the outskirts, automatically reverential towards this sanctum of scholarly pursuit. The two rooms intersect when Rachel's newly nurtured curiosity, a keenness that fructifies in the 'room' she can call her own, disrupts the insularity of the masculine sanctum, ironically looking for Gibbon. She comes away with Balzac instead, only to find a volume of Gibbon sent across by Hirst waiting for her in the hall. Armed with the spoils of her incursion into the masculine den, she goes for a walk, "with Gibbon in one hand and Balzac in the other "(158).This is Rachel's solitary expedition into the countryside.What she encounters is rendered only hazily as against the filmic reel of the events of the previous day that plays on through her mind. The colony forms a backcloth to her "tumultuous" (159) impressions. And most importantly, the Western texts symbolically frame her encounter with the alien land.

The rooms inhabited by the women at the hotel are described from the inside by the narrator. In one such narrative moment, Rachel is introduced to the idea of the woman's room as a space of writing. This early work by Woolf looks at the space of the room more from the point of view of a tenuous readerly grasp of autonomy (figured in Rachel's eager assimilation of rebellious moments in Ibsen) , thus derivative rather than generative . But in the description of Miss Allan's room, when Rachel finds herself inside it, the writerly manifests itself- in the manuscript tracing the history of the English novel that Miss Allan is engaged in writing. The passage that accompanies this moment has direct relevance to the later development of Woolf's thoughts on the room, and also intersects with Rhys's depictions since the subject of discussion is a hotel room -"The bedrooms at the hotel were all on the same pattern, save that were some were large and some smaller; they had a floor of dark red tiles; they had a high bed, draped in mosquito curtains and they each had a writing table and a dressing table, and a couple of arm-chairs. But directly a box was unpacked the rooms became very different, so that Miss Allan's room was very different unlike Evelyn's room" (239). This passage I believe goes straight to the heart of the different standpoints of the two writers.Woolf looks at the economy of the room from the point of view of inhabitation, of claiming that space for oneself, Rhys from the point of view of defamiliarization, of

understanding that space carries residual traces of previous inscription that need to be contended with. Thus the difference is one of generation versus erasure, fertility versus impasse (perhaps the many failed/aborted births in Rhys a suggestion of that).

Both writers experience the voyage through the filters of their developing vision. The ideological concerns dear to Woolf - the trope of the room, women's autonomy- cast a rather long and obfuscating shadow over the space that becomes the theatre for these thought-currents, that of the colony. On the other side, Rhys's intimate knowledge of the iniquities of (colonial) power structures, remains the governing lens through which she decodes the rooms of the imperial capital.

The Urban Labyrinth

Set against modernism's polychromatic canvasses, Rhys's art seems to be one of snatches, fragments, fast changing urban locales in rapid montage shifts. In her case, however, they all combine to undercut the celebratory discourse of proliferating variety, whose logical corollary would be a space for difference. Rhys in fact halts this celebratory discourse of cosmopolitan flux in its tracks by showing how these ostensibly multicultural gregarious European cities are phobically suspicious of difference. She does it most explicitly through how her women, as walkers of the city, are brought up short against how any hint of otherness is frowned upon.Where the urban flux was suggestive of the possibility of anonymity, Rhys's depiction is of an otherness that is forever singled out for attention yet remains non-singular- how difference is defined/comprehended hazily yet hysterically. When Maudie tells Walter and his friend how Anna is harassed by the other girls who call her a 'Hottentot' because she comes from the West Indies, there is no awareness in any of them of the anomaly of location in this labelling of Anna. This in itself is a comment on the phobic reaction to any hint of otherness.

Sasha is most decidedly Rhys's street haunter. Rhys's masterful, synoptic and achronological summation of the chronology of Sasha Jensen's life gives us an insight into the decrepitude of her existence in the first few pages of *Good Morning, Midnight.* That she teeters on the brink of alcoholism is clear but that she measures her sanity quite literally in cups, that is in terms of the languor a few drinks can bestow or the rage that downing too much can unleash, is a typical Rhysian touch. Looking back to her itinerant existence in London from which she was 'rescued' by Sidonie, she remembers her "healthstroll" through Gray's Inn Road, looking at this and at that, this idle flanerie finally culminating in her gaze lingering on a "shop window full of artificial limbs "(11). As against the evocation of the sensory and psychic bombardment by the urban spectacle, Rhys pits this bleak picture of a woman, the

neurotic desperation of whose flailing attempts at self-restoration are conveyed through her take on urban walking leading to a fixation with the prospect of artificial limbs.With an acute apprehension of the societal ‘sneer’ she hopes to fit herself out to combat its sting, where the artificial limbs become a synecdoche for the ‘armour’ that Sasha sees as essential to her survival in these streets.

W Scott Haine records how there was a prohibitive 1907 Parisian ordinance against vagrants and unescorted women entering cafes (qtd in Betsworth 156). In fact, single women, as Rhys’s women almost always are, treading the streets alone not only invited the charge of suggestiveness but got enmeshed in a range of other discourses that reflected the anxieties of imperial England. Martin Pugh points out that a number of women’s magazines devoted their pages to promoting matrimony. If read against the background of the developing imperial narrative , its component narrative strands being eugenic concerns, the anxious desire to transform women into “breeding machines to populate the empire” (162), can be seen as validating state concerns.Considering that motherhood was seen as the corollary of matrimony, and the frowning upon women’s use of birth control measures, inscribed into official discourse as the Home Office considered banning advertisements for contraceptives in the 1920’s, there is little surprise at encountering the deliberately negative picture of unaccompanied women in magazines such as ‘Woman’s Own’-“You have only to go into a restaurant and note the strained, dissatisfied look on the face of a woman feeding alone [Jan.1934]” (Pugh126). Both Woolf and Rhys react to this idea of the ‘sexed city’ though with telling differences.

The city is a space differently conceived by Woolf and Rhys - alternately hostile and enthralling for one, a carnivore feeding on the powerless for the other. Again, the early pages of the book underline the dissimilar complementarities of the two writers. Both see the city as configured along networks of power yet the spaces foregrounded bespeak the difference in perspective and positionality, for instance when Sasha elaborates on the finer intricacies of lavabos. Casting a glance at how these writers perceive the space of the urban vis-à-vis women brings an increased awareness of overlaps but also sharp disjunctions. The Rhys protagonist is a wanderer but her placelessness is not a cause celebre, not an exhibition of cosmopolitan fluidity. It rather gives the writer an opportunity to dissect the hierarchies written into the cityscape.

Deborah Parsons, looking at the idea of urban wandering specifically from the point of view of the outsider says - “What is important then is not to romanticize the position of the wanderer, either as nineteenth-century metropolitan walker or twentieth century

cosmopolitan traveller.For the wanderer never escapes completely from the cultural systems of his origins (be it class, gender, or national identity); the expatriate is identified by his different homeland, the Jew is categorized by his racial difference"(14). It is this terrain that is frequented by Rhys's protagonists.Their journey through urban streets is a negotiation between the intransigent though cloaked hierarchies and the protagonists' own dubious positionality. When Sasha contemplates 'haunting' the streets of Paris, it is only after building a shell around herself, after fortifying her defenses. Her programme is built more along filtering out disturbing locales- avoidance of certain cafes, of certain streets, of certain spots (14). That marks an immediate contrast with Woolf. The flânerie of Woolf's narratorial persona in 'StreetHaunting- A London Adventure' begins in fact by casting off of the shell - "The shell like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others is broken, and there is left of all those wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye" (178). While the narrative voice sets off to embrace, indeed to hunt for the new, the connoiseurely narcissism of the jaunt is signalled by the instrumentality of the lead pencil. As the narrator looks to "become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers", the function of the pencil is described as akin to that of a poacher (177). While Rhys's protagonists need to don an armour to combat the antipathy that even the streets seem to give off, Woolf's narrator needs to redraw the aesthetic balance between inside and outside and mine the resources of the latter, to ponder over in the solitude of one's room.

In a recent volume on *Writing the Modern City* an essay by Inga Bryden is tellingly titled "There are Different Ways of Making the Streets Tell" (Edwards and Charley). She discusses how the city is visually evoked through shards and fragments by different writers (214). These are by definition then partial narratives since they are deeply personalized ways of apprehending urban structures. Rhys's protagonists are inveterate walkers of the city and in novels like *Mrs.Dalloway* and *The Voyage Out*, as also in *A Room of One's Own*, the dynamics of flânerie, mobility and excursion assume importance.

To read these two writers vis-à-vis the trope of the city is to understand Bryden's point about locational factors becoming the filter of perception and interpretation. In Woolf's essay, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', the narrator, pencil poised in hand, displays an unashamed and proprietary voraciousness in the mind's transformation into "an enormous eye" being especially drawn towards oddities and eccentricities (178). It is the residuum of the city that form the constituent parts of the narrator's recording of the "dwarf dance", a visual anatomization of urban marginalia and dereliction (180). However Woolf's focus is

ultimately on the variegated texture of urban life and these sharp observations of penury and victimization taper off, spurred on by this reminder of the teeming variety of London's streets, into her favoured speculations about the fluidity of identity itself when she asks: "We are streaked, variegated…Am I here or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there…" (182). The fleeting specificity of Woolf's consciousness of the effluvia that float at the margins of a more privileged city dissolves into a philosophical assertion of the mystery and multiplicity of human existence. Rhys's heroines constitute the voice of that detritus of the city that Woolf's narrator picks as one of the visual spectacles that the pencil records in its eclectic, writerly ramble. If Woolf's perceptive yet idiosyncratic and intellectually narcissistic reading of the city is enfolded in the writerly craft, Rhys's writing performs a reading of such aesthetically appropriative gestures. The panoramic gaze that as Saikat Majumdar argues draws Woolf towards the quotidian and the banal but only to be encased in a master-narrative of epiphanic valence is by implication what Rhys critiques through a square, corporeal and unrelenting focus on the banal sordidness of her protagonists' lives.

The movement outward in Woolf has a centripetal bias - indicated by the acquisition of the pencil, that will in the creative crucible of the room shape these jagged edges into aesthetic documents. It is intriguing that the colonial echo can be heard throughout an essay that is purportedly so grounded in the urban matrix. In fact the vocabulary almost overlaps. As the narrator browses through the volumes in a bookshop, she is attracted by the decrepit tomes that speak of how "People went slowly up the Rhine…were lost to civilization for years; converted negroes in pestilential swamps. This packing up and going off, exploring deserts and catching fevers...penetrating even to China and then returning to a parochial life at Edmonton…so restless the English are, with the waves at their door "(184) .The explorative bug seems to link the wandering of the persona with the penetrative zeal of the colonizer. She makes this explicit when she says a little later: "Into each of these lives one could penetrate a little way, far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on the bodies and minds of others… And what greater delight …can there be than to deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those wild beasts, our fellow men?" (187). But Woolf here also marks a difference that is gender inflected- the cosmopolitan openness of the narrator towards the flux of the metropolis is related to a sensibility unimpeded by masculine linearity and rigidity. Unencumbered by the weighty self conception of the masculine explorer, the female sensibility can realise better the protean, quicksilver nature of the explorative experience.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf's gaze sweeps over the disciplinary and triumphal edifices of the masculine power grid. Scott Cohen comments on how their marble fixedness is itself a sign of masculine rigidity- "Amid Mrs. Dalloway's pageant of life and variety, monuments dominate and in many ways determine the novel's depiction of London. The repeated appearances of monuments such as Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square, Gordon Statue, and the statue of the Duke of Cambridge play both narrative and descriptive roles in the novel. They delineate scenes and thicken atmospheres, and in an instant they introduce history, the state, and empire. Despite the use of monuments to hold the various strains of the novel together, the active geographical imagination of the novel is strikingly antimonumental…" (98). The comment also makes clear that in *Mrs Dalloway*, the imperial frame resonates throughout. Even as the monumental architecture dominates the cityscape, Woolf introduces a fluid perspectivism that dilutes the looming grip of these spectacles of authority. But in the perspectival flux that structures the novel, Woolf's definitive satire of the city collides with the dizzyingly cinematic exuberance of its shifting zooms where "the voluptuous spectacle of the streets" holds the writer in thrall (Donald 21). Woolf is thoroughly attuned to the materiality of London but ironically that seems to overwhelm her social critique.

It has been argued that the route that Woolf sketches for her heroine in the novel tells its own story and is also not entirely discrepant from her own experience. Calling attention to how the more 'flashy' Oxford Street formed a counterfoil to the swishier Bond Street, Bradshaw points out: " *Mrs Dalloway's* 'fascination'(9) with what it has to offer may well owe something to Woolf's soignée friend Mary Hutchinson who in 1923, the year in which *Mrs Dalloway* is set , published in the Nation and Athaneum (of which Leonard Woolf was literary editor) a lively account of delights of shopping in Bond Street as opposed to the more demotic distinctions of King Street, Hammersmith, High Street, Kensington, and the Tottenham Court Road. 'Bond Street attracts all epicures and flaneurs' Hutchinson declares 'all the perversities of refinement can be satisfied…[in] the smartest thoroughfare of the world' a view of the street that is echoed in a shopping guide : ' Oxford Street is for the world but … Bond Street is for the elect.' "(Randall and Goldman 236). Admittedly Woolf was more enchanted by the contrasts that the city offered, and her rambles were not so circumscribed as Clarissa's.Yet given that Clarissa is in many ways- in her empathy towards the 'othered' Septimus, in her homoerotic leanings, in her belief in space and distance in marriage, in the cosmopolitan integrativeness of her parties - set up by the writer as the ideological centre of the novel, the route she walks brings a sense of class bias into the novel.

The same ambivalence can be seen in Woolf's essay "Oxford Street Tide". She begins by recording the presumed unease of the moralist on the one hand and the dandies and fashionistas of highbrow society on the other towards this crude, "blatant and raucous" altar of consumption and even though her tone is ironic, she does remain torn between this quicksilver world of fast changing trends, swamped by a tidal supply of goods as well as customers, and a quieter alternative. She allows for the fertility and innovation bred in these sites of consumption yet she very clearly foregrounds more its 'flimsiness', the transitory fluff of its displays. Reginald Abbott notes how Woolf remains divided between "the exciting but terrifying realities of the modern consumer world" (195). She also once recorded her relief in her diary at finding what she wanted at a private dressmaker's, a more exclusive mode of shopping that she enjoys for being "quiet" and for marking her deliverance from the "parade" of Oxford street (197). The same anxiety of preserving the boundaries of the self in the face of the crush of the urban mass resonates in Katherine Hilberry's distaste of the "Sunday-stricken streets" in *Night and Day* (324). In a number of her diary entries this same distasteful recoil from the mass is recorded-in one from 1915, she writes-"I begin to loathe my kind, principally from looking at their faces in the tube". In another, dwelling on a 'crowd scene', she writes- "Our verdict was that the crowd at close quarters is detestable…how passively and brutishly they lie on he grass! How little of pleasure or pain is in them…" (Anne Olivier Bell 4, 76).

There is a reaction to the urban crowd in both the writers. While in Woolf, it more often than not proceeds from a desire to preserve the limits of the self, in Rhys it is a defense against a dissolution of the self as it is hunted down. Where Woolf's texts negotiate between fascination and wariness with the urban demotic, Rhys's texts bare the urban cadaver in all its grisliness. The image of the bald woman who comes to the fashion store where Sasha works is one of those vignettes that visually haunts the reader, where human life is stripped down to this macabre bareness. The daughter stands apart, in a sort of shamed horror as the mother tries on various hats on her bald head. And finally hurries her away, 'hissing' at her for inviting a snide "snigger" (sneer) from everyone at the store (20). The woman seeks to shed the anonymity that seems to descend on her with the advent of age, and that can paradoxically come only from adopting the mass lingua franca of the fashion world. Sasha on the other hand, since the episode dates back to her youth, when hounded by Mr Blank, wishes for invisibility. In Rhys, human vulnerability is exposed through a state of physical as well as psychical nakedness, be it the woman's baldness, or Sasha's constant feeling that she needs to grow bodily appurtenances to combat the societal sneer that threatens to rip to shreds her

already fragile self esteem. There is a remarkable moment in the novel when the owner asks her whether she can speak French.The man is referred to as Mr Blank and as Johanna Franklin says, "In assigning him his name, Rhys is clearly parodying his inability to comprehend Sasha in a humane manner; there is a capitalized , unthinking 'Blank' where his compassion should be"(n.p.). But I believe that Rhys is concomitantly pointing out how his dehumanized, blustering clinicalness reduces others to a 'Blank'. Interrogating Sasha about her previous job, he learns from her that she worked as a mannequin. At this piece of information his gaze slides appraisingly over her body, and Sasha, subjected to his blasé and proprietary scrutiny stumbles over the next few questions he asks her- "now everything is a blank in my head- years, days, hours, everything is a blank in my head " (18).

In *Good Morning,Midnight*, Rhys constantly portrays Sasha as battling a societal scrutiny that pares her down to such a feeling of inconsequence that she constantly envisages building a defensive mechanism around herself, such as when she tells herself-" Today I must be very careful, today I have left my armour at home "(42). Drinking too is seen as giving her the fillip to go on, and she also dwells over how she needs to don her mask before going out into a world where even the houses seem to possess the malicious volition to deride her- "If you have money and friends, houses are just houses…If you are quite secure and your roots are well struck in, they know. They stand back respectfully, waiting for the poor devil without friends and without any money. Then they step forward, the waiting houses,to frown and crush. …Frowning and leering and sneering, the houses, one after another" (28). Where Woolf and Rhys intersect is in this focus on how space is permeated by the power equations that prevail in society at large. But where the forays of Woolf's narrators emanate from a decided centre and centripetally feed back into it, Rhys's protagonists face a perennially embattled condition where the inside and outside, marked by an equally bleak antagonism,shade off into each other.Lefebvre speaks of how space and human behaviour are supposed to come together in a kind of pact-"Abstract space works in a highly complex way. It has something of a dialogue about it, in that it implies a tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a contract as it were of non-violence. It imposes reciprocity, and a communality of use. In the street, each individual is supposed not to attack those he meets; anyone who transgresses this law is deemed guilty of a criminal act. A space of this kind presupposes the existence of a 'spatial economy' closely allied though not identical to the verbal economy" (56). It this inbuilt system of consensus that pertains to both spatial and verbal proprieties that Rhys breaches through the raw, enraged consciousness of her women. Even as these public spaces implicitly betoken a code to be observed by the haunters, Rhys's women teeter close

to undermining these unwritten codes, whether it be Sasha's drawers coming down or when Julia 'assaults' Mackenzie with her glove. A decidedly ladylike accessory is thus made the instrument of Julia's lashing out against "organized society" (17).

Rhys examines the consumer economy very often from the point of view of the shopgirl/ model. Woolf's story "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" places the centre of consciouness on the other side of the counter, the upper class Clarissa Dalloway being the perceiving centre. Since the story moves towards the final setpiece where a community of women is brought into focus in the shop where Clarissa goes to buy gloves, the story invites readings such as Kathryn Simpson's who sees the shopping episode as interrupting heteropatriarchal economies by foregrounding the bond between women and thus trumping the logic of profit-driven market regimes(50) . By placing at the forefront the idea of gift-giving as connoting a specifically female space of bonding, Simpson locates a subversive thrust in the story. However, as she herself admits, the ideal of sisterhood is a qualified one.

That Woolf distinguishes Clarissa from the other more demanding customers is true: she speculates constantly about the private circumstances of the woman at the counter. But whether that too doesn't somehow romanticize and 'deepen' the shopping experience is a question worth asking.Rather than merely reading the girl's state, Clarissa reads into it and dwells on the imagined impoverishment and straitened circumstances - and in that, there is also a glance back at her own superior suspectibility. The way the story ends is for me extremely significant since Clarissa's triumphant retrieval of the other shopper's name from within the recesses of her memory seals it within a certain social structure. That the 'naming' of the lady assumes such urgency for Clarissa can be juxtaposed against the shop woman's position in the story, whose lack of name opens up avenues of conjecture. So while the 'bond' with the girl is more at the level of an exoticised transgressiveness, the connection with the lady is solidified with the retrieving of her name. In Simpson's comments on *Mrs Dalloway,* the foregrounding of female bonding leads the critic to gathering into its embrace the most recalcitrant elements -"Repeatedly throughout the present time of this novel we see Clarissa seeking intimacy with a range of women (from Lady Bruton and her daughter, to Doris Kilman, her housekeeper and a shop assistant) through the giving of material gifts and through her social gift-'to combine, to create' " (63). In this instance Simpson seems to override the fact that the relationship between Clarissa and Kilman is at best tense and that the antipathy is palpable enough to resist the kind of suggestion of womanly sympathy that Simpson argues for as a characteristic connecting all the women within Clarissa's ambit. Again a reference to her parties is important since Woolf too seems to project this as

Clarissa's 'gift'. But to attempt a straightforward gendered reading of these occasions where the womanly felicity of warmth and integrative vision is pitted against masculine divisiveness would necessarily be at the cost of ignoring discordant elements such as how class factors temper that integrativeness.

Class remains a potent factor in 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street'. There are in fact various layers that separate female presence in the story. While Clarissa's class superiority undergirds her presumptive intrusion into the life of the shopgirl, the female narrator similarly remains distanced vis a vis her superior intellectual class from Clarissa. When Clarissa in a burst of remembered affection contemplates buying *Cranford* for Milly,having just learnt of her menopausal problems, Woolf cannot resist introducing what Molly Hite succinctly terms her "canon-forming polemics" into the frame (" Modernist Turn" 523). It gives her a chance to pronounce on an earlier, old fashioned, category of fiction with "the broad pages; the sentences ending; the characters- how one talked about them as if they were real " (149). One only has to think of how the modernist writing practice is inscribed with masterful brevity into that one phrase in *Jacob's Room* that refers to " dissolving the full stop "(Woolf 3). Thus any reader of Woolf would necessarily juxtapose the reference to *Cranford's* style with Woolf's and the modernists' more refined version of realism. The rituals of self-christening in the high modernists crucially turned on a rupture from the Victorians. That the 'platform aspects' of modernism are subtly weaved into the consumerist matrix, almost as a guide to the uninitiated, for less aesthetically evolved buyers such as even Clarissa, is in evidence once again when she passes by the picture dealer's window and spies "one of the odd French pictures hung, as if people had thrown confetti- pink and blue-for a joke" (150). The story demonstrates the cultural vanguardism of high modernism through the consumerist gaze, where the more knowing narrator gently ironizes Clarissa's relatively untrained eye. It is thus a self-conscious iconoclasm, both Clarissa's and the narrator's, that is at the centre of the story.

Felski's model of nonsynchronicity is extremely illuminating for a study such as this that looks at two writers who were roughly contemporaneous yet with differently angled visions. Felski's thesis essentially gestures towards how any binding model of modernism as guided by uniformly felt temporal developments would inevitably open up a hierarchizing tendency in literary stock-staking, where the responses of Rhys to the consumerist and urban spectacle may only seem to highlight even further how her women protagonists serially regress into greater depths of victimhood. As Felski puts it, "Clearly women's lives have been radically transformed by such quintessentially modern phenomena as industrialization, urbanization,

the advent of the nuclear family, new forms of time-space regulation and the development of the mass media, all of which have shaped women's perceptions of self and world at the most intimate and personal level[…]At the same time however women have experienced these changes in gender-specific ways that have been fractured by their various and overlapping identities "(Whitworth 235). These cautionary provisos open out towards recent work in the area of feminist studies such as by Susan Stanford Friedman who argues for a 'locational feminism' where she urges that while feminist analyses continue to foreground gender, at the same time "feminists need a terrain 'beyond' these categories in which to take account of the contradictory, fluid and multiplex nature of identity "(10). Friedman emphasizes a model of feminist studies that recognizes its conjuncture with other discourses such as globalism, postcolonialism, etc.

Thus even as the women characters of Rhys and Woolf alike 'consume' the panoramic spectacle of urban modernity, the discrepant positionality of these women writers has an impact on their work. While a Clarissa Dalloway in her drawing room can re-write its patriarchal rigidities through the fluid medium of her parties, Rhys's characters live in a zone of non-belonging which collapses inside and outside into a bleak, unremitting, sameness. But it is the lethal pungency with which they read the script of Western modernity that constitutes the resistive strain in her writings.Rhys's writings would understandably invite a wary response from the more utopian and exhortative strand of feminist politics. The masochism and passivity of her characters and the repetitious enactment of female victimization in her works has been repeatedly commented upon. It is only by reading her critique of patriarchy in conjunction with the politics of location that the oppositional thrust of her writing can be foregrounded. The spaces traversed by Woolf's characters in *Mrs Dalloway* as a vehicle of her social commentary have been extensively commented upon. A reading of Woolf that is circumscribed in terms of evoking the "generic inwardness", to use a phrase from Adam Piette, of much modernist writing, given that her work enters into a sustained and provocative conversation with the social ills of her time, is delimiting (Marcus and Nicholls 420). Yet in many ways the radicalizing energy of female flânererie in Woolf remains ambivalently poised at the cusp of the centripetal and the centrifugal, between the street and the 'room', between reading the city and the 'pencilling' it into being.

While the "city's inherent theatricality"(Sheringham 97) attracts Woolf in an essay like "Street Haunting" the underbelly is only confronted at an intellectualized level. Though urban decrepitude is certainly a core element, it is not so much a reading of the banal but a rewriting of it wherein the banality is accommodated within a larger theoretical paradigm.

Rhys's text delineate a species of urban wandering that in its unrelieved grimness, cuts through aestheticized expression. In a continuing self scrutiny that is often as unsparing as the scrutiny she directs at institutionalized power, Sasha breaks her existence down to bare essentials- "My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafes where they like me and cafes where they don't , streets that are friendly , streets that aren't , rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I shall never be, looking glasses I look nice in, looking glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on "(40). It is a different take on the 'myriad atoms' of modernity that make up a modern woman's life. Sasha certainly skims over some of its primary co-ordinates such as fashion, the consumerist ethos, proliferation of restaurants, cafes and eating places, which can be read against the frame of how these increasingly played a crucial role in women's lives. But while it was mainly the sensation of increased mobility that constituted modernity's impact on women's lives, the stranglehold of incarceration is what above all characterizes Rhys's narratives. One only has to turn to contemporary writing on how mobility was so much at the heart of the transgressive freedoms that urban modernity opened up for women to understand how Rhys veers away from that celebratory narrative. In fact, most of Sasha's self-imaging is built around the spectre of deformity, lack and severance, such as when she describes herself as "an eagle without wings, sad as a violin with only one string and that one broken "(39).

Her urban narratives as Zemgulys points out are intent on remapping the metropolitan terrain to reveal "the unjust calculus of race and money that characterizes an empire" and this qualifies the more liberatory potentialities of the urban experience for women (Wilson and Johnson 30). But this should not mean that we oversimplify something "tricky, discordant" by reductively reading it as "overblown with self-pity" (Wilson and Johnson 21).That her delineation of women's experience of the city is non-progressive should not blunt the adversarial pungency of her work. It is the logjam of thought wherein we look to literary works, especially within the feminist paradigm, that speak to the future as necessarily worthy of our notice that needs to be broken. This is recorded in Jane Marcus's tribute to Woolf's greatness and continuing relevance: "The artist of the oppressed articulates the desire for deliverance of the stranded ghosts of her ancestresses throughout history. She seems hardly to have lived among her contemporaries but to speak directly to the future, to our generation" (75). In this account, Woolf both bears the burden of the unarticulated, strangled past, as well as commandeering women's history towards the potentialities of the future. But, again to turn to Felski, a voice that is not as progressive or future-oriented may well lend itself to as searing and pertinent an examination of imperial patriarchy. 'Ghosted' by history, caught at a

moment of historical impasse, Rhys as also her heroines, bring up the rear-guard of protest. To that extent, the claustrophobia of her fiction is almost a palpable recreation of the lives led by those constricted by stereotypes.

Her women's relationship to the world of consumerism is particularly pertinent to tracing how Rhys's work negotiates between the representational and the diagnostic - her fiction is quite fortright in depicting the women's dependence on the consumer economy and yet simultaneously casts a grim glance at the socioeconomic/ patriarchal power mechanisms that undergird it. At the start of her reminiscences about her time as shop girl at the fashion boutique, Rhys interestingly brings in the readerly element again-Sasha mentions how the job was dull and "You couldn't read; they didn't like it"(16). But of course there are various levels of reading that happen in Rhys; Sasha does read into the patriarchal power whimsies that the fashion house experience exposes her to- for instance in the way she understands that she got the job because the manager Salvatani's mistress put in a word for her. The reading happens at its most intense as mentioned when Mr Blank sits in judgement over her to cover his ineptness- where it expands to become a comment on systems of exploitation-" And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit" (26). Interestingly, at the point where he sneers at her, Sasha yearns for a black dress in the shop that she has long desired-her dehumanization at the hands of the consumer industry finds its salve in being on the other side of it, exercising her power as a consumer.

By situating Sasha Jensen at the cusp of the consumer economy, that is as both the shop girl and the woman consumer, Rhys probes the lures as well as the snares of this world.The text shows how women veer close to being objectified in terms of their servitude to this industry, written into that moment when Mr Blank runs a proprietary glance of appraisal over Sasha's body when told that she was once a mannequin. But she also writes from within of the aphrodisiac effects of exercising consumerist power. While in a story like "Mannequin" Rhys looks more closely at the exploitative dynamics vis a vis women's position in the consumer industry, in *Good Morning, Midnight* she writes with understanding of how consumer forays can bolster the frayed self-esteem of the peripheralized. Rhys once wryly wrote in a letter that "Anodyne has always been my favourite word" (Wyndham and Melly 71). This can be a gloss on how the impermanence and the persecutory affect resulting from her protagonists' non-belongingness is assuaged by their buying sprees.There is an interesting moment in *Good Morning, Midnight* where Rhys plays on the idea of multiple mirroring- the lives of women as reflecting back on each other. In the course of her wanderings, Sasha pauses outside a window of a hat-shop and watches a woman trying to fight off the onset of old age

and what it would mean for women in a society which measures women largely in terms of bodily parameters. The woman in turn stands in front of a mirror in the shop, trying on all the hats available. As she stands looking on, Sasha sees a prefiguring/doubling of her own fate - "Watching her, am I watching myself as I shall become? In five years' time, in six years' time, shall I be like that?" (58). Sasha understands the woman's crazed desperation to ward off the superfluity that advancing age can bring. Rhys ekes more meaning out of the moment by placing another watcher alongside Sasha - the shop woman who watches her ageing customer with almost salacious mockery -"You can almost see her tongue rolling round and round inside her cheek". This scene also codes what Katherine Streip notes about *Good Morning, Midnight* -how "the watchers become the watched" (128). This is true of most of Rhys's work, in fact-that the watchers, those who embody the surveillant/derisory gaze, are the ones under scrutiny. The more Rhys's texts portray her women's acute consciousness of disciplinary regimes, the more concerted is simultaneously the unravelling of those repressive institutional structures. This is important in terms of understanding how her texts move beyond the representational to the tactical - away from Ford's suggestion of her almost compulsive gravitation towards the 'underdog' figure towards a more consciously strategic choice of subject matter. And Sasha moves away thinking to herself that in the 'choice of nightmares' to be like the "hag" would be a lesser nightmare than to be like the "smug" shop assistant (58). Through this ensemble cast of women gazing on each other, Rhys hints at the distorting mirrors of patriarchy that women internalize.

This is not to say that Rhys does not look at these urban vortices from the point of view of the consumer. There are in *Good Morning, Midnight* instances of Sasha scathingly unravelling its exploitative structures from both vantage points, as the seducer and the seduced. In fact the two roles coalesce in Sasha's coveting a particular black dress that has been modelled by the mannequins at the fashion house, importantly visualized by Sasha as boosting her confidence and smoothing over her fumbling, 'stammering', displays of ineptness. As the woman in charge of peddling commodities, 'drugged' by the soporific sameness of the regimen she is subjected to, she understands how the allure of commodified glamour can assuage the lack inside one, as in her appreciation of the predicament of the bald lady. Rhys records from the inside both the lures and the entrapments of the consumer world. Sasha understands that Mr Blank's gaze, derisory and yet making free with her body -"Plat du jour- boiled eyes, served cold' "- presumes her to be a certain kind of woman , especially since the nature of his 'gaze' changes when she tells him that she has worked as a mannequin(25). That it is his unseeing stare that provokes the fury in Sasha is better understood if we take into cognizance

Mickalites's insight into the fashion industry. She notes that by the mid-1920's artificial mannequins were in widespread use, and were built in imitation of their human originals and even took on their names, thus enacting "an uneasy crossover between vivified objects and dehumanized women" (177).

Most of Rhys's protagonists have moments when they dwell, sceptically though not dismissively, on the metamorphosing promise of the commodified item. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna finds herself battling the sneer that is directed at the dowdily dressed and as with Rhys, even the slick, posh facades of the stores seem to sadistically join in the jeering-" And the shop windows sneering and smiling in your face "(22). Anna's speculations that follow are left deliberately vague- "'But it isn't always going to be like this?' I thought. 'It would be too awful if it were always going to be like this. It isn't possible. Something must happen to make it different" (23). Is Anna only looking at her own fortunes changing? Or is it simultaneously a more general look at the non egalitarian co-ordinates of the milieu she is analysing?

When Sasha's sense of inadequacy at negotiating the pathways of the impersonal professional world, symbolically evoked in her losing her way in the maze of corridors when Mr Blank sends her on a futile errand, culminates in her losing the job, the 'grimacing devil' inside her head is galvanized. She imagines putting out this argument to Blank -"You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value , for I am an inefficient member of society, slow in the uptake…Let's say you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple – no, that I think you haven't got. And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit" (25-26). It is not just the palpable rage that strikes one but also the vein of ironic exposure. The reason why events come to this pass is because Blank's display of 'mastery' over French and his need to expose Sasha's relative inexpertness rests on a mispronounciation of a French word by him. The contest between him and Sasha is in fact envisaged as one about a hold over language/s. Rhys shows how the language of power rides roughshod over and chokes other modes of articulation.Thus Sasha's facility of expression is only glimpsed in her asides whereas Mr Blank can contort and bend language to his will.

To finally cast a glance at one of the primary visual sites of display of imperial might in the metropole, both Woolf and Rhys seminally engage with the spectacle of imperial exhibitions. "Thunder at Wembley" is Woolf's evocation of the 1924 Empire exhibition held at Wembley. The essay posits throughout an opposition between the organizational precision of

the architects of the show and the anarchic designs of nature. The refrain of ‘six and eightpence’ is seen as defining the priniciple of order, measure and uniformity that the organizers hope to achieve, almost as a counterstance to the inherent diversity of the colonial spread on display. There is a subtle hint that this effort at containment might be symptomatic of Britain’s efforts to ‘manage’ the imperial polyphony of its territories. There is also a clear suggestion that there is something fundamentally unnatural in ‘converting’ such diversity into the homogeneous label of ‘empire’, erasing disparate experiences to the credit of that fine term ‘ democracy’. ‘Conversion’ works here too in sync with its sister ‘proportion’, since the wares, wrenched from their respective contexts, are all proportionately inducted into the enveloping matrix of six and eightpence.

This is as one of Woolf’s most astute comments on the homogenizing imperatives underpinning the British empire. It needs to be said of course that the imperial spectacle is seen by the narrator from an aerial remove, and the exact nature of what was exhibited is hardly mentioned.What Woolf does look at closely though from an ironic distance is the effect this has on the populace gathered to see it. Interestingly Woolf again brings in the idea of the natural order of things when talking about those gathered, and seems to read their awed, hushed, reverence, for the scene as a break from their settled existences. Woolf does hint at how the anarchic individualism of the spectator might put up a resistance to the persuasiveness of the exhibit. Yet, she changes tack and evoking the routinized, mechanical nature of city life as their natural mode of life, shows how their induction into a novel frame volatilizes them from passive into active adherents of empire-“ But whatever has happened to our contemporaries? Each is beautiful, each is stately.” And a little later - “Can it be that one is seeing human beings for the first time? In streets they hurry, in houses they talk, they are bankers in banks, sell shoes in shops”(170). Not only does this implicitly pit the deglamorized, mundane existence of these citizens against the exoticized spectacle they consume but it also suggests that their respective shells are cast off and they are bound by a collective aura of dignity and stateliness that proximity to the spectacle bestows on them. Emery point out how working class visitors to the Exhibition “were also imagining themselves in new and contradictory ways. Touring Wembley they became simultaneously aristocratic and middle class…Relocated mostly from London to a suburb, they became ‘neighbours’ of the colonies, all gathered in ‘one place’ and part of the same ‘Family’ ” (*Modernism, the Visual* 64) Woolf ‘s subtlety lies in conveying how the alienated lives of these citizens is knit into a communality of celebration. While Hoffenberg concedes that the exhibition experience fundamentally relied on “the nearly limitless fantasy of public

participation" (xviii), he also points to the more conflictual filters of consensus and dissent through which these visual spectacles were approached. Considering the presence of a considerable expatriate community in London by then or the presence of a dissenting or at least sceptically detached subsegment of the British population, such as Woolf herself, the way these edifices of imperial glory were interpreted and consumed was surely "not unidirectional", as Hoffenberg urges in his preface (xviii). Yet Woolf's essay does not register tangible dissent, except in the form of 'nature' dousing cold water over the magnificently erected pageantry of empire. The reactions of those who gaze at the display are more or less knitted into a common pattern, and a definitive criticism of these jingoistic exercises is not voiced except through the observations of the narrator. An effective counterbalance to it does not emerge from within the public itself. It is in fact left to nature to unleash a counteractive fury against the display of power. By a near elision of the exhibits on show, the focus is centred more on sensibilities of the gazers than on the predicament of the gazed.

That voice that understands the 'scriptural imperialism' of these colonial exhibitions, from the point of view of the marked and inscribed, is found in Rhys (Certeau 169). One of the most haunting dreams that Sasha has in *Good Morning, Midnight* raises the ubiquitous spectre of imperial exhibitionism and Rhys is certainly using it in the sense of "the ethnic peep-show" in Mackenzie's terminology, where otherness marks one out as an object of curiosity (Porter 284). Though her specific reference as critics point out is to the Paris Exhibition, the London tube station becomes the originary point. Rhys's entire description centres on the sensation of claustrophobic entrapment- "Many people are in front of me; many people are behind me. Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the Exhibition- I want the way out. There are passages to the right and passages to the left, but no exit sign. Everywhere the fingers point and the placards read : This Way to the Exhibition…I touch the shoulder of the man in front of me . I say: 'I want the way out.' But he points to the placards and his hand is made of steel…" (12). Rhys highlights the steely power equations that underpin the imperial metropolises. Rhys militates against "the stagnations of purist identity politics". Given her own uneasy assimilation into any of those purist slots, she looks askance at purist identity formations and here the backcloth of the 1937 exposition is apposite in its implicit reference to fascist politics. There is in fact a paranoia about nationalities in the novel. There is that searingly ironic moment when Sasha and two men who she has just met stop beneath a lamppost " to guess nationalities." Given that *Good Morning, Midnight* deploys the cinematic

metaphor, this moment seems to give an ironic twist to the classic romantic interlude of popular cinema. Importantly, Sasha's silent comment is significant: "We stop under a lamp-post to guess nationalities. So they say, though I expect it is because they want to have a closer look at me" (39). This is a comment on how questions of nationality are more germane to male selfhood and that the gaze that is turned on women judges them along multiple axes, so that the sense of impalement is more dispersed yet also more final. Geoff Gilbert notes that everybody seems to be under pressure to prove belonging (Anna Louise-Milne 207), an issue that Rhys then complicates since mostly everyone seems to be dubiously positioned in relation to the question of national belonging, like Sasha herself who earns the disapproval of the patron of the hotel where she has taken lodging since she has not filled in nationality by marriage.The atmosphere of surveillance that Gilbert notes as enveloping Paris is corroborated by Boitin's mention of how, "in 1923, the Ministry of Colonies centralized the Centres des Affaires Indigenes (Centre for Native Affairs, CAI) …The CAI's focus was on spying up and regulating urban associations. The CAI worked closely with the Ministry of the Interior or in particular with the French Surete Generale, or secret police to recruit spies, translators and so forth. The CAI also coordinated closely with the Prefecture of Police…and in particular with the prefecture's political branch…which had a section devoted to watching over migrants and detecting revolutionary colonial propaganda" (xxv).Thus the cloud of suspicion that undergirds these urban power centres has as much to with international relations as with the national parameters being redefined in the face of the "irremediable leakages" of colonialism. Though Rhys's criticism of London is recorded more explicitly, that she certainly traces a disjunction between the elastic inclusiveness of Bohemian Paris and its policing of discordant elements is also undeniable. In her article on Rhys's depiction of the exhibition, Linda Camarasana foregrounds how it ties in with the novel's bleak anatomization of fractious humanity, symptomised in the giant confrontational placements of the German and Soviet pavilions - "Rhys writes a counternarrative to the triumphant and purportedly inclusive nationalism that is on display at the exhibition "(58).Where such grand exhibitions would be meant to showcase an internationalist kaleidoscopic breadth, Rhys sees them as exemplifying a petrification of attitudes. Both writers study these pageants in terms of the violence of consensus they were primed to produce.Woolf's focus is self-critical whereas Rhys interprets it in continuity with the sneer at the heart of Western centric power, with the colonial manifestation of it always her reference point.

As Rhys's protagonists wind their way through the urban labyrinth, how does one read their edgy positionality- poised somewhere between compliance and non-compliance to the social

script, as exemplified by their relationship to the seductions of the consumer economy for instance? One way of reckoning with this is to recognize that there might not always be a seamless consistency between theorized and enacted forms of feminist protest since, to return to Friedman's argument that "Reading the subjectivities within a text involves tracing the mediated link between the multiply situated, historically specific producer and product, writer and text, scriptor and narrative voice" (27). Given her own piquant positionality, inflecting in diverse ways the portraiture of her protagonists, Rhys's protest articulates itself more through a claustrophobically, unrelentingly, representional art − there is no beyond and it is perhaps through that that she portrays most starkly the nightmarish present. In one of the early reviews of *Quartet* published in the 'Manchester Guardian', the reviewer is predictably critical of the sameness of her scenarios: "The limitations are the limitations of the subject, of the characters…Miss Rhys is an artist but a good deal depends on what she does next" (qtd in Pizzichini 198). This search for a deeper vision in her work, one that would perhaps be a palliative to the readerly entrapment in the grimness of her settings, is an early symptom of what Jennifer Mitchell rightly describes as the "fairly monolithic scholarship" on Rhys (Wilson and Johnson 190). Even if one leaves aside the fact that Rhys's novelistic agenda is in fact inseparable from specificity of place, it needs to be reiterated that the stranglehold is repeatedly cast around the reader's throat by the bleak reprisal of the slide downwards. However by focusing on the lens she brings to bear on the city, both the flux and the stasis of her works can be reckoned with. The urban boom of her time is registered as much by her as by Woolf, be it consumerism, the cinema, the bohemia or advertising, but the visual lens through which she reads these is mediated by her intimate knowledge of the murky realities of the colonial experience that for her becomes the filter for reckoning with the European narrative of exceptionalism.

Rooms and spaces are the matrix along which the visions of these two writers unfold. Both overhaul the scripts that debar women from expanding the contours of their existence. The difference lies in how in Woolf the heresy is located in the writing act, in the birthing of Judith Shakespeare, whereas in Rhys the heretic operates through the readerly. As their women negotiate the urban vortex, the street-room dichotomy plays itself out in both. While in Woolf, it is conceived along the lines of severance, in Rhys the spaces interpenetrate in the simmering consciousness of her protagonists.

Writing about *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a counter narrative to Bronte's novel, Rhys has moments of doubt-"I have a very great and deep admiration for the Bronte sisters…How then can I of all people say that she was wrong? …Or get cheap publicity from her (often) splendid book?"

(Wyndham and Melly 271). This is an indication of how complex and divided relations between writers can be. At the edges of the high modernist coteries, Rhys ironises the blind spots of high modernism as this chapter has in part suggested. Yet as women writers implicated in the same imperial-patriarchal milieu, Rhys's and Woolf's response to those times through the quest for the room is best read side by side than in any easy derivative economy.

Chapter Three

"Anointed Scoundrels"- The Gendered Spaces of Colonial Crossings: The 'Voyage In' and the 'Voyage Out' in Rhys and Conrad

(*Lord Jim* 54)

Since Edward Said's reflections in *Culture and Imperialism* on how most of the work on European modernism leaves out "the massive infusions of non-European cultures into the metropolitan heartland during the early years of the century" there have been a slew of works that engage with the "voyage in" as seminally as the voyage out (242). Said wonders in that text whether "the voyage in is retributive" (256). This is an important insight since in focussing on how the artists from the colonial peripheries negotiated their way through the modernist milieu, one can recover an adversarial vision in their work that renders tenuous the chronological wedge between modernist and postcolonial literature.The editors of *Postcolonial Criticism* see postcolonial writing as "a site of radical contestation and contestatory radicalism" (Gilbert, Stanton and Maley 3). The resistant reposited in postcolonial writing would be in ideological sync with the more politically oriented anti-colonial movements that emerged in colonized areas as a fierce challenge to colonial authority. But Said's reference is equally to early stirrings of oppositinality, resistant readings that came from émigré writers who voyaged into Europe from the colonial peripheries. To place Rhys within this rubric brings its own set of problems since her vision is forged in the interstices of complicity and revolt. Her affiliation to the plantocratic class would imply a life of privilege but the way the Caribbean haunts her work speaks of a sensibility tortured by inside knowledge of the inequities and excesses of Caribbean power equations. I wish to argue that beyond the more discussed Caribbean tropes in Rhys's fiction, that of Obeah, for instance, Rhys's writings carry an overall imprint of her place and location, particularly as a space insistently marked by colonial history. Growing up in a milieu with a history permeated by the lingering inequities of slavery, she internalized that understanding of an imbalanced power structure, impacted by co-ordinates of race and gender, and that surfaced when she found herself at the receiving end of prejudicial stratifications in Europe. Many of her protagonists have a Caribbean lineage, explicit in some cases and hinted at in others. The metropolitan 'sneer' directed at her protagonists as well as the counter-sneer in Rhys are thus seminally linked to the hegemonies written into imperial power equations.

The focus of this chapter is on the way Rhys expresses her nuanced understanding of how the space and subjectivity of those in the colonies was marked by colonial structures through a delineation of the 'voyage in'. In keeping with my analytic focus on textuality and Rhys's response to it, this chapter studies the trope of voyaging through a reprisal of the 'high' and 'low' in modernist studies, in its juxtaposition of Rhys and Conrad. If early twentieth art dealt with "the voyage out", it was equally the time of the 'voyage in'. While Conrad and his male voyagers enact the former, the latter is the space occupied by Rhys and her protagonists. Rhys's own location is a marker of how modernist aesthetics were imprinted by the colonial context. Conrad's works have been read in a similar light. If Conrad's male voyagers span out into the colonies, the 'voyage out', Rhys's women protagonists enact the reverse 'adventure', 'voyaging into' metropolitan hubs.

This chapter positions itself at the crossroads of the 'voyage in' of the colonial wards and the 'voyage out' of the high modernists. Rhys's work is a good entry point into examining how the centrifugal geo-cultural 'wanderings' of the canonical modernists are ultimately directed inward, centripetally feeding into modernism's penchant for interiorized processing.

In this chapter, I look at how both Conrad and Rhys view the imperial matrix from a critical distance. In continuity with this study's engagement with Rhys's dialogic insurrections into high modernism, however, I also argue that the sneer (at colonialist vanities and inequities) in Rhys is more visceral and in Conrad, more ironic- that is, that the concern with the power differentials that permeated the colonial script is more palpable in Rhys. This chapter looks primarily (though other texts are discussed as well) at the criss-cross of a dynamic colonial circuitry through two texts that exemplify the 'voyage out' and the 'voyage in', Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark.* In the first section I look at some of the tropes that are seminally linked to imperial forays into the unhomely, such as the cartographic axes and the leitmotif of the gaze. These were the tools to a visual mapping of the *unheimlich*- as David Howard asserts, "… cartography has consistently provided the graphic arm of the colonial enterprise" (Chew and Richards,148). Howard also affirms that, "Maps have often symbolically reconstructed and reoriented social and physical landscapes into more metropolitan-friendly places of settlement and sovereignty"(141).The first section of the chapter looks at how the negotiation between the homely and the unhomely in both Rhys and Conrad departs from the dynamic of a cartographic and visual 'domestication'/ assimilation of the unfamiliar outlined in Howard's statement.The question of mapping and unmapping is studied in terms of how, and how far, the movement enjoined by the cross traffic of imperialism undid the separatism of imperial maps.Thus in this first part of the

chapter the economies of imperial mapping are studied vis a vis the two technologies that colonizers used to map alien lands - first, that of cartography, and second, the surveillant eye, the 'gaze'. The focus will be on how these two facets find expression in Rhys and Conrad. Next, I look at how the self is unmapped as the protagonists journey from one colonial location to another. And finally, how Rhys responds to and unmaps the adventure tradition (and here I look at other texts from Rhys as well) by bringing in the axes of gender and race. In the final part of the chapter, the focus of discussion is on Rhys's direct allusion/s to Conradian texts in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie.*

Mapping/Unmapping

" Lying between 15˚ 10′ and 15˚ 40′ N. and 61˚ 14′ and 61˚30′ W."

Voyage in the Dark 15

As if in reaction to suggestions that in Rhys's insistently repetitive remapping of victimhood and delinquency (Ford's reference to the underdog), the mapping of location carries little valency, Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* begins by configuring Dominica in precise latitudinal and longitudinal co-ordinates - the stranglehold of cartography is evoked to underline the long shadow British imperial map-making casts over the Caribbean as also other colonized lands. Tobias Doring addresses this aspect when he points out how the transit circle in London was instated as the centre of the global cartographic grid in 1884, a natural corollary of Britain's then imperial power. He argues further that "an act of conscious self-positioning and of comparative interpretation, to identify one's meridian is to engage with hermeneutic power" (189). Anna's frequent reminiscences of how a large part of her growing up years in Dominica were given over to being trained in English ways, are a measure of how the imperial motherland made incursions into the space of the colonial borderlands. In her studied invocation of her exact placement on the map,then, Anna attempts to look aslant at that invasion of space, to indicate separateness, at least at the level of cartography.

In Akerman's *The Imperial Map,* the contributors trace linkages between imperialism and cartography.In this context, Harley's theorizations are seen as seminal in locating "cartographic productions within the discourses of power and ideology", Harley stating clearly that "maps are never value-free images" (Akerman 4).This idea is carried forward in the essay on 'The Irony of Imperial Mapping' by Matthew H Edney in Ackerman's book. Looking at maps as ideologically slanted, Edney suggests that "The technological and scientific rigour on which they depend has been revealed as an ideal that few maps actually attain" (Akerman 13). Edney's own argument views imperial mapping as an ironic activity - in that, even as a territory is cartographically configured for the denizens of the imperial

metropolises, who become the "enabled and empowered"audience, the activity excludes the actual inhabitants of the territory being mapped (Akerman 13).The empiricist claims of mapping hence come under a question mark. By focussing on unmapping, Rhys and Conrad address and explore the limitations of the superimposition of a metropolitan 'scientific' discourse onto the colonies. In its evocation of ephemera and fragments, Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* in particular exposes the totalizing claims of imperial geography, juxtaposing the lived minutiae of Caribbean life against the dehumanized images offered by objective and empirical metropolitan texts.

Even as Anna talks of her acute awareness of where her island lay on the imperial map, she simultaneously complicates that mapping by pointing to how these were the images offered to the inhabitants by the constructions of imperial geography - "A goodly island and something highland, but all overgrown with woods,' that book said. And all crumpled into hills and mountains as you would crumple a piece of paper in your hand-rounded green hills and sharp-cut mountains "(*Voyage* 15). The text begins with Anna's memories of Dominica, and importantly they hinge on her intimate lingering over the minutiae of her life there-as opposed to that close-up, the imperial text offers as Anna Snaith suggests a "panoramic", aerial view (*Voyages* 136). The gap that Rhys points to is between an "inhuman cartography"(Snaith *Voyages* 136) and a familiarity born of the experiential. While Anna's evocation of the exact geographical templates of her current location is suggestive of the vice-like grip that the imperial core exerts over its peripheries, the reception she receives in England bodes quite the reverse – how the racial registers through which the 'other' is perceived underline the non-specificity of the way the colonized were bracketed together. The mechanics of imperial map-making are shown to rest on a lack of knowledge of its subjects and populations. To centre this more specifically in the West Indian context,Belinda Edmondson talks of the "geographical unreality" of the West Indies, tracing this haziness to that originary mis-naming -" Columbus thought he had sailed to India, and thus the islands he discovered became the 'West Indies'"(20). Edmondson sees this as leading to the islands being entrapped in a discourse of 'somewhere elseness'(20), "not Europe, not Africa,not India"(20). Thus even as the Caribbean was extremely crucial to the economic map of the empire, its materiality was hazily grasped/ placed. In Rhys's text, for instance,even as Maudie purportedly expresses sympathy for the way Anna is branded the Hottentot by the other girls in the company, her own lowdown on Anna's background fares no better in terms of its hazy configuration of Anna's antecedents -"She's always cold… She can't help it. She was born in a hot place. She was born in the West Indies or somewhere, weren't you,

kid?"(12). Since maps connoted incorporation through naming, this is also important because lack of clarity about Anna's origins works somewhere between the colonial margins being both inducted and excommunicated from the mainstream − as Certeau points out, naming can imply constitution but also excommunication-" It does what it says, and constitutes the savagery it declares. Just as one excommunicates by naming , the name 'wild' both creates and defines what the scriptural economy situates outside of itself"(155).

Rhys effects the idea of mapping/ unmapping through Anna's dwelling on the sights and sounds of the Caribbean - such as obfuscates her current (metropolitan) placement on the imperial map. The intermeshing trajectories implied by the porous borders of imperialism meant that the shadow of one location fell on another − such that the separatist gridlocks of mappings were complicated by these fluid borders.But distinct from the celebratory discourse of cosmopolitanization attendant upon border crossings, Rhys depicts these voyages not in terms of plurality but as held fast within the stranglehold of colonial binarism. In other words, the geographical criss-cross notwithstanding, the grip of binarist thinking does not slacken-if anything, it intensifies the sneer directed at the 'colonials', the trespassers.The ambiguity of Anna's place on the imperial map is troped in terms of one locational frame as superimposed over another - while in the colonial periphery, by the looming shadow cast by the imperial motherland and while in England, by her memories of Dominica.In fact, the text opens on this note -" It was if a curtain had fallen, hiding everything I had ever known. It was almost like being born again"(7). Though Anna speaks of being born anew, the text revolves more around the idea of un-birthing, linked here to the dislocations of colonial displacements. By beginning as well as ending the text with this image of aborted, incomplete, birthing, Rhys points to how voyages on the colonial map end in a fragmented, schismed, selfhood for her protagonists.

Both texts map the voyage through the psyche of the protagonists. For Marlow, the unfolding map of his journey seems to increasingly fold in towards Kurtz. It is interesting that at every station that he stops he progressively gathers and stores information about Kurtz. Details are either relayed to him or come to him (miraculously) through overheard fragments of conversation. There is a compelling connection that the text seems to establish between the two men. As the enigma of Kurtz is half-mapped for him by these bits and pieces he gathers, with increasing urgency, Marlow sees his voyage as leading towards Kurtz. As he approaches closer, he begins to map the trajectory of his journey in terms of his proximity or otherwise to Kurtz. For instance when he says,"The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess

sleeping in a fabulous castle"(44). In her discussion on *Heart of Darkness* in *Postcolonial Contraventions*, Laura Chrisman refers to Marlow's response to the African map as a sign of "residual juvenile hankering"(30), and the same strain can be detected in the above citation.The crucial point, however, is that in both these registers between which the text fluctuates in my reading, imperial juvenilia and high modernist gestures, the materiality of the colony stands elided.

The geographically traversed area of the voyage, the mapped in other words, takes a backseat in Conrad as what is foregrounded is the world of essences, visions and unseen connections. In Rhys, geographical specificities are both reiterated and obfuscated. In Anna's acute awareness of how her place on the map of the imperial city is rendered tenuous due to her colonial status, the gradations of the imperial map come home to her with redoubled emphasis. Yet the intense immediacy of her memories of the Caribbean allows for slippages out of the geographical templates of her positioning in London.The opening of the novel clearly indicates her almost wilful desire to map one location onto another-as she says, she would close her eyes and will herself into believing that the heat of the fire in the grate in England was the "sun-heat" of back home (7). The iron reality of the imperial metropolis as normative centre, as the fount of meaning, is both reinforced in the discriminating sneer Anna finds herself the target of and yet unmapped by the palpable 'presence' of the absent Caribbean in her psychological peregrinations.

It is through an uncanny switching of the homely-unhomely in the many dual-framed fictional moments in *Voyage in the Dark* that the *imagined*, the England mapped onto Anna's mindscape, clashes with the *experienced*, the reality of England that Anna confronts as she changes location on the geographical map.Just after her expression of rage against the male sneer (her bringing the cigarette down on Walter's hand) directed not just at her but as much at Germaine, Anna's reading of the mist laden disturbingly "still" London landscape from her window merges with her memories of how Hester found the West Indian scene full of foreboding (71).Through the blurring of the two frames, the West's mapping impulse to inscribe clear lines of separation between itself and colonized territories is undone.Rhys implies a blurring of the civilized-sinister dualism – "Before I came to England I used to try to imagine a night that was quite still. I used to imagine it with the cric-cracs going.The verandah long and ghostly…The moon and the darkness and the sound of the trees, and not far away the forest where nobody had been-virgin forest. We used to sit in the forest with the night coming in, huge. And the way it smelt of all the flowers. ('This place gives me the creeps at night,' Hester would say)" (71). It is in this way that Rhys challenges the fetishistic

splits of colonial/racial taxonomies. By showing how the sinister lurks as much in the civilized. Rhys's vision defamiliarizes and renders 'uncanny' the homely registers of the metropolis - there are many junctures in the novel when Anna speaks of the bestial as the frame through which to view the imperial capital, as for instance when she compares the early morning washing of the streets to an animal being bathed, or when she views 'nature' through an unsettling prism - "The long shadows of the trees, like skeletons, and others like spiders and others like octopuses"(122). Throughout the novel, Anna depicts nature in the metropolis through images of stunting, impairment and menace- in the opening pages of the novel, looking at the garden that stretches out outside her room, she comments-" The tree by the back wall was lopped so that it looked like a man with stumps instead of arms and legs"(9).This sense of lack that she reads is directly tied to her sense of how humanity feeds on vulnerability and the sneer that is directed at those who are freaks in one way or another is again reiterated through natural imagery at the end of the novel when she finds herself with child and the society that has drawn her into this impasse and yet now distances itself to moralize over her predicament (Ethel's letter to Laurie with its refrain of how "there are ways and ways of doing everything"[142] a marker of how Ethel's insistence on surface respectability and discretion is set against Anna's 'pottiness', her non-compliance to 'forms') -" The big tree in the square opposite d'Adhemar's flat was perfectly still, and the forked twigs looked like fingers pointing"(144).Thus while locationally(measured by way of the geographical map, that is) Anna finds herself in the heart of the imperial mother-country, it is the distance that the writer plays upon, both in terms of the non-acceptance of her difference, and her own frame of memories.

Anna Morgan's journey through the imperial metropolis can be read as a despairing attempt to correct the vision of the Caribbean that had been mapped onto the imperial metropolitan imagination by ethnographic and cartographic texts.To extend the logic of Richard Phillips's argument that "The taken-for-granted world of the map naturalizes ways of seeing, ways of reading the landscape"(15), the sneer that is directed towards Anna is based on the metropolitan citizenry's assumption of textual knowledge about other landscapes and peoples.With a sneering arrogance, which Rhys as already pointed out implicitly ironizes vis-à-vis the geographical conflation of territories,Anna, who is from the Caribbean is labelled the Hottentot. Walter displays his 'knowledge' of the tropics in speaking of the lushness. But in only foregrounding the heat and the vegetative abundance, he actually maps metropolitan fears and lusts onto the Creole Anna.The long passages in the novel that foreground Anna's reminiscences of her life in the Caribbean, and the impression of the complexly intertwined

lives of the white Creoles, blacks and coloureds is the author's riposte to the inadequacy of the binarist lens deployed by the metropolitan populace. Anna's desperate attempts to map a more 'authentic' picture of her island onto the imperial imaginary forms the core of her interactions with those she encounters. Almost towards the close of the novel, Anna tries to share information about her origins with Joe but he uses it to belittle her instead, reeling off names of Caribbean islands to exhibit his 'cosmopolitan' knowingness.Thus the phobic ferocity which which the tropics are racially mapped onto the imperial imagination leads to Anna's own unmapping, in that she is only viewed through a pre-fabricated, racially marked, prism.

Both Conrad and Rhys look at the idea of the 'unmapping' of selfhood as the corollary of voyages along the imperial map. In both writers, questions of selfhood and identity are analyzed from the point of view of journeying into alien territory. The fact that the two writers look more at dissolution of identity as a consequence of these dislocatory journeys would mean a recalibration of the adventure format. But as I will argue, though Conrad demystifies the adventure framework at one level, the question of male heroism is not entirely written out of the Conradian 'voyage out'. Clearly, as is borne out by the arguments of Andrea White, Conrad does not subscribe to the classic adventure format - however the boys' club feel of such stories survives in his narratives, in a vestigial, highly cerebralized, form.

As Marlow probes his intense desire to explore the region of the Congo, he says - " Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps…At that time there were many blank spaces on the map and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map …I would put my finger on it and say: When I grow up I will go there…But there was one yet – the biggest – the most blank, so to speak that I had a hankering after. True by this time it was not a blank space anymore. It had got filled…It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery-a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness"(11-12).The quintessential phallicism of the colonial impulse, the premise of penetrating into untrodden territory, finds a different manifestation in Marlow's remark- the comment records how prior colonialist penetration has robbed Marlow of the mantle of the pioneer. Though Marlow is by virtue of his appointment fully implicated in colonialism's trading practices yet such is the novella's complex evasiveness that it forges a select space for Marlow and Kurtz. Even as it pictures at least the latter as a fortune-hunter, the text also manages to suggest their estrangement from the colonial milieu and posit it as a virtue. The novella seems to argue for a voyage out that equates a purely utilitarian colonialism with a demystification of the

potential romance of faraway lands. Marlow almost hierarchizes darkness here-the pristine sinister mystery of the land is felt to be besmirched by the dark dealings of corrupt colonizers. It is that anterior darkness that Kurtz seems to plumb and it this exhumatory daring of Kurtz that leads to Marlow's heroizing of him. Conrad's Kurtz takes the lead in the dark rites of modernist truth-telling, and Marlow voyages into these 'extremities' through Kurtz. Both Marlow and Kurtz seek to recover the unmapped Congo, that which is opaque to the common run of European colonizers. Marlow's desire to un-write the mapped Congo is an attempt to both recover the pioneering impulse of the colonial odyssey and a simultaneous disavowal of the cartographical imperative.

The modernist drive to un-write the literary map of a tame realism by a proclaimed move towards a more robust aesthetic ideal through a recovery of the subterranean is nascent in Marlow's conflicted response to colonial cartography. For instance there is that oft quoted passage from the text-" Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world…An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest…You thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once-somewhere-far away-in another existence perhaps "(35). This can of course be read as one of Marlow's many musings on the intense solitude of the wilderness, but since the text is also about how the landscape was being claimed, apportioned and carved up by the mechanics of the colonial grid, this passage seems to almost nostalgically conjure up an un-despoiled, virgin, darkness. This colonial journey celebrates not the taming of the wild by the coming of civilization, but in fact seeks to recover the mysterious otherness of the land anterior to colonization. Richard Phillips points out that towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a "scramble" to map the remaining blanks, the highest concentration of which were in the African and Australian interiors. It is this that Marlow's ruefulness perhaps gestures towards; that "By the turn of the century…it seemed to many that the world had been mapped" (Phillips 6).

As against this fetishizing of unmapped otherness, there is that other map, one based on 'scientific' data, that Marlow encounters in the company office, a map liberally dotted with red. While that map evokes from Marlow the more predictable heartiness of the proverbial colonialist, Conrad complicates this stock response by pitting it against Marlow's and Kurtz's penetrative heroism in unsheathing the impenetrable, implacable, spirit of the wilderness, one that is far in excess of the mapped and appropriated. The scene where Marlow visits the Belgian Concern's Company Offices and sees the map of colonial carvings on the wall is at one level a graphic reminder of how these territories have been violently mapped onto the Empire - that what remains the silent, unmapped, subtext of this process is the brutality

perpetrated on the colonized. And yet the description of the scene fluctuates between political irony and a portentous fatefulness.In retrospectively describing his journey into the Congo, Marlow says early on in the text, "It was the farthest point of my navigation and the culminating point of my experience"(11). In the transformative and metamorphic that is suggested by the two women and the Doctor whom Marlow encounters in the office, the text swings between political awareness and the philosophical resonances contained in the above statement.

In the increasing probing of the intersecting trajectories of empire and modernism, Conrad's texts are rightfully seen as resisting subsumption into the more retrograde variants of colonialist literature. If the cartographical was integral to the colonial project, as alien lands were territorially claimed and mapped onto the colonial grid, then the resistance of *Heart of Darkness* to that project lies in its rejection of those co-ordinates - noticeably, territories remain unnamed in the text, almost a wish-fulfilment of Marlow's yearning to journey into a white patch, a tabula rasa. Anne McClintock elaborates on how the colonial map is to be understood as a "technology of knowledge that professes to capture the truth about a place in pure, scientific form, operating under the guise of scientific exactitude and promising to retrieve and reproduce nature exactly as it is. As such, it is also a technology of possession…Yet the edges and blank spaces of colonial maps are typically marked with vivid reminders of the failure of knowledge and hence the tenuousness of possession" (27-28). Both Rhys and Conrad explore facets of colonial experience that exceed the controlling economy of the colonial map. Robert Hampson talks about the scientific methodology of measuring, surveying, marking territories that went into the process of mapping (53). As argued, the texts under consideration undo that calculus though in different ways.While Rhys foregrounds intermeshing trajectories that are written out of the etched lines of mapped divisions, in other words probes the silences that are the unmapped subtext of cartographic science, Conrad's text inclines towards that which exceeds the scientific exactitude of maps.

It has been argued that most people do not think to deconstruct maps- they are accepted at face-value (Phillips 15). The writers I look at in this chapter certainly decode the exercise of a 'cold' mapping, thus distancing themselves from imperial utilitarianism. But while in Conrad the romance of the *voyage extremis* re-enters through a side-door, Rhys dedramatizes the motif of voyaging by focussing on the grim underbelly to the potential promise of travelling into the imperial mother country.

The Unseeing Gaze- Elision /Reification

The colonial voyage involved contending with an alien geo-locale, and while mapping was one way to bring it into the realm of comprehensibility, the 'colonial gaze' was another way to master/decode the unheimlich. In this section, the focus is on how the two writers transcribe the dynamics of the gaze into their texts. As the protagonists in these texts shift location, from centre to periphery and vice versa, they contend with the space of the unhomely through the mechanics of the gaze.The subsequent argument will hinge around analyzing the ways in which the the anti-colonial critique in *Heart of Darkness* is problematized by how the 'gaze' is turned more towards the unseen rather than the visible. And in Rhys, I look at the interplay between the gaze and the counter-gaze, the sneering devaluation of her outsider protagonists and their counter-glance at imperial patriarchy.

In *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors,* Elleke Boehmer, elaborating on the trope of the colonial gaze says: "The gaze was made manifest in the activities of examination, investigation, inspection, peeping, poring over, which were accompaniments to the colonial penetration of a country" (68). Boehmer argues that in this consuming desire to penetrate into the other, "there was much of the attitude of the voyeur as well as of the map-maker" (68). The 'gaze' directed at native lands and inhabitants is purportedly scientific but its subtext is a consuming interest in the anomalous other. It is the aberrant and deviant in the native landscape that holds the attention of the colonizer. How far does Conrad's text trouble this representative slant?

Heart of Darkness segues between two kinds of seeing - its excoriation of the utilitarian colonial 'gaze', exemplified by the myopia of the manager and his cohorts, and the superior connoiseurly 'gaze' into profound, submerged, truths, that would in turn imply an overlaying of concrete colonial realities for a postcolonial reader. A discussion of the 'gaze' in *Heart of Darkness* leads one into some sense of its troubling shifts between the anti-imperial and the modernist, its politics and its prototypical avant gardism. Kimberly J Devlin's 'The Scopic Drive and Visual Projection in *Heart of Darkness*' addresses the subject of the text's intense investment in visuality. The article talks of how critical work on the novella has foregrounded this aspect, dating back from Ian Watt's isolating its strong visual sense "as the most distinctive feature of Conrad's work", and forward to Achebe's critique of the text's visuality as premised on stereotypical Western optics (19). In a reading framed by the psychological perspectives offered by Freud and Lacan on the scopic and its relation to the voyeuristic, Devlin's article focusses on how Marlow's journey through the heart of the Congo carries voyeuristic traces.The critic identifies three primary facets of colonial voyeurism in Marlow's

ocular negotiations- first, the assumption that behind every visual scene there "lies a provocative sight"(25); second, the assumed entitlement of the colonizer to penetrate the visual front, and finally, the ocular triumph that results from the belief in having seen and 'read' what lies behind the veil. A crucial point that Devlin makes is how the "final destination for Marlow's exploratory eye is Kurtz", the final mystery that Marlow overwhelmingly seeks to decode (38).

For Achebe the failure of *Heart of Darkness* rested on the inability to see, that is, how the gaze it turns towards native lands and peoples is unseeing and blinkered. But it might also be argued, as a continuation of Achebe's post-colonial critique of the novella, that Conrad is interested in a variant of the gaze, one that would inaugurate the modernists' self-instantiation as readers of the subterranean.Turning to the idea of the visual triumphalism that Devlin refers to, one could argue that for Marlow the gaze comes to increasingly centre around his eagerness to penetrate into Kurtz's enigma and in turn recover some sense of Kurtz's far-seeing vision. Conrad cannot entirely break away from the celebratory framework of the adventure genre as Kurtz and Marlow become worthy of the "modernist honorific", to borrow Joshua Esty's phrase (*Unseasonable Youth* 163), in their ability to gaze down the precipice.The modernist felicity to excavate the sinister subcurrents becomes the singular gift of his morally compromised protagonist Kurtz. In fact, declaiming on that cultic jewel of Kurtz's verbal wizardry, "the horror, the horror"(68), Marlow's chosen trope is of the unflinching gaze reaching an epiphanic revelatory crescendo: "Since I had *peeped* over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his *stare*, that could not see the flame of the candle but was wide enough to embrace the the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness….After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief. It had candour, it had conviction. It had the appalling face of a *glimpsed truth*" (69, emphasis mine).

To look at other instances from the text where the ability to 'see' is in contention, Marlow interrupts his recounting at one point to ask his listeners, "Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?"(30). And a little later he deprecates their ability to configure beyond immediate, corporeal reality, when he describes them as preoccupied with their performing on their "respective tightropes" (36). In fact, he momentarily forges an alliance with them in that capacity, saying that he too had all his faculties pressed into service in steering the steamer through these insidious waterways and those "monkey tricks" of survival left him little time for much else. And yet he quickly exalts himself above that partnership of

the inglorious rituals of daily survival by emphasizing that the "inner truth" made its haunting presence felt "all the same" (36).

And to come now to that moment when Marlow's - the colonizer's - 'gaze' is most put to the test, the most striking visual trope in the novel is of course the heads displayed on the stakes. In fact, in the Conradian use of delayed decoding, these are first configured as ornamental orbs by Marlow. Though Marlow is not able to gloss the concrete correctly in the first instance, his misreading is soon subsumed as this material embodiment of Kurtz's rapacity and unbridled megalomania is superseded again by an invitation to probe with hushed awe the mysteries of a haunted soul. Marlow is at pains in fact to establish that he was not that shocked.What the unveiled scene provokes again is obeisant contemplation: "these round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic" (57). The readers are invited along with Marlow to rise above the visual impact of the scene to probe the "symbolic" import of a man possessed so completely by the powers of darkness. This is no ordinary display of power, Marlow seems to be communicating. It speaks of the extraordinary, fearless pursuit of extremities by Kurtz, which enthrones him as Marlow's chosen deity in the "choice of nightmares" (62).[15]

Though all the markers, whether from inside the text (the thick blanket of fog, the opacity of the natives) or extraneously related to the text, that is, the critical body of commentary on it (delayed decoding) would point to the impossibility of penetrative insight in those "incomprehensible" surroundings (*Heart* 37), Conrad ultimately locates the 'heroism' of his characters in precisely this feat- that they access the truth that lurks beneath. If modernism was indeed a recovery of the subterranean, then this could well be the final crowning of his narrator and protagonist.Whether it be the terra incognita of Woolf's tunnelling process or Freud's projecting himself as a conquistador, all bespeak a modernism intent on an epistemological excavation of the uncharted and buried.This is the inflection that Conrad's novella gives to the mastering visuality of the colonial gaze. And the problematic is exacerbated in Conrad's gendering of modernism. The recovery of forbidden knowledge can only be shared by the male figures. In fact the bond is sealed by the powers of darkness as Marlow becomes the proxy carrier of truths excoriated from the substratum.The intended is

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[15] Seshagiri's comment in *Race and the Modernist Imagination* is directly pertinent -"Joseph Conrad's Charlie Marlow …gazes at the severed heads of the Congolese people and recognises the political emptiness of nineteenth-century imperialism in the same moment that he discovers the artistic plenitude of modern primitivism"(11).

denied admittance into those portals since women are constitutionally debarred from gazing into such murky depths.

This is where I would like to bring in Rhys since in her texts, it is the women who are most attuned to the subtext. Counterpointing Rhys against Conrad, the most obvious juxtaposition is that while the marginality of Rhys' protagonists gives them a perspective askew and acidic enough to offer an exposé of the seedy underbelly of flourishing imperial metropolises, Conrad reserves this achievement of penetrative vision for his male protagonists and that it reaches its acme in the colonies. While Conrad designates the reading of the gothicized substratum a curiously male enterprise, where misreading and misconstrual stand feminized, Rhys reverses this dynamic and through her female streethaunters, such as Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*, subjects the cultural badinage of Europe to often damning scrutiny. Veronica Marie Gregg has pointed out how *Voyage in the Dark* is dotted with contemporary cultural artifacts. In relation to that, I wish to read Rhys's novel as operating within the reading-writing matrix. If post-colonialism is largely configured as a rewriting of blinkered colonialist narratives, thereby foregrounding the dynamics of location, then Rhys achieves the latter objective more through a reading model- where her novel gains a dissectory focus through her protagonist's edgy reading of the sights and visual repertoire of the imperial locale. As her narrators respond to the visual iconography and emblems of the imperial centre, they splice through the surface narrative to reveal the violence that lurks underneath.

Rhys's heroines are above all readers of the urban iconography.Visuality is a central trope in both the writers-in Conrad, the lens through which modernism is configured even as colonialism is deconstructed, and in Rhys feeding straight into her exposé of colonialist and patriarchal hegemonies . In terms of the colonial negotiations between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, Rhys turns her protagonist Anna's gaze to the visual economy of the metropolitan centre. In the process,she renders the familiar unfamiliar for the European audience by foregrounding the suppressed racial and sexual violence in its social and cultural narratives.

Rhys' flâneuse figures roam the streets of the urban jungle as transit points. In their transitory mode of existence, they encounter the cultural vocabulary and iconography of the European world and with their often leering asides dissect it to reveal the hegemonic undergirdings. As Anna voyages into the imperial centre, she finds the gaze turned against her. As a Creole from the West Indies, Anna is referred to as the Hottentot. Pamela Scully and Clifton Crais speak about how Sara Baartman, a KhoeKhoe woman from the Cape Colony was put on stage in London as a freak show and how the iconography of the

Hottentot Venus continues to resonate in all its murkily voyeuristic racial- imperial registers well into the mid-nineteenth century. Sara Baartman labeled the 'Hottentot Venus' for her protruding bottom became a freak show, symptomatic of the aberrant in native bodies. Elleke Boehmer in fact links Sara Baartman's being put on public display in London to her examination of the colonial gaze, the consuming interest in "poring over" the other (69). The commanding perspective from which the colonizers scrutinize the colonized is alternatively termed by Pratt as the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" attitude (201). Sara Baartman was simultaneously figured as atypical and typical, figured as excess and also as representative. In their article on the Hottentot Venus, Carlos A. Miranda and Suzette A. Spencer quote an advert recording her arrival, inviting audience to partake of this curious yet symptomatic spectacle:

> THE HOTTENTOT VENUS- Just arrived…from the banks of the River Gamtoos, on the borders of Kaffraria, in the interior of South Africa , a most correct and perfect specimen of that race of people . From this extraordinary phenomena of nature, the public will have an opportunity of judging how far she exceeds any description given by historians of that tribe of the human species. She is habited in the dress of her country, with all the rude ornaments usually worn by those people. She has been seen by the principal literati in this metropolis who were all greatly astonished as well as highly gratified with the sight of so wonderful a specimen of the human race (911-12).

The contradictory registers of this advertisement can be glossed by Sadiah Querishi's observation of how difference is on the one hand reified and on the other becomes the "typological basis of alterity"(239).This gaze that simultaneously exoticizes and elides difference, that is simultaneously bewitched and juridical, is the one Anna encounters in the shape of metropolitans who underline her otherness only to collapse it into convenient stereotypes.The differentness of the Other is both acutely lodged in the consciousness of the gazers as well as subsumed within the racial frame through which the Other is viewed. This is clear from the geographical slippages involved in labelling a woman from the West Indies the 'Hottentot'.This points to how the gaze is both searingly probing and yet unseeing.Selina Davis, the protagonist of Rhys's story "Let Them Call It Jazz", again of West Indian lineage, voices the painful irony of this contradiction when she says, "They don't look at me but they see me alright" (*Stories* 166). An interesting paradox thus opens out- a classificatory, scientific gaze aimed at containing and a salacious gaze thriving on the stereotype of the

hypersexualized excess of the native. This is in line with Anna Morgan's reception in London. The people in the metropolis both fixate on her difference and yet elide it by seeing it as of a piece with a generalised model of racial depravity.

It is through the interior consciousness of Anna that the text pierces through the hypocrisies and regressive thought structure of the ostensibly gregarious and cosmopolitanised metropolis. If her exterior life is one of sameness, projected as an inevitable slide into victimhood, it is the astutely critical, unsparingly acerbic commentary that Rhys invests in her protagonists that makes them something other than the hunted and the helpless. In an overwhelming focus on the Rhys woman, one might under-read the iconography Rhys selects and inducts as an inverse gaze.

Thus my argument is that in *Voyage in the Dark* Anna Morgan reverses the reductive gaze trained at her. If Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* works towards diminution through magnification, that is the Congo jungle in all its immensity is reduced to signifying a rudimentary stage of human progress, then Anna traverses the same path: London that purported centre from where all power flows outwards is pinned down thus through Anna's eyes : "This is England Hester said and I watched it through the train window divided into squares like pocket handkerchiefs; a small tidy look …I had read about England ever since I could read- smaller, meaner everything is never mind"(15). The voice from the periphery summarily challenges the much-vaunted variety and breadth of the imperial metropolis by suggesting through its unrelieved architectural uniformity a disturbing sameness in its gestures of exclusion, judgement and discrimination.

In Conrad, the cultural and natural landscape of the native land is figured in terms of riotous excess, that in its proliferating abundance seems to defeat both description and analysis. I am thinking primarily of those two passages exemplifying Achebe's adjectival clutter. The impressionistic recording of the anarchic vegetative sprawl of the jungle finds its echo in the second instance, the 'ornamental jungle' (Hobsbawm 233) that the native woman carries on her person in Marlow's telling. Thus even as an impression of excess and magnitude is built up , its terms are reductive.The visual focus on the barbarousness of the native woman writes her human presence out of the script. In fact the sheer (sinister?) corporeality of the description accorded to her seems to preclude a role for her in the narrative. David Spurr points out that by the last decades of the 1890s there was a taxonomic mania that gripped the West in its keenness to identify the cultural and economic import of the objects encountered in and amassed from non-Western cultures. Spurr sees the proliferation of geographical societies as symptomatic of a similar desire to sift through the material overload of the

empire (50). Such a detailing and close focus on the artifacts of native territory is rarely evidenced in *Heart of Darkness*, a point emphatically argued by Achebe in his critique of Conrad's text. Spurr's thesis proves that there was an urgent interest in delving into the particularities of native objects, however accurate or otherwise it may have been in actuality. Interestingly another detail from Spurr's book would also help in resituating Conrad's portrait of the native woman. Spurr cites Charles Allen's reference to how the euphemism for native mistresses was 'sleeping dictionary' (170). Since colonial officials were required to learn the native languages, native women combined a sexually gratificatory role with a more functional one. That the native woman possibly fulfils a more utilitarian role in the economy of imperial cross-exchange is elided from Conrad's text, as it is the overpowering sensuality of the 'gorgeous apparition' that broods over a text whose narrator phobically recoils from a closer interaction with the figure of the native (60).This allows mainly for portrayals that resonate with an overwhelming corporeality, ironically working to elide human presence rather than to foreground it.

The Victorian parlour of the Intended as an inner sanctum comes to signify for Marlow the modernist space for interiorized processing, where the outside, that which belongs to a disparate time and space, can be processed and stored away by him. That Conrad himself felt that everything in the novella finds its final culmination in this scene is telling. Interestingly, the prelude to the scene is Marlow's prolonged gaze at the Intended's photograph. His misreading of the portrait might be seen as a manifestation of a sexist gaze, yet the way the scene unfolds insidiously revalidates the gendered lens. In the entire interface between Marlow and the Intended, Marlow's consciousness is abuzz with images, fragments, sights and sounds of the African experience. Marlow's overtly sexist comments on how women do not live in the world of time are bolstered by the tale's trajectory where the Intended's rosy conception of the colonial voyage is left undisturbed. In fact, all her attempts to enter into 'colonial time' stand exposed as examples of misconstrual. The 'time-space compression' that Doreen Massey refers to as such an essential feature of globalism began with these colonial voyages and the Intended (149), a non-participant in the economy of colonial travel, is deemed incapable of apprehending the complexity of these currents. Massey's probing of how different individuals are differentially aligned to the flows and interconnections of what she terms the "power-geometry" of time-space compression comes into play as we analyze the position occupied by women in the colonial matrix (149). This gendered split between masculine knowingness and feminine incomprehension is in evidence in the way Marlow's gaze fluctuates between the immediate space of the Intended's mausoleum like boudoir and a

constant looking back at ‘other’ spaces that in fact are shown as entering with him -“ Before the high and ponderous door ,between the tall houses of the street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetry…I had a vision of him…the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum regular and muffled like the beating of a heart, the heart of a conquering darkness”(72).This could be read as an implied split between narrow, insular existences and the masculinism of forays into wider realms. Through Marlow’s janus-faced gaze, two kinds of darknesses invade the boudoir in that final scene, the darkness of delusion as against the “glimpsed” darkness of an unbearable truth confronted with “candour”(69). Since women here are figured as consumers of the pedestrian, bourgeois, narrative constructions of colonialism and since women live so much on the surface, the ‘penetrative’ force required to peer into Kurtz’s “impenetrable darkness” (68) cannot come to the Intended.

Strangely enough, the ‘unrestrained’ garrulousness of the young woman, completely contrary to how Marlow reads her portrait, implicates her even further in the unknowingness of the stay-at-home. Her ‘babble’ as symptomising ignorance could then be reminiscent not only of the loquaciousness of Marlow’s aunt but also of the natives. Thus even as the overt sexism of Marlow is ironically exposed, it is also subtly reinstated along another axes. Before the meeting, Marlow declares himself ready to give up the ghost of Kurtz. Yet he ends up doing exactly the contrary – deciding to cling to the last to that spectral presence. In a sense, while the sinister whispers of the outside are not allowed to rupture the ‘decorous’ inside of her boudoir, for Marlow, the Intended’s parlour stands in for the modernist trope of the ‘room’, the creative crucible where the ‘voyage out’ and the ‘voyage in’ coalesce. Its pristine insularity paradoxically sharpens Marlow’s sense of the treasured expansiveness of the ‘voyage out’. The Intended wants Kurtz’s last words, and by reassuring her that Kurtz died with her name on his lips, he immures her permanently in the stasis of imperial romanticization, while he keeps to himself the dynamism of the knowledge of other realms, other interfaces, other visions.

The women in Conrad’s novella are interestingly poised between hyper-stimulation and stasis - their overactive imagination spinning tales of heroism and martyrdom (vis-à-vis the colonial enterprise) because they are incapable of taking the leap, cognitively, into the nightmares that underlie the ‘official narrative’. This awareness of the substratum of ‘horrors’ brought back from the colonies makes Marlow radically question the knowledge base of the inhabitants of the metropolis. This intersection where the metropolis is negotiated through the looming shadow of the colonies that it feeds off, is of course central to Jean Rhys’s work. In

Conrad's text, lack of understanding, misconstrual, misreading stand curiously feminized. Rhys's texts reverse that process because it is the marginal, liminal space available to women that in fact gives them an insight into the subterranean gothic of the polished metropolitan exteriors.

Voyage in the Dark charts Anna Morgan's slide into dependence and entrapment. But its opening, that posits the idea of the subject as reader versus the subject as they are read by others, gives a clear indication of Rhys's authorial positionality - that she sets out to disrupt the West's "customarily parochial geo-cultural focus"(Gilbert xii). The first encounter between Walter and Anna, where they meet as a part of a foursome with Maudie and Jones, is framed cleverly by the writer as an attempt to read Anna according to pre-given writs, all linked in some way to her past, and more pertinently, to the discourse of racial hierarchization, whether it be notions of 'heat' or the label of Hottentot or Walter's ascription of infantilism to her. Anna is set up as a text whose borders are penetrated and breached by the denizens of the metropolis, whose alienness is read and fixed in terms of familiar tropes. In a familiar reprisal of the colonizer's authoritative gaze, Anna's identity-boundaries are infringed with impunity by Walter whereas Walter maintains boundary control through his reclusiveness. As Anna feels even the basic foundational pillars of her already beleaguered sense of self under threat, such as her age, she offers to produce her birth certificate as a testament. This impulse to fix Anna's otherness in terms of available generic tropes, such as when she comments on how Walter "listened to everything I said with a polite and attentive expression, and then he looked away and smiled as if he had sized me up", can be interpreted as a variant of colonialism's taxonomical imperative(12).

That Walter's criteria of assessment in 'placing' Anna bespeak a preoccupation with physicality pertains not only to the field of colonial erotics but also to the 'medicalized' discourse of racism. Mary Lou Emery refers to Walter's rather curious interest in Anna's teeth, "a strange choice that brings to mind the examination of horses or slaves for sale" (74). That Walter's appreciation of her teeth could also play upon the other frame within which such body parts were evaluated, that of racial stigmata, is also a possible undertow. Robert L Hayman recalls how the racial science of the nineteenth century isolated physical anomalies in the inferior races. In that context, Hayman mentions Cesare Lombroso's focus on "the presence in human beings, of anatomical stigmata associated with primitive creatures - a simian forehead, rodent-like teeth, or a facial asymmetry…"(245). This also calls to mind a tract that inserted itself so loquaciously into the annals of Western 'ethnography' on the Caribbean, Carlyle's "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question" (1849). Painting a

willed picture of the happy, emancipated negroes of the West Indies enveloped in a haze of masticatory bliss, he paints them as "sitting yonder with their beautiful muzzles upto their ears in pumpkins, imbibing sweet pulp and juices, the grinder and incisor teeth ready for every new work…"(528-29). Such overtly racist documents , and coming as they do from the leading literary figureheads of the Western canon, dot Western constructions of the 'other' and the interspersed textual fragments in Rhys's texts become a counterweight to the monocultural optics of the former.

The obsessive vocabulary of racial decadence is linked to a sense of paranoia and crisis as the colonial wards began to make inroads into the imperial cities. One hears it in the hysterical reaction of Ethel to 'foreigners', in Laurie's bolstering her Englishness by insisting on the good, strong peasant blood running in her veins, and in the geographical anomaly of Anna being labelled a 'Hottentot'. Anna is throughout perceived as untutored and perhaps 'unteachable', much as the natives were figured as unredeemable. Many voices in the text despair at her inability to master the art of getting on and Walter also reprimands her for lack of discretion and restraint such as when she readily shares with Vincent that she first met Walter during her chorus-girl days at Southsea. This is also that moment in the novel when Anna's internalized rage at the sneer directed at her outré status finds expression in her bringing her cigarette butt down on Walter's hand. After their spat following Anna's tactical blunder/s, Anna tells Walter that she just wants to move upstairs and be alone with him and he mocks her saying- "Let's go upstairs , let's go upstairs. You really shock me sometimes, Miss Morgan"(76). Anna's multiple 'indiscretions' reconfirm her 'otherness' in Walter's mind. Considering that it is shortly after this episode that Walter severs his connection with Anna, one can read backwards and see that from Walter's perspective(and Anna registers this) the incident proves a 'hysterical' and uncontrolled element in Anna. Just after this, Anna begins to reminisce about the pool in Morgan's Rest and most tellingly about the flowers that bordered it and whose 'excess'ively strong, rank scent made Hester "faint" (77-78). Since Rhys makes Hester the voice of the English metropolis in the Caribbean, the stereotypes and antipathies Hester displays are replayed by the metropolitans Anna meets in London.

The colonial peripheries are read through various frames in the metropole. In *Heart of Darkness* its denizens read it through the second hand "rot let loose in print"(15). Philippa Levine offers an interesting insight into how the technological advances of modernity sometimes contributed to a concretization of regressive, raced thinking on the part of the metropole. She points out how "The advent of photography made cheap depictions of the nude 'savage' more common, reinforcing the gap between the clothed and proper English and

the barely clad and shameless ‘primitives’ they ruled” (‘Sexuality’ 136). It might be argued that Conrad’s text testifies to a desire to read for itself, to reject prevalent readings guided by such visual evidence circulating in the metropolis. The primary narrator sets up Marlow as the modernist imprimatur in announcing that his sea yarns bore his inimitable stamp, in that there was no neat, compact ‘kernel’ of meaning nestled in them but only suggestive and multiple layers. In rejecting maps or his aunt’s ‘view’ of the ignorant millions , presumably based on the kind of visual evidence Levine talks about, Marlow chafes against a pre-charted visuality of empire. All the targets of Marlow’s ire for their incomprehension are groups who would rely on knowledge about empire disseminated through the mass organs of modernity. Women in particular were cast as eager and suspectible consumers of the allures of a technology elevating exoticized stereotypes. For instance Mark Wollaeger offers a detailed analysis of how picture postcards contributed to “imperial stereotyping by disseminating primitivist images of indigenous peoples during the most jingoistic period of England’s global dominance”(44). He points out that the vogue of picture postcards first caught Britain’s imagination in the 1890s and incidentally but interestingly identifies 1899, the year of publication of *Heart of Darkness*, as signalling the beginning of the golden age of postcards. His piece also mentions how contemporary fears about women’s ‘vulnerability’ to proliferating forms of consumer culture now extended to the avalanche of postcards flooding the colonial capital. Wollaeger discusses how colonial postcards promised an ‘authentic’ glimpse of native life (44). It is then possible to understand how Conrad’s protagonists show a contempt for these mass cultural forms. These mass pictorial representations, for all their claim to authenticity, are juxtaposed against a knowledge that is wrenched from the entrails of the colonial matrix and that cannot be accessed by the popular imagination.In *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire*, Paula M. Krebs observes that the turn-of-the-century growing success of the halfpenny papers such as ‘The Daily Mail’ contributed to the creation of imperialistic jingoism. She also refers to how the new variety in newspapers paralleled the new segments of reading publics. She mentions women here and points to how in fact news organs such as ‘Daily Mail’ aimed to woo the woman readership by including fiction and fashion articles (4,6). It is this lowbrow press that Marlow sees as letting rot loose in print and the highbrow, insider’s, understanding of the male voyager is the implicit counterpoint. This also brings one back to Marlow’s oft-repeated statements about women being out of touch with reality. The assumption of women’s minds being seized more easily by popular media would only corroborate Marlow’s assumption that they live in a romanticized world.

As Gabreille McIntire suggests, “The ‘world’ of women that Marlow imagines is distinguished by its non-relation to ‘truth’ ” (262).

Though *Heart of Darkness* speaks so much of the bafflement of the Western mind in the African interior, the text, while contained within the frame of homely-unhomely, complicates the idea of insider-outsider in the way Marlow constantly transfers the label of outsiderness to the other subject groups − his auditors aboard the Nellie, the women in the metropolis, the others in the group of colonizers, especially the manager. Marlow keeps aside a certain insiderness for himself and Kurtz, a greater capacity to understand the registers of the alien. Anna Morgan on the other hand struggles to find insiderness in either of the two locations that frame her identity. Here is Anna musing on her desire to share with Walter the registers of her Caribbean past –“I wanted to talk about it. I wanted to make him see what it was like. And it all went through my head, but too quickly. Besides, you can never tell about things”(*Voyage* 46). While this is startlingly close to Marlow’s jibes against his urban/e auditors’ bafflement with his inside account, Anna’s statement is more an acknowledgement of the contradictory and complex strains of Caribbean society, which her own uncertain ‘insider’ status in that society is an indication of.

Anna fights throughout to find acceptance within the multiply inflected axes of her existence, in the Caribbean as in England. Thus her inability to revivify her experience to Walter stems not only from the limitations of his metropolitan entrenchment as from the uncontainable, fractured and fluid nature of her own context/s. Anna summons the shards of the past to marshal a sense of completion. Her pressing upon the fact that she is a real West Indian, fifth generation on her mother’s side, meets with incomprehension from Walter-he fails to grasp the full import of the gulf between belongingness and unbelonging that has haunted Anna in the Caribbean. To that extent, Hester’s prophecy of how the sins of the father are visited upon the children indeed comes true. Hester functions as a foil to Anna and her father since she never suffers from muddled loyalties, and hence looks upon the existential schism that torments them as ‘tragic’ (53). Anna and her father are aligned in their sense of being uneasily suspended between two world orders –one, that of the plantation economy, exploitative and inhuman, and the other, of an increasing, tactile, identification with the land. Though Hester in her damning references to the tainted slave past of plantation history voices “the ‘Anti-Caribbean animus’ emanating from the metropole”(Sandiford 6), her own denial of human status to the black help proves that she merely voices the rhetoric of emancipation. She falls more into Sandiford’s categorization of “purists” who inveighed against the creolized milieu of the Caribbean posing the threat of cultural pollution (3). The exchange of

letters between Hester and Uncle Bo about Anna's future symptomises how Anna remains uncomfortably suspended between the troubling binaries of her West Indian past-Hester as the spokeswoman of colonial society's insistence on the distance between planter class and black servants, and Uncle Bo as the symbol of Creole inter-mixture to the point of profligacy, emblematized in the reckless inter-breeding that Hester comments on.

While Anna's difference constitutes her in the eyes of the inhabitants of the metropolis, the text excoriates the orthodoxies and biases that permeate the progressive Western narrative by turning a counter-gaze at the cultural ephemera that Anna encounters and responds to.With increasing work being done on how cultural references embedded in texts can be a locus for political commentary, these inconspicuous references in Rhys's text/s open up an engagement with the dynamics of empire and patriarchy when probed further. In the course of a meeting with Hester, Anna spies an advertisement of Bourne's Cocoa at the back of a newspaper - "'What is Purity? For Thirty-Five Years the answer has been Bourne's Cocoa' ". And a little later as she turns that notion of purity around in her mind- "Thirty-five years…Fancy being thirty-five years old. What is Purity? For thirty-five thousand years the answer has been….."(50-51). In an article entitled "Bittersweet Temptations: Race and the Advertising of Cocoa", Emma Robertson discusses the history of cocoa advertising. She points to one interesting poster in particular, where the plantation backdrop of cocoa sourcing is superimposed by "selected images of the manufacturing process in Britain" and the caption proudly proclaimed that once transported to Britain the raw tropical material became Absolutely Pure through industrial technology, an obvious reference to how the manufacturing process neatly skirted the use of human hands (Hund, Pickering and Ramamurthy 176). Thus the purity of the product depended on both the elision or at least the gradual obscuring of the plantation backdrop and the highlighting of Britain's technical/ industrial know-how.Anandi Ramamurthy similarly discusses how a number of advertisements depicted scenes of the metropolitan production process and even where the plantation context is evoked, the images "assert a false idealism", suggesting scenes of "rural toil that are picturesque and harmonious"(65). Again, the coercive nature of plantation labour is aestheticized and its unpalatable exploitativeness rendered invisible.The sweatedness of the labour context is quite literally left out of the frame as the product is encased in a sparkle of "purity" made possible by the marvels of technological expertise. Joanna de Groot sums this up in her article "Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections: Reflections on Consumption and Empire" when she notes the paradox that "the powerful everyday presence of colonial products in metropolitan lives was both pervasive (the role of sugar, tea and

tobacco in mass consumption) and invisible (the unseen commercial and exploitative structures of colonial power or labour which delivered the products)" (Hall and Rose 170). Catherine Rovera suggests that the advertisement be read against the backdrop of "England's obsession with moral purity as some kind of mass neurosis". She reads the Bourne's Cocoa Purity claim as an allusion to the "Social Purity Crusades that swept Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the wake of the Contagious Diseases Act enacted to fight against venereal diseases"(7). By foregrounding the idea of purity Rhys therefore evokes the dense web of both the imperialized and gendered contexts. As Hester informs Anna, undoubtedly trying to slip in an implicit sermon, about the preacher's daughter impending marriage, the advertisement in its gendered connotations evokes the socially encoded connection between respectability and matrimony for women. The announcement carries all the weight of Hester's disapproval of Anna for her "impure" ways. The advert also breaks into, as visual backdrop, a conversation about Anna's Uncle Bo who Hester derides for his many-coloured offspring populating the West Indies- "the colours of the rainbow" as she bitingly comments (54). So the idea of miscegenation that renders any notion of "purity" rather tenuous in the fraught cross-racialized atmosphere of the West Indies is hinted at by Rhys here. In an insightful article entitled "Rhys's Pieces: Unhomeliness as Arbiter of Caribbean Creolization" H. Adlai Murdoch describes Rhys's world, as that of her protagonists, as one of doubleness. Talking of *Voyage in the Dark* and its evocation of the "ubiquitous British product Bourne's Cocoa" he points out the complex nature of the reference when he discusses how the 'lasting (and therefore) desirable purity of English products is inevitably tied to the "corrupting humidity of the tropics"(265). As he argues, it is ironically suggestive of the doubleness and intersections of a colonized world that "Britishness is defined through Bourne's cocoa's brownness-a processed product of colonial origin, which is then re-exported to be consumed by metropolitans and colonials alike"(269). Since consumption of cocoa was implicitly tied to that of milk, Groot too points to "the combination of the domestic (indigenous rural purity) with the colonial (tropical exotic flavour)" (170). To expand the argument, it is these intercultural, intermeshed trajectories that Rhys insistently evokes as a challenge to the exclusionary impulses working in imperial metropolises.

The visuality of *Voyage in the Dark* manifests itself in the gap between how Anna is seen and what she consequently is privy to, seeing into the system that judges her. In *Picturing empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire,* James Ryan comments on the "ambition of regimes of colonial representation: to see without being seen", "a kind of

one-way vision" (Levine 'Photography' 215). It is this one-way truck that Rhys poses a visual challenge to. Ethel sees in Anna "a half-potty bastard", an obvious reference to her Creole origins .When Ethel says that Anna "is not all there" it carries suggestions of insanity, absence, madness(124). In Rhys's rendering however the not being all there is the recalcitrance that Anna retains beneath the mask of compliance and passivity. It is that that gives an edge to Anna's observation, rendered again through a palpably visual metaphor, of the hollowness of Ethel's claim to a ladylike position. Importantly, it is not the spurious nature of the claim that Anna inveighs against as much as the constructed nature of such norms when she records: " That's what I can remember best- Ethel talking and the clock ticking .And her voice when she was telling me …that she was really a lady. A lady- some words have a long, thin neck you'd like to strangle"(120). Anna spies a new 'respect' in Ethel's eyes for her when she notices Anna's 'talent' in bringing the men in, which would in fact reconfirm Ethel's stereotyped image of the oversexedness of the Creolized, half-potty bastard. It is when she sees that reflected in Ethel's eyes that Anna begins to hate her.

Modernity's pulsating buzz, the urban streets lined with stores or the appeal of the cinema, forms a crucial part of Rhys's fictional canvas, and of her expository purpose. These dimensions of urban visual experience are incorporated into Rhys's texts, such as when Anna watches some episodes from the Three-Fingered Kate cinematic series along with the xenophobic Ethel. It is the subversive element in the criminal leanings of Kate that most interests Anna who rebels against her co-readers' interpretation, that is, her fellow audience's loud applause at Kate getting caught. In Ethel's discomfort with foreigners, such as the actress who plays Kate, making inroads into British cinema the 'othered' Anna reads an instance of conservativeness.It is a measure of Rhys's being as Joshua Esty opines " a ruthlessly systematic feminist" that she does not shy away from showing the constraints that beset Ethel's life and yet she also fixes with an ironical eye Ethel's desperate need to maintain her English superiority over the rudderless Anna (*Unseasonable Youth* 171).Though there are admittedly few affirmatively feminist moments in Rhys's oeuvre, in her astute recognition of how gender intersects with race, class and nationality and hence how any articulation of female oppression is to be understood in its locational and contextualized parameters, Rhys anticipates a major strand in arguments forwarded by non-western feminists and increasingly by voices within the western academia.This statement by Rita Felski from *The Gender of Modernity* finds a reflection in Rhys's work: "Any notion of a common political identity or set of interests arising out of shared oppression disappears here behind the sexualization and pathologization of racial categories "(163).

While there are no theoretical refections from Rhys on the appeal of cinema, many voices from within female modernism - among them notably Woolf - theorized the cinema in divergent but telling ways. To look briefly at two of these, Elizabeth Bowen writes in her essay 'Why I go to the Cinema' (1938) of the 'primitive' appeal of the cinema-"In time, the cinema has come last of all the arts; its appeal to the racial child in us is so immediate that it should have come first. Pictures came first in time, and bore a great weight of meaning: the 'pictures' date sight back in their command of emotion; they are inherently primitive" (Carter and Friedman 128). Bowen seems to break down cinema's appeal to the visual, sensory and non-theoretical, also echoed in her repeated assertions that the cinema is her access-point to "the fairy story"(127). On the other side of the spectrum, Dorothy Richardson reads cinema's advent as resonating with a cosmopolitanized world-"These youths and maidens in becoming world citizens, in getting into communications with the unknown, become also recruits available, as their earth-and cottage bound forebears never could have been for the world-wide conversations now increasingly upon us in which the cinema may play, amongst its numerous other roles, so powerful a part" (Brooker et al 517). Richardson pushes for a conception of new media as cosmopolitanizing the world whereas Bowen embraces it in more intimate,primeval, personalized terms.In her relaying of the cinematic medium, Rhys plays on both its archaic appeal as well as seeing in it a failed cosmopolitanism.

There was also a more utilitarian way in which cinema brought Britons out of their insularity and made them 'world-citizens'.Martin Pugh records how "There was a huge output of propagandist films, thinly disguised as documentaries or adventure stories, including 'The Wildest Africa'…'From Red Sea to Blue Nile' …in addition to the Empire Marketing Board's productions such as Windmills in Barbados (on sugar) and Cargo from Jamaica (on banana) "(399). John M. Mackenzie who has done extensive work on empire and popular culture discusses at length how cinema provided the interface between colonial settings and the untravelled British public. In so far as British authorities attempted to monitor the content aired and saw films as an ideal way to inculcate robust imperial pride, Mackenzie sees this conservativeness as running counter to cinema's technological novelty (225). These various views, contemporaneous and otherwise, help situate this emerging phenomenon in Rhys's time along the vectors of gender, empire and modes of reception/consumption. How does Anna Morgan read the cinematic text? And how does Rhys's authorial imprint modulate Anna'a cinematic experience? Elizabeth Carolyn Miller studies the 'Three Fingered Kate' series vis-à-vis the figure of the New Woman Criminal. The transgressive, protean and antiestablishment potentialities of the New Woman law-breaker are exemplified in Kate.

Miller gives specific instances from the films in the series, such as the first one where Kate relies on racial cross-dressing to evade the law or the fourth one wherein Kate relieves a retired colonial officer from India of his imperial loot. Anna's entry point into the film is her restlessness with how the public in the theatre celebrates Kate's eventual downfall.Anna invests emotionally in Kate's victories since they trigger the euphoria of transgression, a challenge to the "upholstered ghosts" of 'polite' society (*Voyage* 83), whose exotic, lavish existence is built on imperial collectibles and curios (118). Kate's robbery is thus pitted against imperial raidings. That Rhys places Anna in a context of lower class audience and yet differentiates her reactions from that of the others underlines that not only class but more specifically colonial and racial politics are in play. Anna's reaction and Rhys's own selective use of the Three Fingered Kate series (Miller points out that Rhys places the film in a "conservative and moralizing" context) perform a decoding of the cultural ethos of the imperial centre (116-17).

Laura Frost's gloss on the film on Theodora that follows the screening of 'Three Fingered Kate' resonates equally with such a reading. Frost notes that Theodora was an actress/ dancer who then rose to the stature of empress as the wife of Justinian I. The references to Theodora's voracious sexual appetite "point to the conflation of female entertainers…with prostitutes at Theodora's time" (198).Whether in Theodora's ascent to power or Kate's skirmishes with the powers that be, Rhys explores the non-utopian aspects of female rebellion.Anna's own fluctuation between conformism and rage against society's power structures, between acceptance and exposition, emerges from those interstices.

That Rhys's reading of the West's prurient fascination with what Stuart Hall terms "the exotica of difference" is mapped onto the filmic text can be gauged from Julia's and Horsfield's cinematic experience in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (Back and Solomos 151). The narratorial voice describes the liaison that unfolds on the screen in racialized terms-"On the screen a strange, slim youth with a long white face and mad eyes wooed a beautiful lady the width of whose hips gave an archaic but magnificent air to the whole proceeding" (34). The emphasis is simultaneously on the man's whiteness and his intoxicated fascination with the woman's uncontainable voluptuousness, tellingly figured through her prominently huge hips, thus evoking again the Hottentot image. The notion of primitive otherness is further underlined in fact by the use of the word 'archaic'. This also prefigures Horsfield's own interest in Julia's unplaceable exoticism. When a woman sitting behind them rubbishes the film on account of all involved in it being "dingo" Horsfield reacts rather violently at this intrusion into this rather meagre gateway to a fantasy world – the "bare place" and the "frail

music" make him feel that "the illusion of art was almost complete. He got a kick out of the place for some reason."(34). Both the textual instances cited foreground divided as opposed to shared responses. Another facet that needs to be kept in mind is that in her treatment of that Ur-symbol of modernity, the moving pictures, Rhys remains resolutely within the vernacular idiom and skirts the highbrow quotient of the complex conversations that clustered around this innovation, in which female modernists such as Woolf and Richardson prominently participated.

To cast a final glance at how the dynamics of visuality and vision operate in these two texts, for Kurtz boundary crossing becomes a stepping- stone to triumphant vision, Conrad thus extending to him the dubious honour of becoming "the privileged bearer of epistemological authority" (Felski, 26), articulated in Marlow's reverential testimony. It is a telling index of the visual economy of *Voyage in the Dark* that it is mentioned at one point how her father relies on Anna's "sharp eyes" (62). Anna's desire to shed the constricting framework of defunct plantocratic attitudes hence enables her to visualize an alternate, less repressive milieu, but her intercultural positionality given the prevailing rigid oppositions of empire can lead to no visionary culmination. While in Conrad the space of contact becomes a visionary laboratory for metaphysical truths to be birthed, Anna can only envisage birthing a monster. Urmila Seshagiri comments on how Anna's pregnancy "intensifies the cultural ambivalence history has thrust upon her" ("Modernist Ashes" 13). Anna's "unassimilable racial identity" accentuates the incisive gaze she directs at the societal mechanism but also entraps her in a historical impasse (14).

With the empire as the frame, an ability to penetrate beneath and to see beyond is hence respectively conferred on their protagonists by Rhys and Conrad. In Conrad, the concrete materialities of imperialism become a conduit to a resonant "cosmic irony" and the concrete dissolves in the immaterial. Rhys on the contrary records the material co-ordinates of the imperial project and the 'monstrosities' it spawns in a visceral manner (Said *Culture* 65). If as innumerable critics have argued, male modernism configured itself as a rarefied cartel, then Kurtz's overarchingly damning last cry earns him pride of place (in Marlow's awed rendering) in those sororities. Anna Morgan remains the suspect outsider whose half-articulated asides undo the master narratives of patriarchy and colonialism but with no sublimatory crescendo. While Conrad transcends visuality to voice a vision, Rhys's recalcitrance and locational ambivalence manifests itself in a refusal, or historical incapacity, to traverse that distance from visuality to vision. Jon Hegglund reads *Heart of Darkness* as "completely separating the idea of 'Africa' from its material reality" (Brooker and Thacker

43). In terms of the mechanics of the gaze, it can be said then that Rhys grounds herself in the minutely perceptual while Conrad moves between the perceptual-political on the one hand and the existential-metaphysical on the other.

Before we entomb Rhys's protagonists forever as masochistic and passive and functioning in a somnambulistic mode, it is important to see how their zombie-like voyage through the urban corridors and spaces includes the casual yet invaluable, telling references to the pathologies of patriarchy and imperialism conducted in *Voyage in the Dark* in particular through an excavation and dismantling of the visual, lexical iconography of the imperial centre. Though prime examples of women who are sucked into the societal machine, they also remain recalcitrant in their ironic anatomization of its machinations and its prejudicial basis. Thus Rhys is enacting a refusal to let colonial visuality be one-sidedly denominative.

The Ex-Centric Self: "That Unclean Stain in the Colonial Script " (Baucom 46)

How do Conrad and Rhys approach the question of identity, its making and unmaking, from within the frame of imperial voyages? In both texts, there is a juxtaposition of the impoverishment/stasis of the urban imaginary as against ex-centric visions recovered from darker/ silenced, realms. Kurtz and Anna are both vilified figures in the 'normative' colonial script and yet the two authors effect a turn-around - the ex-centricity of the protagonists is deployed as a leveraging point to expose both the myopic regressiveness as also the hypocrisies of the colonial milieu.

This leads one to the subject of madness. Modernism's minotarian pitch often figured madness as a disaffiliatory discourse, as a reaction to the brutalizations and automatism of urban existence. Both Anna Morgan and Kurtz seem to move in a hallucinatory haze, and are looked at askance for their non-sychronicity to the dominant discourse. Kurtz's 'madness' is panned by small-minded people like the manager but Marlow's corrective voice subtly guides the reader's response, pitting Kurtz's 'excess' as perhaps the more desirable alternative to the non-presence of the manager and his cronies. Anna's slide into the hallucinatory surfacing of sedimented and unresolved memories is however seen as a lack. A number of characters in the text comment on her 'absentness'. They jeer at her desire to anchor herself to an ethos, as if in their minds her vagueness is her primary reality, a register of her non-being. Her grip on sanity founders as she finds herself incarcerated within the pathological brackets of colonial society and her final 'confinement' which culminates in stillbirth establishes the blankness and absence conjoined on her by the amnesiac erasures of history. Anna's madness is that of a being ghosted by time and history. In Conrad, the untamed becomes a signifier of the pre-civilizational and Kurtz its mad, occult worshipper.

The novella does not shirk away from noting the excess inscribed into Kurtz's looking for worldly fame in the colony. But in seeing his breakdown as a conduit to truths that "the dead cats of civilization" who only roil around in the "dustbin of progress"would be blind to also means that his madness is to be seen as located somewhere between megalomania and vision (51). It needs to be emphasised that Kurtz's and Marlow's modernist aesthetics of speech that speaks from the dark abyss is built on the silence of natives and women. In these inaugural texts of modernism, even as modernist literature marks its territory, the process entails a territorial/ aesthetic/ cerebral occupation of the margins.

These passages into and out of the metropolis hence revolve around the uncontainable in the colonial script. In Conrad's text, Kurtz represents that which ruptures the imperial script and in Rhys's text, Anna Morgan's ambiguous positionality both invites and escapes containment, since she signifies that which escapes/imperils its lexical gridlock. Kurtz's uncontainability, however, becomes surreptitiously reinstated as modernist heroics even as it destabilizes the conventional registers of colonial heroism. Sent out to prepare a report for the "Society of Suppression of Savage Customs' Kurtz's neurotic and peremptorily cryptic addendum 'Exterminate all the Brutes' to what is otherwise the model of magniloquence suggests how his extremism imperils the normativities of the imperial scriptorium (51).This is where *Heart of Darkness* negotiates between breakdown and utterance and the collapse of one script makes way for the instantiation of the other.

To look at Anna's pariah-like status now, whether figured as excess or lack, her absence is never able to become presence in the metropole. Anna's increasing withdrawal into herself, her 'absent' presence is a reaction to how she is the stigma that underlies the vaunted model of high imperialism. Even prior to her entering England, in Hester's suspicion of Anna'a non-synchronicity with the English ideal, Anna is already figured as lack. That she represents the contagion that festers in the crannies of the colonial script is made amply clear through the imagery that is associated with her in Hester's dire pronouncements. Revealingly, the entire weight is on the notion of hygiene.This is important in terms of how the voyage in of the colonials was looked upon by the residents of the imperial capitals. Rod Edmond details how there was almost a biological hysteria that prevailed and that intensified with the emergence of germ theory- "Germs, those invisible carriers of disease intensified the views of both tropical places and peoples as toxic. And one important consequence of this was a new bacterially derived way of stigmatizing immigrants as the bearer of germs" (Driver and Martins181).

Anna as a child wears a woollen vest a size too small because wool next to the skin is 'Healthy', wears scrupulously starched white drawers and petticoat, and extremely tight gloves that do not fit, with a voice, presumably Hester's berating her " You naughty girl, you're trying to split those gloves; you're trying to split those gloves on purpose"(36). Rhys evokes a specific Caribbean scenario here-as Callaghan deduces from her wide-ranging survey of textual representations of women from the West Indies, "Femininity for the creole elite is English femininity" (112). She also refers to how imposition of English fashions was frequently represented as a torment for creole women. That the scene also contains a reference to Anna's watching how Joseph dexterously uses spittle to blacken the family's boots dents the polished veneer of respectability Hester aims for, with a side glance at the resistant impieties of the victimized.

To shift focus from Kurtz and Anna and to look now at Anna and Marlow in conjunction, both verge on breakdown as they are faced with the weight of unresolved memories, Anna's from the Caribbean and Marlow's from the voyage out. Both remain suspended between two locations, as the blurring trajectories of the homely and unhomely lead to a decentredness. In both Rhys and Conrad, the question of memory haunts the aftermath of the voyage.While Anna struggles to maintain selfhood in the face of the misrecognitions that are her inevitable fate given her placelessness in the colonial economy, Marlow's entire narration in *Heart of Darkness* can be seen as an act of narrative memorialisation -sifting and selecting memories such as to make Kurtz both the damned and the elect. Marlow sees the memories of his contact with Kurtz as the most treasured aspect of the 'voyage out'. The dense and chequered pool of memories becomes the prism through which the metropolis is negotiated by Anna and Marlow.

It is in the passages that describe Marlow's disoriented wanderings through the urban metropolis after his return from the Congo that Conrad inscribes a sneer at the unimaginative insularities of the metropolitan denizens. It is in these passages that an early iteration of modernism's anti-bourgeois animus can be located. And in the violence of his reaction away from these attitudes, Marlow approaches a sort of unhinging of his own. Significantly, it is in terms of the body that Marlow describes his near breakdown-"…I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces so full of stupid importance. I daresay I was not very well at that time. I tottered about the streets -there were various affairs to settle- grinning bitterly at perfectly respectable persons. I admit my behaviour was inexcusable, but then my temperature was seldom normal in these days"(70). Marlow describes almost a

bodily repugnance to the smug unknowingness of the urban citizenry. It is through the bodily that Marlow's acute sense of non-belonging is manifested.

If Marlow sees himself as in possession of knowledge in excess of what the bourgeoisie of the metropolis can handle or envision, Anna's excess, the suspicion of her representing the contaminatory festering in the colonial script, paradoxically marks her as an unplaceable lack. In her neither/nor positionality, she is forever figured as falling short of the prescribed economies of behaviour. In Anna's case, it is through the body that her non-beloningness is both apprehended and sought to be corrected.

The opprobrium that sneers at an unmanageable, creolized, sexuality that strains at containment follows Anna from childhood. Shortly after losing her virginity to Walter and aware of how this would reconfirm society's 'image' of her, she tells Walter that she does not like the mirror in his bedroom since in the novel Hester and Walter are the ones who hysterize the body the most. The mirror in his house underlines for Anna the deformative specularity of the mirrors of colonialism. The image of a precipitous descent at the end connotes how Anna continues to fall betwixt the two alternatives given her by colonial society, those of dismemberment (figured in the aborted birth) and re-suturing. Struggling under the weight of colonial orthodoxies as also the tenacious hold of the memories of her past, Anna remains suspended in interim in a voyage that is never completed, much as her step-mother in England and her Uncle in the Caribbean squabble over who will pay her passage money. Neither colonizer nor colonized, Anna's madness is of those who occupy the edges of the colonial economy and who can plague and decode its hegemonic formulations but have not found the writerly corner from where to forge a counter-writ. Anna's youth, especially considering that Rhys's other tales of feminine adriftness are of ageing women, shorn of the evolutionary arc of the bildungsroman underlines how Rhys intends us to read her as statically entrapped in repressive power structures and that her non-progress is a comment on how Anna is the caesura between the moment of breakage and the moment of change, between the anti-colonial and the post-colonial.

Can Anna'a prolonged haemorraging at the end then be read as colonial society's zealous, violent, need to expel the offensive other and to then suture Anna into a more compliant member who as the doctor blusteringly declares at the end is ready to "start all over again in no time" ?(159). Anna comments on the brisk and machinic efficiency with which he moves, ready to 'smooth' out the blimps in the colonialist narrative and to stitch into some semblance of order the fissures and excesses that threaten its narrative valency. Mary Lou Emery points out that the doctor misreads Anna'a reference to falling, since Anna points to

her vertiginous descent into the depths of her Caribbean memories while the doctor interprets it to refer to her sexual indiscretions. This is pivotal since Rhys portrays Anna's absentness as identitarian ambivalence whereas the doctor abnormalizes her sexually.[16] Anna deliriously navigates between being a blank and a pregnant pause. Evelyn O Callaghan mentions the selectivity of West Indian canon-formation. This is the irony of a counter-canon to which women critics like Callaghan and Donnell now working to restore 'women writing the West Indies' posit a women's counter-canon in turn. Donnell speaks of how in the formation of the post-1950s Caribbean writing portal, certain names figure repeatedly such that " Together these nominated few navigate a fairly smooth, if highly selective and all-male, crossing from colony to nation-a crossing in which literature and history make a happy couple…the exclusion or selection of pre-1950s writers becomes a means by which to side-step works which were and perhaps remain out of step with the prevailing politics of reading, a way to ignore those texts that never made the crossing successfully"(Callaghan 4).This could well be a gloss on how Rhys's work continues to worry canons , and could also point to how her first major Caribbean protagonist navigates a compromised path between inarticulacy and protest- never quite able to effect the crossing herself.

Textual Interfaces

Though I find a side-by-side reading of *Voyage in the Dark* and *Heart of Darkness* an ideal entry point into the contours of the voyage in and the voyage out, it is around the seminal tropes of the 'half-caste' and the 'slave' , appositely , that the most explicit interface between Rhys and Conrad occurs, in Rhys's explicit though brief allusion to *Almayer's Folly* in her *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. But I would like to take a slight detour and find my way into these texts via another thread of linkage, that is, that both invoke the names of the male

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[16]If one looks at that last scene, there is in fact a stark difference between the very vivid visual flashback about her Caribbean past playing through Anna's mind and the perceived incoherence of what she says aloud. This again is one of the dimensions of madness in Rhys- since these women's expression of rage and unfulfilment, their chafing against the smugness of societal brackets, such as here in Anna's memories, is a half-way road between inner affect and verbalization, as Hite says, " their utterances are received as senseless". The half-muteness of their dissidence entails their being perceived as inchoate and mad-again, Hite's gloss is invaluable-" To be outside the machine is to be without a language, condemned to emit sounds that inside interlocuters (sic) will interpret as evidence of …infantilism…- or simply madness".(Hite 'The Other Side…' 28).

characters in the title. This allows one to analyze how Rhys's focus on masculinist commodification and aestheticization of women draws on the colonialist mythos and how Conrad's tales troublingly operate within that paradigm. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is an important part of Rhys's corpus for me because it takes a closer look at what is of course seminal to her fictional diagnostics, the male psyche. The male characters in her fiction, it can be argued, are often closet aesthetes under their brisk, worldly exteriors, who fall into edgy encounters with marginal, mysterious, women like Walter with Anna Morgan or Mr Mackenzie/Horsfield/ Neil James with Julia to stimulate their secretly nurtured bohemian inclinations. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna's and Walter's love scene in Savernake forest where Walter takes her stands out for Walter's willingness to show interest in Anna's Caribbean origins. But closer reading reveals that the whole scenic backdrop of a wildly flowering landscape, his exhorting Anna to admit that the flowers that grow on his island are as charming as the ones that are found on hers, his vocalization of his 'fantasy' to make love to her in those 'lush' environs, lead to that revealing moment when as the narratorial voice tells us, "Walter said, as if talking to himself, "No imagination? That's all rot. I've got a lot of imagination. I've wanted to bring you to Savernake and see you underneath those trees ever since I've known you" (67).Walter seeks to establish a distance from his more staid image and adventure imaginatively and sexually into uncharted regions. But that Walter's wild fling is deliberately orchestrated to cultivate a rakish adventurism and that Anna's origins add to this picturesque simulation is clearly underlined through Rhys's use of the word 'clockwork' and through Anna's discomforting awareness of Walter's self-absorbed objectification of her. In fact, just after Walter's admitting to his scripted erotica, Anna muses on how the loveliness has gone from the scene - "But something had happened to it. It was as if the wildness had gone from it."(67) Turning to colonial discourse theory, this could be read as Walter taking on the lineaments of the colonizer enacting the fantasy of penetration into the exoticized 'other'. In this scene, interestingly, Walter who otherwise characterizes Anna as 'forward' in her ways, calls her 'shy,Anna' since this is his chance to reprise the role of the conquistador. His foray into the imaginative is figured in erotic terms with Anna serving as the conduit to a fantasized 'excess' such as when he tries to seduce Anna into making love in the forest.

Mr Mackenzie is introduced to the reader as a model member of "organized society" (17). Rhys's sneer at bourgeois patriarchy and its facade of respectability is at its sharpest when she writes, "Mr Mackenzie was a man of medium height and colouring.He was of the type which proprietors of restaurants and waiters respect. He had enough nose to look important ,

enough stomach to look benevolent .His tips were not always in proportion with the benevolence of his stomach, but this mattered less than one might think ”(17). Mr Mackenzie, this most practical of men otherwise, whose very corporeality seems to be the exemplum of measured deportment, and in an echo of Walter’s wariness of Anna’s unrestrainedness, suspicious of Julia’s feminine unguardedness, finds himself nevertheless drawn to Julia’s mysteriousness. This is where I also see Rhys slyly engaging with the co-ordinates of the adventure genre, and hence again bringing into play an interface with Conrad. Of course, her insights are very different from Conrad’s as one will see. Mr Mackenzie, whose frame bespeaks proportion, we are told was something of a poet in his youth who had even published a book of poems back then. The narrative voice emphasises his secretly nurtured lust for “strangeness”, “recklessness”, even ‘unhappiness’, and that his ‘morbid’ fascination for the strange has brought him to Paris , almost compulsively as a matter of fact - “ Paris had attracted him as a magnet does a needle”(18). Significantly, his money is made through passed down ownership of a line of coastal steamers, further strengthening Rhys’s suggestion of his flirting at the edges of an adventurous existence.His being drawn to Julia is an extension of this fascination for the unfamiliar. Extremely prescriptive in his behavioural code, he has that other voyeuristic side to him - one that feeds on the flamboyant displays of Parisian bohemia and on Julia’s mystique. The imagery of ingestion that is associated with him, since he seems to be connected in the novel with the world of restaurants, is significant as it underlines how he consumes and specialises Julia’s edgy living, even while sitting in judgement over it. As he says to himself, “She was irresponsible. She would have fits of melancholy when she would lose the self-control necessary to keep up appearances”(21).The two sides of Mr Mackenzie co-exist in a masterfully maintained balance.We are told that he swore by the social code and departed from it only when he was absolutely certain no one would know. There is the socially-scripted imperative, of propriety , proportion, order and balance , that he follows scruplously and yet that is threatened from below by his desire for ‘adventuring’ into the wild. The closeted poet in him resurfaces in his letters when he waxes eloquent to Julia about putting his throat under her feet. By placing his desire for Julia and his cloaked adventurist aspirations in such close conjunction, Rhys exposes the hidden subtext beneath the normative colonial script - the fascination with the anarchic as lurking under the exemplary coda of colonialism.The novel’s many references to the animalistic and the primitive incontrovertibly places it within the modernist and colonialist paradigms. The enclouded genealogy of most of Rhys’s protagonists ensures their entrapment within these frames and hence creates space for Rhys to decrypt these stereotypes. In *After Leaving Mr*

Mackenzie she does this through exposing the double speak of the male characters. She uses the exclusionary narratives of modernism and racism as subtext in Julia's relationships with the three men. In the mention of Mr Mackenzie being drawn to Paris like a magnet is implicit Rhys's first-hand knowledge of the primitivized erotica on show in the sexualized atmosphere of the Parisian clubs.Julia's 'animalisitic' otherness intrigues the roué in Mackenzie- in the words of Carol Sweeney, this is how racist exotica " nourishes the etiolated poetics of the domestic subject "(27). The remark is particularly appropriate in that it employs the metaphor of consumption and also points to, vis-à-vis Mackenzie's forays into versification, his attempts at adventuring into otherness.

Thus while Mary Lou Emery is right in pointing out that Julia is framed in every sense of the word, the racist-imperialist, patriarchal and modernist discourses that frame her into in Emery's words " the abyss of nonrepresentation" are constantly held up to scrutiny by the writer (*Rhys* 130). In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, too, as in other fictions by Rhys, the societal sneer is architecturally inscribed onto streets, houses, buildings, etc. Just after her meeting with Uncle Griffiths, the juridical voice of patriarchy in the novel, Julia looking around her as she traverses the streets, finds the houses "bulging" with importance, stepping forward as if to posit their stolidity (Julia also notes that they all look apiece) against her waywardness (61), which was the judgemental refrain of Uncle Griffiths' patronizing conversation with her, the "fat" pillars as if 'engorged' with a sense of their importance (61). The phallic imagery underlines Uncle Griffiths' masculinist arrogance.Even later in the novel, there are telling moments, such as when he recounts with relish how pickpockets wore false arms while the real arms did the trick. He also proudly announces how he did not become a dupe. From within Griffiths' perspective, this could well be an indirect, sneering glance at the subterfuges employed by women like Julia. He then goes on to hold forth on 'life', 'literature' ,'Dostoevsky' , to a captive female audience -"Uncle Griffiths sat in the arm-chair and went on talking, eagerly, as if the sound of his own voice laying down the law to his audience of females reassured him"(96).But it is Julia's voice that again threatens his declamatory burst. When he pontificates against Dostoevsky wondering why one should "see the world through the eyes of an epileptic", Julia retorts, "mechanically, as one's foot shoots out when a certain nerve in the knee is struck" (96). It is the suggestion of a sort of literary eugenics in Uncle Griffiths' statement that she opposes when she says, "But he might see things very clearly, mightn't he? At moments" (96). It is primarily a revolt against the eugenicist paranoia of people like Uncle Griffiths, which ranges from the social, racial to the aesthetic.

After Leaving Mr Mackenzie is an apt case study for my overall argument that Rhys's work performs a readerly diagnostics of scripted norms and societal codes. In the novel, it is the script of masculinity that Rhys pries open, not only through the eponymous character but also through Horsfield and Neil James, again to underline how their venturesome forays out of the bound script by which they live necessarily reduce the woman , Julia, who is their conduit to the non-conventional, to the status of object. Significantly, Horsfield first gazes at Julia through a mirror, as he catches a glimpse of her slapping Mackenzie. The moment fixes itself in his mind as having a "fantastic", almost filmic quality (28), which is even more pertinent since his encounters with Julia seminally involve the "primitive" pleasures of the cinema. The 'hysteria' embedded in the scene, its muted sensationalism, seen through a distorted mirror, frames Julia for Horsfield in the economy of the primal and fantastic, which is in sync with his present need to digress from the scripted imperative of purposive masculinity seen in his decision to taste adventure by spending his inheritance in sojourning around Spain and the south of France. In the Rhysian world, the co-ordinates of 'adventure' are differently inflected from Conrad. While Conrad recalibrates the genre and shifts its focus from its earlier manifestations, navigating between the topographical and the psychological, in the final analysis Conrad reinscribes its masculinism. Rhys brings the lens of gender to bear on the issue-she probes how the calculated and opportunistic experimentalism of the male characters feeds on racialized femininity. Thus while both Rhys and Conrad reshape the adventure genre vis-à-vis its masculine provenance, Rhys's insights are expository whereas Conrad fluctuates between disavowal and re-investment, between rupture and reconstitution.

Mr Horsfield gives way to impulse in picking up Julia but only begins to feel in control once he has given her money-"When he had done this he felt powerful and dominant. Happy."(36) Importantly, this is a prelude to her sharing her chequered past with him. It seems that like Mackenzie, Horsfield too is attracted by the unknown quantity that she represents, underlined early on in the text by the narrator -"Her career of ups and downs had rubbed most of the hallmarks off her, so that it was not easy to guess at her age, her nationality, or the social background to which she properly belonged"(11). Thus, adventuring in the case of the woman amounts to nullity – her urge to escape turns Julia into a blank, so that when the sculptor Ruth hesitates to give credence to Julia's past, she actually needs to pull out her documents and scraps of memory to resuture her identity. She tells Horsfield about her desire to get away from England "I wanted to go away with just the same feeling a boy has when he wants to run away to sea-at least, that I imagine a boy has. Only, in my adventure, men were mixed up, because of course they had to be. You understand, don't you? Do you understand

that a girl might have that feeling?"(40). A little later she describes her intense urge to get away as seizing her in an "iron" grip (40), reminiscent of Marlow's fascination for the Congo possessing him completely. Marlow too uses the offices of the opposite sex, his aunt, that is, to procure a berth but the realm of adventure can only remain robust by exorcising flabby female melodrama as "rot" and "humbug" (15-16). Thus the last meeting between Marlow and the aunt happens over the domesticated ritual of a cup of tea and sees Marlow moving off with the aunt safely immured in the lady's drawing room. Marlow lingers over that picture of felicitious femininity safely sealed –in "a room that most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing room to look" (15). Though initially hounding his aunt,Marlow proceeds to erase the shadow of the feminine sex from his voyage out, and his take-off point coincides with the woman being kept out of it, both conceptually and materially. It is only with the aunt 'soothingly' ensconced in her boudoir that the male adventure begins.

Julia's adventures cannot "of course" proceed forward without men - it is matrimony that becomes her release from a contracted existence (40). Julia's existence fluctuates between a desire to defy norms and a recognition of dependence on the male sex. In the patriarchal script, the narrative of adventure when deployed by the woman devolves into misery and destitution. Even as Julia narrates her intense desire for an unconstrained existence to Horsfield, he feels a "warm glow of humanity" suffuse him at this account of misadventures (42). While Horsfield pre-emptively reads ruin and downfall into Julia's moment of confession, Uncle Griffiths strikes the more punitive note when he announces a doomed existence for Julia as a woman who "always insisted on going your own way"(61). This of course would problematize a feminist reading of Rhys since in her fiction women's efforts to unshackle themselves from scripted authority seem foredoomed. Julia recalls how she communicated these yearnings to Ruth and also strangely it seemed to the woman in the painting, referring to the Modigliani nude. This is a moment of a redoubling of frames, as she herself is framed by Ruth and as the woman in the painting is framed within the discourse of modernist art. Though such moments in Rhys's texts seem unnervingly suffocating in their bleakness, they do chillingly chart the sociocultural imperatives that delimit women's lives. In *Paradoxy of Modernism* Robert Scholes approaches the high-low divide from a different angle when he speaks of the artistic aspirations of three women models, Nina Hamnett, Kiki and Beatrice Hastings who all wrote (Hamnett also painted) but would more likely be found in high modernist discourse by virtue of there being "nude images of all of them, made by famous male Modernist artists." He then asks a basic but pertinent question -"How many nude images of male Modernists do we have? …And male artists painted by others than

themselves?"(224). As women with talents in their own right, their fame derives more from their being framed within male modernist artscapes. Griselda Pollock anatomizing the gestures of modernist art from a gendered position notes how a noticeable number of the famous male masterpieces foreground the nude or the brothel. As she observes, "So we must enquire why the territory of modernism so often is a way of dealing with masculine sexuality and its sign, the bodies of women-why the nude, the brothel , the bar? What relation is there between sexuality, modernism and modernity. If it is normal to see paintings of women's bodies as the territory across which men artists claim their modernity and compete for leadership of the avant-garde, can we expect to rediscover paintings by women in which they battled with their sexuality in the representation of the male nude?...there is a historical asymmetry- a difference socially, economically, subjectively between being a woman and being a man in Paris in the late nineteenth century" (76). But by replacing the presumed male viewing subject of Modigliani's nude by the female spectator, Rhys through Julia shows how this art drew on the primitivist and also a raced femininity.

The struggle that is foregrounded is between subjecthood – "the eyes were blank…but when you had looked at it a bit it was as if you were looking at a real woman, a live woman" (40)- and a submergence in the triumphal performances of modernist iconoclasm -in finding that she is speaking to the woman in the painting, Julia too flounders between subjectivity, that is, voicing her own thirst for adventure, and being a conduit for the adventurism of the men in the novel. Commenting on her, Mr Horsfield thinks,"And this one had rebelled. Not intelligently, but violently and instinctively. He saw the whole thing" (42). It is as if Julia is a more extreme manifestation of his more considered quest for the untraditional. The distinction he draws between rebelling intelligently and dramatically also underlines how Julia becomes for him simultaneously the object of pity and a piqued curiousity. But if he reads Julia's spirited yet bound to fail sallies as an example of indiscreet, foolhardy adventuring, she in turn reads astutely his divided personality-"very tidy and very precise" on the outside but erotically impelled towards the "primitive" nevertheless(63). His own responses betray that he has not quite subdued that animalistic part of him, a fact that Julia again intuits when she notes-"He's been taught never to give himself away" And then "He looked rather subdued, till you saw in his eyes that he was not quite subdued yet, after all."(63) And that flashes through in his rejoinder when Julia observes how society derives a "subtle pleasure" out of the misery of the powerless- his response is-" Subtle pleasure? Not at all. A very simple and primitive pleasure" (64-65). As opposed to Julia who has been cast "outside the pale", men like Horsfield flirt at the edges of that precipice, seeking a thrill in

such liaisons,(ad)venturing out of the familiar but never endangering their social respectability. There are various protestations from Horsfield against his bourgeois existence ("a white house with green blinds") -importantly he speaks of his yearning for "a bit of sun" (121) which would again bespeak of his pursuit of exoticized pleasure through Julia. And finally, having sampled that he heaves a sigh of relief at Julia going off, and after his brief skirmish with the unfamiliar retreats into familiar environs-"It was as if he had altogether shut out the thought of Julia.The atmosphere of his house enveloped him- quiet and not without dignity, part of a world of lowered voices, and of passions, like Japanese dwarf trees, suppressed for many generations. A familiar world" (127). It is time to put an end to his orientalized fantasies and withdraw into the hushed tones of respectability.

To this interface with Conrad and his 'sneer' at the simplistic, even propagandistic, glories of the adventure tradition, whose generic conventions he strips of glamour in his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*(the text named in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*) Rhys brings a gendered lens as she shows how the woman's, Julia's, desire to insert herself into the adventure quest brings her up short against encoded cultural norms. Mr Horsfield's privately expressed yearnings for a more exciting life are contrasted with Julia's explicit chafings and publically expressed rages, which ironically entrap her further while making her quixotic enough to attract the closet libertines. One must also keep in mind that Rhys domesticates the adventure tale, that is, places it in a metropolitan setting. Rhys probes the Gothicized, repressed libidinal subtext of the urban city through such fiction.

Andrea White analyzes how Almayer marks a departure from the heroes of the imperial adventure tale since he is hardly the stuff that pioneers are made of, for instance in the way the lure of lucre seems to be the primary animating force in his life (121). Conrad's fraught, uneasy, relationship to market driven writing is discussed by both White and Dryden.[17] Linda

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[17]There are a number of critical essays that look at how Conrad's battles with poverty notwithstanding, there was always a desire on his part to identify a niche audience for his works. In his chafing against how he feared that his work would be read as revolving around the "infernal tail of ships"(qtd in Peters 47) , he was inclined towards a more select audience as better able to appreciate his re-workings of the adventure genre. John Marx cites an interesting exchange between Conrad and Blackwood's on a wider dissemination of *Lord Jim.* Blackwood's proposed that the novel could be sold in a cheaper edition. Conrad turned down the proposal, declaring that he would much rather find appropriate, discerning, readers, "leaving the Democracy of the bookstalls to cut their teeth on something softer"

Dryden points out that Conrad wrote rather self-consciously to Cunninghame Graham about Karain-"I am glad you like Karain. I was afraid you would despise it. There's something magazine'ish about it. Eh?" (110). White discusses how in composing his Malay fictions, Conrad was both deploying the frame of the exotic and "also aware of a certain antagonism towards the very discourse he knew his work would be read within." (118) Though White is referring to antagonistic responses to tales about strange beings from far-away lands, might we not also talk about Conrad's own suspicion of pre-fabricated brackets within which his writing might get boxed? To that extent, Conrad seems to anticipate the conflictual relationship of the modernist coterie to popular modes.

The rebellion against pre-scripted norms is also reflected in how both Conrad and Rhys, though this would simultaneously involve taking stock of Rhys's response to Conrad too, write back to the generic bind of the adventure tradition. Carol Dell Amico in her comparative reading of the two writers makes two important points-one, that the colonialist subtext of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is underexplored and two "the coincidence of Julia and Almayer."(90). But first to start with the women characters since *Almayer's Folly* inserts itself into the fictional landscape of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* when Norah contemplates the fate of the slave woman, Taminah from *Almayer's Folly*. Amico interprets the reference to primarily illuminate Norah's positionality, where she is on the one hand the slave to her domestic situation and hence akin to Taminah and on the other hand according to Amico her physical description allies her to Nina, the half-caste daughter of Almayer.(81). But it would perhaps be more interesting to study the two texts together by casting a look at the range of women characters in Conrad's text, that is Nina, Taminah *and* Mrs Almayer since this is the way into understanding the Conradian shadows cast on Rhys's novel/s- the issue of slavery, that of agency, the Creole/ half-caste woman, the native woman and the motif of adventure. To explore Amico's suggestion of the links between Julia and Almayer is to circle back to the genre of adventure. But I see another interesting overlap, the idea of ageing. In this first novel by Conrad, it is as if the adventure tradition ages even before coming to life. Thus though I agree with White that Conrad from the beginning re-deploys the genre to excoriate the

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(John Marx, "Conrad's Gout"). Another instance of Conrad targetting a niche market is when he refused to submit his story "The Return" to 'Pearson's Magazine', asserting that it was " much too good to be thrown away where the right people won't see it" (qtd in Liggins, Maunder and Robbins 108).

bankruptcy of colonialism, I would like to add that though Conrad recognizes the emptiness and the foreclosure of romance in the genre's prescribed forms, its allure holds him and it is only with *Heart of Darkness* that he reanimates the genre by mating it with the cerebral ferment of the modernist script. In *Almayer's Folly*, we are confronted primarily with its atrophy. In fact Conrad's ironic treatment of the genre revolves around replacing movement with stasis, action with inaction-the rivets that never arrive (*Heart of Darkness*) or the colonial house, the definitive symbol of imperial conquest, that never gets completed (*Almayer's Folly*).

The novel in the figure of Almayer seems to write the epitaph to the laid down co-ordinates of the adventure format. If Conrad writes of the 'follies' and the etiolation of the genre, prior to pitching it at a more philosophical level, Julia Martin herself is the emblem of ageing 'folly' and misdemeanour. Rhys looks at Julia's pent-up rage at a system that denies women the chance to break out of a slavish compliance to pre-formations, such as that women advancing in age are squeezed into even narrower brackets – when after their mother's death, Norah tries to explain away Julia's outbursts as resulting from her feeling "miserable" and "sorry for everything", she is faced with an unrepentant Julia who retorts-"Sorry? But it was rage" and who insists that she feels an overpowering urge to "spit" in the face of sham respectability (97). This is startlingly reminiscent of Marlow's strong urge to "measure distance by spittle", by spitting on the manager and his uncle, those buccaneers of imperial capitalism, who condemn Kurtz in the name of respectability. If one were to linger a little over this comparison between *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and *Heart of Darkness*, both Conrad and Rhys seem to differentiate between true and false buccaneers – but while the true adventurer, Kurtz, is anointed even in failure and death in Conrad, Julia as the more incautious complement to the cautious, calculated breaches of Mackenzie and Horsfield can only effect a readerly rupture of the 'normativity' of the hegemonic script- she cannot write a generic riposte to it.

Rhys chooses this first novel by Conrad because it speaks directly to themes that would continue to haunt her own writing-the idea of interracial, intercultural, contact, and the spectre of miscegenation. It is here that the figure of Mrs Almayer assumes importance. One can see her as something of a Bertha Mason from within Conrad's oeuvre. Bearing in mind the important distinction of course between the native woman and the Creole, the commonalty has more to do with the racial slur that is attached to cohabiting with women of tainted or in the case of Bertha dubious bloodlines. When Lingard first suggests to Almayer that untold riches would come his way were he to marry his 'daughter', Almayer thinks only

of his own 'dilemma', that is, his fall from the majestic image of the white man –"There was only within him a confused consciousness of shame that he was a white man" and he finally reconciles himself to the reprehensible prospect thus-" …she may mercifully die. He was always lucky, and money is powerful! Go through it…He had a vague idea of shutting her up somewhere, anywhere, out of his gorgeous future. Easy enough to dispose of a Malay woman, a slave after all…"(12). Conrad renders starkly the racial self-absorption of Almayer, but does this necessarily result in a portrait of Mrs Almayer from the inside, one that takes cognizance of how the trauma of colonialism affects her? She emerges as primarily a schemer and harridan, again startlingly reminiscent of Rochester's characterization of Bertha. In the initial years of their married life, Mrs Almayer lives immured in her separate tenement, only known to the world through her snarls and uncontainable rages. She is shown to burn furniture and shred the pretty curtains and when she finally emerges from seclusion to claim her daughter, Almayer bemoans her "witch-like" presence polluting his house (33). Conrad portrays her as a deranged, odd, figure though hers is perhaps the starkest story of colonial dislocation and psychic displacement. For instance it is her slimy acquisitiveness that lingers-though there is a brief glimpse into her psyche, it lays bare its distortions rather than its trauma. As a termagant figure, from whose lips abuse spews forth liberally (again reminding one of Rochester's claim about Bertha that " no professed harlot ever had a fouler vocabulary than she"; 355), she makes for a revisiting of how native/ Creole women were figured in terms of foul, unseemly, excess. It is a different matter that Almayer fares no better- his deferred dreams of glory fight for control of Nina with the more palpable native allure of Dain Maroola and egged on by her mother's reminders of the glories of her ancestors, it is Nina's adventure quest that begins at the point that Almayer's snaps. Thus the hybridized Nina becomes the site for Conrad's reworking of the generic valence of the adventure tradition-and nativism and alterity as conduits into unexplored regions that are only suggested here prefigure the more complex and drastic (since Nina as half-caste is already half-implicated in these) ruptures and reformulations of *Heart of Darkness*.

Another figure who flits at the edges of the novel's and Almayer's worlds is that of Taminah, the slave girl who also dreams of release and novelty but whose servitude condemns her to sameness. The novel finds a point of intersection between Norah's predicament of being chained to domestic drudgery and Taminah's situation. Taminah's final revenge on Nina for being able to realize the possibility of a life with Dain, something that she herself could only dream about, is to incite Almayer into action. The entire scene between them is figured as Almayer wrestling with a demon-in fact the words "phantom" and " apparition" are used for

Taminah(113). Again, the slave woman's move from the shadows to visibility is unimportant - she in fact is invisiblized throughout the scene since she is more a catalyzer to Almayer's fight with his own passivity and inaction. In the cast of primary antagonists her brief emergence into articulacy is obscured and peripheralized.

Rhys's novels examine the complex and varied facets of women's entrapment. In that light, reading the Norah-Julia configuration as a mirroring of the Taminah-Nina dynamic, one can understand Norah's sanctimonious condemnation of her sister as a manifestation of her suppressed yearning for a more expansive existence. It is the meeting with Julia that releases her pent-up frustration and in fact just after dwelling on that passage from *Almayer's Folly* she gazes at herself in the mirror and finds herself torn between a certain satisfaction derived from societal appreciation –" Everybody always said to her: ' You're wonderful, Norah, you're wonderful. I don't know how you do it.' It was a sort of drug, that universal, that unvarying admiration…And so she had slaved"- and a consciousness of how her death-in-life condition – "It's like being buried alive" (75). As she recalls her mother's second stroke and how "since then her life had been slavery", her rage at how the patrons of good society stood around her and moralized about her nobility, while her youth and beauty died a slow death, makes her lash out at them, much like Julia, as "Beasts…Devils…"(76) though she retracts from that rebellious outburst to a more compliant (and baldly pragmatic) position soon enough. Though Sue Thomas is right in pointing out how Rhys erases locational specificity in employing the reference point of the slave woman to underline Norah's subjugation (*Worlding* 85), what Rhys does do is to show her awareness of the differential registers of entrapment that both Julia and Norah face - Norah's claustrophobia resulting from her capitulation and Julia's rage at constriction emanating from her recalcitrance.

And that brings one to the most evocative, as also the most under-read images of incarceration in the novel. This needs to be mentioned in this section because it again takes us back to Conrad, this time to *Lord Jim*. In a rather enigmatic reference to her childhood, Julia conflates her feeling of abandonment (happiness) and feeling pinned down (afraid) to the pictured scene of her prancing around, culminating in her catching butterflies. She describes how she had mastered the art of catching butterflies without breaking their wings, her purpose being to put them in a tin and listen to the desperate sounds of its struggle -"And then you walked along, holding the tin to your ear and listening to the sound of the beating of wings against it. It was a very fascinating sound. You wouldn't have thought a butterfly could make such a row…Besides it was a fine thing to get your hand on something that a minute before had been flying around in the sun" (115-16).

It is rather a puzzling passage since it seems that Rhys is again returning to her excoriation of the lurking capacity for voyeuristic violence in human beings -only she is doing it through Julia herself. The almost salacious pleasure humanity derives from watching the powerless squirm is of course a leitmotif in Rhys's fiction. In *Voyage in the Dark,* for instance, Anna comments on the way the 'other' is hunted down -" But I think it was terrifying- the way they look at you.So that you know that they would see you burnt alive without even turning their heads away: so that you know in yourself that they would watch you burning without even blinking once. Their glassy eyes don't admit anything so definite as hate. Only just that underground hope that you'll be burnt alive, tortured where they can have a peep…"(103). This sporting with misfortune and suffering is the note struck in the above quoted passage from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* too, yet whereas Anna reads this in others Julia is presumably "afraid" since she spots that streak in herself (116). Only Rhys complicates even that interpretation by mentioning that what makes the girl afraid is that labels begin to be pinned onto her acts of impulse- she only wanted to keep the butterfly comfortable and "give it the things it liked to eat", but it is a measure of her socialization that she understands how she has opened herself out to the charge of being "a cruel, horrid child…" (116). The disturbing undertones cannot however be ignored-Julia does extract a thrill from hearing the sound of the ineffectually beating wings. Rhys seems to be casting a general glance at the human propensity for gratuitous cruelty.

The image is especially reminiscent of Stein's entomological interest in butterflies in *Lord Jim*. Marlow's meeting with Stein underlines the latter's interest in 'curiosities', human as well as those from the insect world – another echo of the residual and cerebralized traces of the adventure tradition in Conrad's work .Marlow is drawn to him in his capacity as a "collector"- he tells Stein he has come to him who is a connoisseur of rarities to discuss a "specimen". In both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* Marlow seeks to dubiously anoint the compromised, self-involved, protagonists, to overlay their 'absence' with philosophical speculation. It is as if some fundamental 'lack' in them requires them to be written into a haloed narrative by the *par excellence* storyteller Marlow- that 'excess' of writerliness can be glimpsed in the meeting between Marlow and Jim where Jim hovers around lost in the background while Marlow writes obsessively. This comes at an important juncture when Chester, the mercenary, piratical, man of business, seeks to use Marlow's services to engage the forlorn, down-on-luck Jim and Marlow rather violently shouts him down, as if saving Jim for a more aestheticized realm of pursuit. Marlow speaks of keeping a grip on his own faculties in the face of Jim's miseries by concentrating on his "industrious scribbling." And

Marlow consciously projects himself as protecting Jim from a crudely earthbound future by almost writing him into a narrative of greater allure–" At this point I took up a fresh sheet and began to write resolutely. There was nothing between him and the dark ocean…All at once on the point of the pen, the two figures of Chester and his antique partner, very distinct and complete, would dodge into view…No!"(132-33). With the furious scribbling of his pen, Marlow fobs off the easy option of telling Jim about Chester's offer- he writes them out of the narrative, inducting Jim into a more resonant one. In both the fictions, Marlow's masterly narratorial rendition writes the protagonists into sublimity. One is left wondering then, who is the more masterful curator of oddities- Marlow or Stein?

In these interfaces between Conrad and Rhys , explicit and indirect, I see Rhys engaging with the trope of the colonial voyage, deploying that as a vantage point from where to excoriate imperial hierarchies and conceits, but marking a seminal difference from her canonized male precursor, using the point of view of her women protagonists to achieve that objective. Another crucial difference as this chapter suggests is that Rhys's work reads its way into existence-it tears into the exceptionalism of Western narratives. Conrad's work moves towards a writerly overhauling of arcane generic conventions and the more puerile forms of popular culture, but nevertheless reinscribes some of its more problematic and racial-patriarchal attitudes. Both writers register their distance from encrusted imperial attitudes by using the trope of the voyage. In Conrad's case, however, it is macro-formulations that ultimately take precedence over colonial realities, whereas Rhys uses the criss-cross of imperial voyaging as an entry point into tracing "the micro-physics of unchecked power on the subjectivities of oppressors and oppressed" (Donald E Hall 37).

Chapter Four

Of Parvenus and Pantheons: 'Reading Back' From the Margins in Rhys and Mansfield

" …you see I am not a highbrow. Sunday lunches and very intricate conversations on Sex and that 'fatigue' which is so essential and that awful 'brightness' that is even more essential - these things I flee from…"

Katherine Mansfield (in a letter to William Gerhardi: qtd in Smith v)

In a number of statements, such as the one quoted above or when Mansfield writing to Ottoline Morrell, referred to herself as "baby scholar" and "upstart" (Mansfield *Letters* 319), or in the way Rhys distinguishes herself from the heavily cerebralized milieu of modernist cartels by referring to her "one syllable mind" (Wyndham and Melly 24), there is a self-conscious attempt on the part of these writers to place themselves as 'lowbrow'. It is not the contentious (the cross-rivalries) but the commentative value of that self-positioning that I examine in this chapter.

Functioning within the frame of reading Rhys's work in consonance with that of her (near) contemporaries, yet also moving away from looking at her writings in juxtaposition to that of the more canonical writers, this chapter attempts a side-by-side reading of Rhys with another writer from the colonial extremities—Katherine Mansfield. In this chapter, I trace the continuities in their preoccupation with gender, location, the modernist moment and the colonial context.This chapter argues that if Rhys's and Mansfield's piquant position within the colonial structure (and in Mansfield's case her chosen writerly province, as a writer of short stories) made them something of parvenus, they seem to embrace the label and proceed to turn into a leveraging point to cut into modernism's self-monumentality.

This side-by-side reading of the two writers finds its genesis in the argument that rather than simply according relatively late entrants into the modernist corpus like Rhys and Mansfield a place in the hallowed precincts of modernist experimentation, it is important to see how even as the favoured modernist tropes were taking shape, they wrote to combatively engage with them and expose the gaps and elisions. The work of colonial expatriates like Rhys and Mansfield can be seen as looking askance at the culturally miscegenated fictional landscapes of high modernist masterpieces as also offering a resistant reading of the 'cosmopolitanized' writerly milieu in which they lived and worked (Rhys in *Quartet* and Mansfield in "Bliss", for instance). Given that the 'sneer' as used in this study implies the modernists' distancing

of themselves from regressive (imperial) attitudes, and their openness to an increasingly multicultural milieu, it is revealing to examine how these writers show these gestures of iconoclasm as compromised along race, class and gender lines.

Since I am probing more the disaffiliative in their writing, the question I am asking is whether the new turn in modernist studies, its revisionary largesse, might possibly be in danger of appropriating even that which is non-synchronous. The fevered zeal with which these writers voyaging in from the margins are being 'centred' involves perhaps a reverse peril. If exclusion implies a silence, then there can be an insidious silencing even in gestures of inclusion. It might silence the profane impulse in the writings of these authors - their sly yet sure combative engagement (the counter-sneer) with the artistic milieu of their time.The quote from Mansfield that I begin with engages quite directly with the vaunted modernist atmospherics. In this chapter, I attempt a detailed reading of Rhys's and Mansfield's dis-identification from favoured modernist tropes, thus coming at and destabilizing the high-low schism in another way, by seeing the 'low' as a complementary but also critical/expansionary addendum to the high.

The first section of the chapter looks at the two writers' relationship with urban spaces, mostly in contradistinction with Woolf's treatment of city spaces. In the following section I do a consonant reading of the two writers vis-à-vis their ironic glance at the modernist milieu. Mansfield, like Rhys, was tortured by unbelonging, neither completely at home in the conservative colonial society of New Zealand as also something of an interloper in the avant-garde circles of the imperial centre.I foreground the sly satire that both direct at the pretensions of the European art world, Rhys in the *Quartet* and Mansfield in stories such as "Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day", a delightful take on a high-faluting male artist who sees a 'staid' marital life as an artist's nemesis. To that extent, both writers maintain a sceptical and wry distance from "the audacities of avant-gardism" (Begam and Moses 1).

The next segment deals with the leitmotif of the voyage(and the related implication of female adventurism) in the works of Rhys and Mansfield. And I close with an examination of how their work can be read as predating/ anticipating some of the concerns/ motifs that are now seen as integral to postcolonial literature.

That "Longing For Cities"

(Murry 71)

The work of Rhys and Mansfield can be sub-divided into two segments vis-à-vis their occupying the interstices between metropole and periphery- their metropolitan fictions and the work set in their place of origin.In keeping with my overall thrust on reading these writers

as in an interrogatory relationship with the thematics of high modernism, I begin with their focus on the city. In engaging with this trope that was so much a part of Woolf's overhauling of gendered economies, I look at how they add a necessary post-scriptum to that.

Touching upon Henry James's depiction of the city's spectacle, Woolf asks in an essay on James-"If London [or the modern city in general] is primarily a point of view, if the whole field of human activity is only a prospect and a pageant, then we cannot help asking, as the store of impressions heaps itself up, what is the aim of the spectator, what is the purpose of his hoard?"(Parsons 61)[18]. Mansfield, Rhys and Woolf herself, approach and read the visual spectacle with an expository 'purpose' in mind. Rhys deploys the axes of female flânerie to chart the difficult journey of single and disempowered women through the city. In their precipitous descent into alcoholism and vagrancy, brought on or at least exacerbated in large part by societal intolerance, Rhys situates a counter-critique on the society that pillories them. Mansfield's depiction of underclass women like Rosabel in "The Tiredness of Rosabel" and Ada Moss in "Pictures" manoeuvres between the liberationist and the carceral in charting women's negotiations through the city. Modernist fiction's interest in the new, visible, urban presence of women is reflected in the works of Rhys and Mansfield, yet the revolutionary thrust of female flânerie is 're-routed' in seminal ways."The Tiredness of Rosabel" and Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* and "Mannequin" look at the 'fairy palaces', the consumerist havens, from the point of view of the server rather than the served. Where Woolf turned female flânerie into a high art, my analysis points to how Rhys and Mansfield in their work are more attuned to the urban forays of disadvantaged women. And as for Woolf, her dissection of the city can be sharply political yet her choice of words in critiquing James revealingly reflects back on how the urban forays in Woolf are encompassed within the writerly - the "hoard" of impressions as much explorations of 'otherness' as extensions of modernism's promiscuous interest in the other to revivify a moribund literary landscape.While her protagonists' rambles through the city imply a sustained and provocative conversation with the realities of socio-political power, yet the observed rests in conjunction with the crafted, both contained within modernism's generative dynamics.The other important difference is that of class-most of Woolf's wandering women are tied to stable (mostly upper-class) structures. Rhys and Mansfield on the other hand focus on women who

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[18]Virginia Woolf, "Henry James" (1919), rept. in Graham Clarke (ed.) , *Henry James: Critical Assessments, vol. I, Memories, Views and Writers* (Mountfield, Helm Information Ltd., 1991), 356.

are a part of the mass that in fact engage the spectatorial eye of Woolf's female narrators, whether one thinks of *Mrs Dalloway*, or 'StreetHaunting'.

In Woolf's *Night and Day* (*Night*), Mary Datchet, the suffragist, after a morning spent immersed in work, prefers to indulge her palate in a restaurant, "a gaudy establishment" (70), while her co-workers choose the quieter alternatives, the much older Mrs Seal eating sandwiches brought from home on a park bench and Clacton opting for a spartan vegetarian meal as opposed to Mary's heavy repast. We follow Mary as she seats herself in a restaurant, and see that a covert flânerie is also a part of the indulgence-"she bought herself an evening newspaper, which she read as she ate, looking over the top of it again and again at the queer people who were buying cakes or imparting their secrets". Running into a female friend, she lunches with her, and then they both emerge onto the bustle of the street, with a purposive sense of being a part of its energy- stepping out "with a feeling that they were stepping once more into their separate places in the great and eternally moving pattern of human life" (70).

Compare this with Sasha Jensen in the opening section of *Good Morning, Midnight*- "I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life" (9). Rhys situates a single woman in an urban context but here the beleaguered aspects of women's existence in cities is more palpable, since her women's outsiderness both disadvantages them and gives them the acidic edge with which to unpick the imperial/ racial/ gendered hierarchies that form the subtext of the city. The novel suggests that it is only through such micro-management that Sasha can negotiate the urban landscape. Sasha follows this up by talking of how choosing the right eating places/drinking holes is crucial to her staying afloat. She talks of how "last night was a catastrophe" recounting an incident of how while drinking in the company of a woman and her male companion , she broke down-at which the woman turns on Sasha for making a public spectacle of her misery. In her unrestrained display of emotion in the cafe, Sasha flouts the distinction between public and private-but this certainly needs to be read in juxtaposition with how Sasha's own privacy is publically consumed.That anguish at how the marginalized are easy prey is written into sentences like this one-" No more pawings, no more pryings-leave me alone" (37).

Sasha speaks of how she needs to narrow down on places where she can be "dry, cold and sane" (10). A little later, she plans her next fifteen days with the main thrust on how the idea of survivalism is tied to picking the right urban spots-the ones most likely to be gentle on a down-and-out vagrant like her-"This is going to be a quiet, sane fortnight. Not too much

drinking, avoidance of certain cafes, of certain streets, of certain spots, and everything will go beautifully" (14). The contrast with the passage from Woolf could not be starker- while Mary chooses her spots to run her spectatorial gaze over the urban scene, Rhys's women pick spots that promise inconspicuousness. There is a crucial commonalty too- the women in both scenarios execute a reading of the urban miasma- though Mary does it with/in relative ease, whereas Sasha's bitter dissection is of one from the margins. But what stands out is that Rhys and Mansfield (self-consciously?) choose protagonists who represent the grimy side of women's urban endeavours-as Parsons says, Rhys portrays the "counterparts to the university-educated and professional women entering the city in the first decades of the twentieth- century city: mannequins, models, showgirls, and prostitutes- and are problematically uncertain realizations of the urban woman as model for emancipated identity" (145). While Woolf revolutionizes women's relationship to cities by showing her women laying a claim to space (the young Elizabeth in *Mrs Dalloway*), Rhys's women look for a space to retreat. And yet from those nooks and crannies of withdrawal, they fix an unerring eye at the prejudicial societal 'sneer' as played out in public spaces.While Rhys's women themselves remain bound within a narrative of failure, their fate reflects back on class and race hierarchies as equally important in any valuation of the changing trajectories of women's lives.Thus what the colonial parvenus, Rhys and Mansfield do, is through choice of alternate city spaces ,to cut into the class biases of the modernist pantheon.

If we shift our focus from Woolf to Mansfield and Rhys, we see the underside of the urban milieu coming into view. Ali Smith notes that "Woolf in her more rivalrous moments dismissed Mansfield to herself for her 'cheap' realism, the ABC tea shop, waitress-peopled, downmarket settings of her stories" (xix). Woolf commented on various occasions on the cheapness of Mansfield's fiction, and her comment if lifted out of its disparaging registers, can in fact throw light on the positionality of the two writers; Mansfield's deliberate incursions into the most minutely material aspects of her 'downmarket' protagonists' lives as a deliberate departure (in common with Rhys) from the "aesthetics of respectability" (Thomas "Aesthetics of Respectability" 64). [19] In turn, Woolf's discomfort highlights how as Thomas says, "imperialist politics and aesthetics of feminine respectability inform her

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[19]As Pamela Dunbar points out, Mansfield plays with "literary decorum"; she "gives a cleaning-woman, a boarding house-keeper, a lonely spinster, the stature and status of heroines. And in the gap she reveals between their lack of social esteem and the richness and generosity of their inner lives lies the stories' irony" (62). Dunbar's point is well taken yet in

judgements about the artistic credibility and respectability of Mansfield's writing" (Thomas 79).

So to move from *Night and Day* to Mansfield's "Pictures" marks a movement from, while still remaining within the parameters of women's emergence into visibility, the pioneers to the stragglers- Mary investing her intelligence and energy in spearheading the suffragist campaign and Miss Ada Moss struggling to find work as a contralto singer. Interestingly even the rather patrician Katherine Hilberry has her moment in an ABC teashop - and yet it becomes the place where she scripts a part of her own at least partly self-impelled narrative with Ralph. It is a site for a writerly interlude- where she, having first bought pencil and paper in the bookstall, secures an empty table and a cup of coffee and writes her impatience with bourgeois mores-she complains of William's and Cassandra's unimaginativeness in that they "insist that we are engaged" (*Night* 384).The energy and intellectualism of Mary's and Katherine's ventures is very different from the seedy narrative of Ada Moss's struggles. Even as she sinks into the comforts of the 'gaudy establishment' where she lunches (*Night* 70), Mary's is a self-conscious foray into the urban vortex. Ada Moss's straying into the ABC teashop is more a quotidian marker of the landscape that defines her life and crucially linked to her itinerant, random existence. After revelling in the orgiastic tableaux of imagined "Good Hot Dinners" and "Sensible Substantial Breakfasts" she counts out her money and left with only one and threepence, chooses to head for an ABC (*Collected* 119). Mansfield and even more pungently Rhys sketch the geography of dis-possession through the spots and locales which form the fabric of their protagonists' lives- decrepit hotels, cramped bedsits, lavabos and back streets and alleys. Rhys's *Quartet* in fact is about sketching a pedestrian path that is in sync with Marya's desire to discover the 'other' city. Deborah Parsons speaks of how the Parisian Left Bank was made up of both the middle class spots, the bals musettes, frequented by students from the Sorbonne, and on the other hand the boîtes which were more

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more general terms she seeks to restore a certain decorousness to the proceedings, acknowledging the mundane yet simultaneously ennobling it, whereas I detect a more flagrant departure from decorum in Mansfield. Mansfield's heroines' inner lives are made interesting not only by their richness but also by the societal diagnosis and astute understanding of society's sneering vanities that their cloaked rage, or alternately, their tired despair unleashes.

disreputable (156). Parsons notes that Rhys knew of both since Ford organised dos at the Bals Musettes. So it is even more significant that her characters, such as Marya, incline more towards the world of the boîtes.In her architectural mapping, Rhys consciously charts the less privileged borderlands of the city.

Commentaries on Woolf and the city highlight how the route charts and sites/ sights that her characters' negotiate are seminally tied to her political critique. My argument is that in the same vein, the choice of locations in Mansfield and Rhys deserve equal attention in foregrounding the critical element in their writings. For instance to stay with Mansfield's "Pictures", in their discussion of "new spaces of food consumption" (Benson and Ugolini 81), Gareth Shaw et al rightly point out that the department store was certainly the quintessential commercial consumerist haven, but the newly evolving food chains also merit attention.In another essay on the same urban phenomenon, Scott McCracken chooses to debate the complexities of gender and the modern metropolis, and the transforming co-ordinates of both, through the emblem of the chain tea shop. The establishments he looks at are ABC and Lyons. McCracken points out that the "chain teashop was a key element in a distinct lower-middle-class habitus" (Brooker and Thacker 86).

In situating Ada Moss in the ABC teashop Mansfield gives us but in characteristically low-key fashion a visual sketch of a space occupied by women - the ABC's were staffed by women. Mansfield relies on her readers' awareness of this by not making the gender of the cashier clear till sometime later in the narrative. Thus she slips in the sense of a differently defined urban scene at the level of the quotidian- and this is in keeping with how the story explores the everyday, deglamorized, struggles of small-time professionals like Ada Moss- the revolutionary ferment of women's incursions into the outside world is squarely approached through the lens of privilege/non-privilege. Additionally, one might again turn to Saikat Majumdar's thesis, a part of his formulations on postcolonial thought, that "the assertion of the ordinary as a significant site of the historical" (176) must be taken into account in tandem with the more theatrical aspects of struggle.Using that theoretical frame, I am arguing that Mansfield and Rhys venture into the non-spectacular and even the compromised in their explorations of the potentially emancipatory narrative of women's growing engagement with modernity. Leon Betsworth notes in his dissertation on cafe culture in modernist literature that Rhys's women are frequently found nursing a drink in cafes. He reads this spatially as both "potentially transgressive" yet also (156) a marker of their abject marginality. But more importantly he locates in the exclusionary eye that often confronts

them in these spaces a platform from which the writer stages her reverse "pertinent observational critiques" (158).

Though "Pictures" lingers on the visible urban presence of women and although this story looks at predominantly female encounters, the register along which these thematics unfold may be read as non-utopian. This is related to how Mansfield and Rhys look at the woman-woman encounter through the multiple prisms of race, class and gender and hence these encounters are necessarily fractured and divisive.To that extent the work of these writers treads the difficult ground between being non-constructivist but decidedly expository. The story in fact begins with a particularly abrasive encounter between one woman and another, Ada Moss and her landlady to be precise. Such friction between the woman lodger and the female house owner is an ubiquitous feature in Rhys's fiction and here we glimpse a similar dynamics in Mansfield. The writer shows that the survivalist registers being common to both, the encounter is inevitably hostile- the landlady seeks to eke out her rent from Ada Moss as also to clip the wings of this rather beleaguered avatar of the New Woman-" My sister Eliza was only telling me yesterday-'Minnie…' she says 'She may have had a college eddication and sung in West End concerts' says she 'but if your Lizzie says what's true ,'she says ' and she's washing her own wovens and drying them on the towel rail, it's easy to see where the finger's pointing…'"(*Collected* 120). Mansfield sketches a scenario where the most intimate parts of a woman's life are publically consumed. After that final act of infringing on Ada's privacy by snatching away her private letter, she backs away but not before labelling her a woman of dubious character, through the heavily ironized sally of addressing her as "My lady"(121). Rhys's women constantly battle that sneer too. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna's progress through a procession of rooms that replicate one another is paralleled by a repetitive enactment of hostility on the part of the landladies. Thus Mansfield and Rhys do frequently paint the same landscape as Woolf- in fact perhaps oftener than her in that much of Rhys's fiction focuses on single women. These are all writers drawn to the spectacle of the city and preoccupied by women's negotiation of it. But while Woolf and the city have long been the subject of critical enquiry, it is only now that that the same thematics are beginning to be explored vis-à-vis Rhys and Mansfield.This is also to re-visit the core argument of this study- to bring up front the congruent but also the non-congruent while studying theses writers' different perspectives is in the ultimate analysis to add to and extend Woolf's well-theorized investment in the urban scene, and to see how writers with a different positionality bring a new, though perhaps not as enabling a dimension, to the subject.

Away from London for some time, Mansfield wrote in her journal in 1915- "My longing for cities engulfs me" (Murry 71). Intrigued or repelled by the spaces of the city, but alike returning to its labyrinthine realities time and again, Mansfield and Rhys take us into the 'rooms' of single women yet their explorations square upto the indignities of their lives more decidedly than Woolf's fiction does. The focus of Mansfield and Rhys is on the inglorious. This is not to suggest that their work does not take cognizance of the aspirational vis-à-vis women- yet it makes more space for fraying of aspirations, the lacklustre struggles of the underclass, the tiredness of the Rosabels in other words. Admittedly these are more narratives of failure than fruition-the rooms are a suitably decrepit accompaniment to the grimy lives of their inhabitants. Woolf's oeuvre enjoys its rightful place in the feminist archive since hers is an enabling narrative in the ultimate analysis. Yet as Sue Thomas points out, the tactility of hardship, the underworld of unsavoury sights and smells, is left out of her writing and in fact a revulsion to it expressed in many of her private statements. Thomas notes how "Pictures" opens with the stale smell of Ada Moss's 'cheap' dinner pervading the room as also becoming the signature signifier of the story. She relates this to how Woolf in a number of statements panned Mansfield herself as also her stories such as "Bliss" for their cheapness (65, 68). Both Rhys and Mansfield factor in the sensory co-ordinates of their protagonists' existence with unflinching attention to minutiae, which probably explains Woolf's objection to the 'cheap realism' of Mansfield's stories.

A louche, low, world is of course the fictional province within which Rhys works. All three writers chronicle changing gender paradigms through their focus on women and the city, yet in Rhys's case, the registers of class and race equally pressingly modulate that concern. Deborah Parsons speaks of how the proliferation of consumer "stores offered a new sensory experience for women, and were liberating for those working and shopping in them" (47). Mansfield and Rhys portray this more from the inside, focussing on how the fragile sense of identity of their outré protagonists is affected by this consumerist stimuli. Pamela Dunbar points to how Mansfield "challenges conventional notions of the romantic heroines by focussing on ageing and socially disregarded figures"- 'Miss Brill', 'The Canary', 'Life of Ma Parker' (71).In their conscious choice of socially marginalized protagonists, Mansfield and Rhys certainly extend the canvas of fiction revolving around women.

I would like to end this section with looking at two stories, one from each writer, where they examine the consumer spectacle of the city. Rhys tells the story of the urban vortex from the other side- whether it be from the point of view of the model vis-à-vis the world of art or from the perspective of the mannequin when it comes to the booming, bustling fashion

industry. That in fact is how one of her early stories is titled. The story that recounts a very young Anna's first assignment as 'Mannequin', hence the title, looks at the unglamourized inside of the glamour business. Rhys employs a de-pastoralized vocabulary to convey the shabbiness of the setting, such as when the room where the models change, if one looks beyond the sensual flashes of rouge, naked limbs and silken lingerie, is described as unwelcoming and cold,"a very inadequate conservatory for these human flowers"(21). There is also a frequent evocation of the labyrinthine metaphor-on numerous occasions, Anna's negotiation of the corridors of the establishment is compared to her winding her way through a maze. The story shows an interest in the back-rooms of the glamour industry-Anna muses over how "At the back of the wonderfully decorated salons she had found an unexpected sombreness; the place, empty, would have been dingy and melancholy, countless puzzling corridors and staircases, a rabbit wren and a labyrinth"(21).

Interestingly the word 'underground' is used to describe the place from where lunch is served. This is important since this is the most animated space in the building and the place where Anna exists in an uneasy bonhomie with the other models. This scene is the centrepiece of the story. On the one hand, it is the space where the work-force casts a counter-glance at the inner workings of the business, such as a fellow model, Babette, who speaks of sexual exploitation at the hands of proprietors of these salons.To that extent it is the 'underground' feminine space of subversion. But at the same time Rhys looks at the internal hierarchies that reign among the women. Rhys lingers over how the models have been selected to fit into the 'genres' of the fashion industry. This is of course a glance at how commodification is finessed into an art, with fine distinctions and artful niches honed to perfection. She also hints at how their professional profiles seem to seep into their actual demeanour, such as when Mona, the femme fatale of the house is shown as having cultivated a sneering superior air towards the rest.Rhys's inside rather than aerial view also dwells on how work divisions breed rivalries, for instance how the pale-faced 'workers' sewing away with "the stamp of labour" on them glance enviously at the 'blatant charms' of the models (23).While both processes are implicated in the process of commodification, the latter is more inconspicuous, the former more in the arena of visuality.

The envy of the women in the labour pool and their looking askance at the models can be better understood if one takes into account Nancy J Troy's analogy between theatre and fashion. She quotes Paul Reboux who speaking in 1927 of the Rue de la Paix, the fashion high street that is the site of Rhys's story, emerging as the locus of couture houses, also observed how the mannequin had evolved from a strictly functional role: "Presentations by

mannequins have acquired a kind of theatrical pageantry" (Troy 5-7). Taking the analogy between fashion's staging of spectacle and the form of theatre, Troy points out, making a particular mention of the needle trade, that the visual lure of the foreground depended on the mass of workers sewing away in the background. Yet the place of congregation, riven though it is by hierarchies , is also the place where they experience a temporary reprieve from the "raking eyes of customers", and where they swap stories about boyfriends and career struggles(25). It is a measure of Rhys's unromanticized portraiture that she shows how the scopic ethos permeates the store and so even the lunch hour is not entirely free from the assessing gaze that the women turn towards each other, though it also allows for a modicum of sociability that eases the otherwise dehumanized atmosphere of the place.

Rhys again collapses the division of the inside and outside by bringing the metaphor of the labyrinth from the street to the inside. Where a number of Rhys's novels show the woman wending her way through hostile streets, sneering faces and derisive glances, this story places that sense of dislocation on the inside. Sasha's sense of the houses stepping forward aggressively to sniffingly judge her claim to urban passage takes a slightly different complexion in Anna's case in 'Mannequin' even as the feeling of constriction binds the experiences of the two. At many points in the story Anna feels the oppression of the inside weighing on her and after the long day of work, feels that "the white and gold walls seemed to close in on her" (25).In fact, that sense of winding through a never-ending maze also forms Sasha's experience of the inside of the fashion house she works for, as she is sent off by Mr Blank on a futile search.

Thus neither shopper nor worker break free from exploitative networks. For all early readings that saw Rhys's work as lacking a locational specificity, these cryptic yet involved renderings of specific urban facets shows how attuned she was to what Steve Pile terms the "micro-climates" written into cityscapes (12).The story ends with Anna feeling as if she is gasping for air, caught in the meshes of "hectic capitalist urbanity"(Donald 52). Rhys conflates the inside-outside yet again when the story's finale casts a glance at the surging stream of models and mannequins sashaying down the pavement of the Rue de la Paix , as if the street and the ramp of the couture house have merged into one. There is admittedly a moment when Anna feels an onrush of elation at being part of this purposeful, pulsating, female multitude. Rhys plays on the notion of artifice when she again deliberately bends a pastoral metaphor in describing how the colourful and gay parade of mannequins made the pavements "beautiful as beds of flowers" (26). The final vision is of the Paris night swallowing up these women. The story looks at the world of fashion from the inside and its

gendered lens explores both facets- the enabling potentialities as also further entrapment within a consumerist gaze. In lingering over the aspect of artifice and constructed glamour that make up the city, Rhys unpicks the tantalizing surface-text of the urban fabric to reveal the lurking inequities and oppressions on which it rests.The story touches upon both the sense of a burgeoning female presence in the city, but also the networks of exploitativeness that impede its paths.

Like Rhys in "Mannequin', Mansfield approaches the fashion industry in 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' through the consciousness of the worker.Mansfield's story places Rosabel in the consumer space along all the three axes identified by Reginald Abbott (194) as central to women's relationship to commodity culture-as a shop assistant, as a shopper and as a consumer icon (in the way that both the girl in the shop and her male friend spectaclise her). The story significantly begins with Rosabel exercising her power as a consumer though the reader is made to understand clearly that this power is severely constrained and can only mean securing one indulgence at the cost of forgoing others. The story plays off one kind of room against another-the dazzling largesse of the rooms of fashion spectacle as against Rosabel's small rented accommodation. These represent the two poles of the urban spatial environment for women from the sub-strata trying to make a life for themselves in the city.

That Rosabel's entire negotiation of city spaces, including her domestic establishment, is mediated by her worker's experience of the consumerist parade, is in evidence- on her way home, she endows with magic some of the sites encountered but as she nears her room, the magical changes into the gothic- "Westbourne Grove looked as she had always imagined Venice to look at night…even the hansoms were like gondolas dodging up and down, and the lights trailing luridly…When she stood in the hall and saw…the stuffed albatross head on the landing, glimmering ghost-like.."(514). Rosabel's interface with the city is through the registers of fantasy – the oppressiveness of public transport is briefly palliated by the romantic haze induced by her reading a few fragments of *Anna Lombard* over her co-passenger's shoulder. At the same time, the 'voluptuous' fantasies unleashed by the read fragment make her chafe against the mass of humanity, which "seemed to resolve into one fatuous, staring, face…" (514). She seeks to erase her own implication in that anonymous sea of humanity through the erotic power of the fantasized scenario. This is also in contiguity with the desire for transcendence that the day's events at the store have released in her. The two spaces that define her existence are alike marked by constraint and powerlessness, but one through its potential for voyeurism, creates 'room' for imagining an alternate, richer, life.

Mansfield like Rhys retains a stubborn focus on grim micro-details, such as when Rosabel shifts from the canvas of fantasy to confronting the decrepitude of her day-to-day existence- with even the minutest details such as the enamel coming off the basin being recorded by the writer (514). Objectality is of primary importance in the way Mansfield and Rhys reconceive/ revise modernist landscapes.Objects are foregrounded but while in Woolf everyday objects lead forward to the epiphanic (the snail in 'The Mark on the Wall'), in these writers they are squarely a measure of the oppressiveness of the existence of the lower classes.Mansfield and Rhys have an unerring eye for the small, trivial detail. In subjecting the question of detail in art to a gendered analysis, Naomi Schor points out how the focus on detail in women writers is seen as evidence of their inferiorized literary production - she argues that embrace of detail in women writers is directly pertinent to " traditional separations of high and low subjects" (4). She sees the foregrounding of detail on the part of women writers as an instance of insubordination- it represents a desire to " subvert an internal hierarchic ordering of the work of art which clearly subordinates the periphery to the centre, the accessory to the principal, the foreground to the background"(15). Can this, especially given the vocabulary Schor uses, be reoriented as a comment on high and low modernism?Can one then hazard to say that in Woolf details are both brought up front but also fitted into a whole-ideological/aesthetic - but in Rhys and Mansfield they obtrude, stare you in the face, and become a statement in themselves?

At the store, Rosabel has a unique vantage point from where to view up close the private lives of her customers. Mansfield shows how the spectatorial operates here from the point of view of both the customer and the seller and for the latter it is alternately intoxicating and embittering. As she watches the languorous intimacy between the young lady and Harry, she experiences a moment of rage at being treated like a mannequin by the girl who then sweeps out of the shop, secure in her affluence. Thus if we read backwards, Rosabel's entire journey back from the establishment where she works is an effort to un-write her dehumanization by the rich class. While the girl personalizes the encounter briefly when she comments on how good the hat looks on Rosabel, but in the next moment majestically exits from the shop with scarcely a look backwards, Harry in turn dehumanizes her by his over-familiar remarks on her figure. As soon as his girlfriend's back is turned he assumes a tone of insolent familiarity in speaking to Rosabel, thereby underlining that her status as a shopgirl renders her easy game. When the girl first enters the store, she turns to airily ask of her escort -"What is it exactly that I want, Harry?" who envisages for her an eccentric, impossibly structured, piece with a giant feather (515). For the upper classes, buying is a non-utilitarian pursuit that

strengthens the aura around them. This is precisely the scenario that Simmel in his essay on fashion associates with the fashionable strata of society- how their quest is for the item that scandalizes - "The reason why even the aesthetically impossible styles seem distingue, elegant and artistically tolerable when affected by persons who carry them to the extreme, is that the persons who do this are generally the most elegant…so that under any circumstances we would get the impression of something distingue and aesthetically cultivated "(544).

Class dynamics are written into the fashion script, and the pursuit of fashion by the luckless protagonists of Rhys and Mansfield foregrounds this aspect. Rosabel's entire fantasization following from that brief encounter revolves around a relationship with Harry but at the centre of this flight of imagination is the life that it can make available to her. Consumerism remains very much the pivot even of her fantasy life- the bunch of violets that she buys at the beginning of the story and that seem like a rash indulgence, are now available by the armful. There is the luxuriant erotica of dress and food-it is these sensual luxuries that form the centre of Rosabel's dream and it is these that electrify her contact with Harry. Mansfield brings alive the yearning for consumer goods in someone who is steeped in that economy, but from the other side, those who are part of the industry yet without the material power to be its beneficiaries. Thus Rhys and Mansfield are aware of the chimera their women pursue but they also understand how these can give a sense of worth to their dispossessed selves. They portray the compelling nature of these consumer spectacles for those women struggling to forge a life for themselves in urban centres, with understanding, since their own experiences showed them how these contributed to the self-definition of the derided. Maroula Joannou points out that in an article in 'Harper's Magazine' Rhys dwelt on the pleasure she got from clothes and how this added a different dimension to and hence interrupted her predestined role as a victim-"This assumes" she said that "I have never had any good times, never laughed, never got my own back, never dared, never worn pretty clothes, never been happy" (470). Rhys's protagonists alternately analyze the iron grip of contemporary trends as manifested in fashion and draw on these as a way out of their abjection. Joannou comments on how the vocabulary of fashion is expansively spread across Rhys's works –"It encompasses hairstyling, jewellery, cosmetics, manicure and all the means whereby the fashion-conscious woman is able to perfect…"(470). In 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' Mansfield's enters the fashion industry through the 'tired' Rosabel's eyes. Rhys's fiction focusses similarly on the role that fashion plays in the lives of her women characters from a non-judgemental perspective. In fact, they often reconcile themselves to the drabness and constraint of the 'rooms' they live in by dwelling on the buying of new clothes. When Julia is

paid off for the final time by Mackenzie, she skirts the emotional wrench of the situation by buoying herself up with how she can at least present a better made-up face to the world- "She thought of new clothes with passion, with voluptuousness. She imagined the feeling of a new dress on her body and the scent of it, and her hands emerging from long black sleeves" (15). In that last reference to self-specularity is the voice of a woman trying to restore her pride in her physical self.

In a close reading of 'The Make-Up of Rhys's Fiction', Rishona Zimring points out how Rhys both scrutinizes the culture of commodification yet also makes space for the fashion culture as assuaging the bruised subjectivities of the pariah figures of her fiction. As she writes, "Analyzing the effects of beauty culture from the point of view of the urban ingénue, Rhys's fiction of the 20s and 30s repeatedly show women spending in attempts to compensate for displacement and loss…Make-up and other adornments do offer her protagonists some means of self-assertion…"(215). This can be read against the repeated references in the novel to Julia'a self-perception as also other people's looking at her as a ghost. Coming back to England, Julia writes to her former lover Neil-"I hope you don't mind my writing to you. I hope you won't think of me as an importunate ghost" (*Mackenzie* 48). Clothes help add a layer to her self- to ward off these frequent feelings of dissolution and ghostliness. When she meets her sister after a long gap, Norah typically measures her in terms of her clothes. In fact, Julia's fashion consciousness first prods her to reflect on her own complete disconnect with the fashion vocabulary of the times and to ask fiercely of her sister, when Julia seems to indicate financial problems- "And who's better dressed – you or I?"(54). Julia responds by explaining that this buying spree was to gain at least some acceptability in the eyes of her family. As already discussed (Chapter One), she longs for the protective glamour of the fur coat to ward off the belittling eyes of the paterfamilias figure, embodied in the text by Uncle Griffith.

Thus these fictional pieces from Rhys and Mansfield do not look at the fashion system from within a rigid binary of dupes/ accomplices- their women are the victims but also alternately the strategic deployers of what this new consumer realm had to offer- whether to fight off "the eternal grimace of disapproval" or to eroticise and expand the contours of their drab existence (*Voyage* 140). But of course that brings us to how "the hieroglyphics of dress" is so much at the heart of Rhys's writing and whether the popular culture paradigm it falls into would not again summon the spectre of high and low (Joannou 475), a fact contested by Woolf in her questioning why writing on fashion should be designated 'trivial', yet her tone in her essays and personal memoirs indicates that she herself never quite saw much merit in

these user-oriented realms. Modernists saw themselves as creators and not as consumers. Trinh T Minh-ha writes-"High culture has often been defined as creator-oriented" and a little later, "High culture in such a context is …mystified as the exclusive realm of the creators, while popular culture remains equally mystified as that of the passively demanding consumers who, more often than not, are presented by their very advocates as fixed and unchanging in their ideology of consumption"(195-97).One is arguing against that last assumption-that even those who are participants in this culture retain a perspicacity to decode its inner workings, that consumption need not be entirely severed from creative or tactical cunning.

Woolf makes the point that the frame overpowers the framed, that the extraneous descriptiveness obscures rather than reveals. It is here that the micro narratives of the non-canonical (at least at that time) writers could be seen as in dialogue with such formulations. For with Mansfield and Rhys, we return to these grottos of mundaneness where micro details are not merely atmospheric or even illuminative (in terms of throwing light on the character) but in fact seminally related to their interstitial placement between core and periphery, consumer (as caustic readers of the urban milieu's gender/class/race biases) and consumed (the derision they themselves faced as 'little colonials'), inside and outside. Placed at the heart of the imperial metropolises, they register through the course charted by their women characters, both the potentialities and the predatoriness of the cityscape.

Of Literary Soirees and "Cubist Sofas": Modernism as Performance

"It was a very select, very fashionable affair…They sat on cubist sofas."

"Je ne parle pas français" (*Collected* 70)

Both Rhys and Mansfield in their non-fictional and fictional, Mansfield more in the former, outpourings engage with their status as little colonials sneered at not only by Londoners but also by non-human entities (as already noted in Rhys). In her journal, Mansfield writing of a walk through a garden feels as if the red geraniums jeer at her- "And what are you doing in a London garden?' They burn with arrogance and pride…If I lie on the grass, they positively shout at me, 'Look at her, lying on *our* grass, pretending she lives here, pretending this is her garden'" (Murry 157). By detecting violence in the landscape, Mansfield joins Rhys in their apprehension of a predatory city, closing in on the "swarm of outcasts" that had descended on it as a consequence of imperial cross-truck.In another entry, Mansfield, never one to let go of an opportunity to unmask, speaking of a book where the French are portrayed in an uncomplimentary manner writes-"They aren't human; they are in good old English parlance-monkeys" (Murry 142). Even though one finds, given her context, a more searching analysis

of racist taxonomies in Rhys, such statements show that Mansfield's work too bears the stamp of the awareness of England's imperial arrogance, so that inferiorization of any kind is pictured through 'good old English' racist parlance. Thus when we see Mrs Norman Knight parading her dress ensemble at Bertha Young's party, we cannot but note her acute and in fact provocative awareness of the shock value of her attire, with monkeys embroidered along the hem. Though Rhys's work, primarily due to the longer chronological stretch of her writing career and because of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is often read against the backdrop of empire, Mansfield's New Zealand stories are read in that context but her metropolitan tales are rarely subjected to that category of scrutiny. Yet these stories in fact betray a wry engagement with the playing fields of colonialism and empire. In this section, I look at both how these writers satirize the performative gestures of modernist non-conformism, and their particular ironization of modernist cosmopolitanism's problematic relationship with empire through their works set in the metropolis.

As someone who was more closely aligned to coterie formations and yet aware of their qualified acceptance of her, it is a different aspect of in-betweenness that we come across with Mansfield- more a consumer of these art coteries than their acolyte. Mansfield reads the nature of their self-fashioning cosmopolitanism with a spry wit and satirical eye whereas Rhys casts a more unforgiving glance at it. But both in their metropolitan settings foreground the elisions in the captivating tale of modernity -" Elided in the preoccupation with individualized modernity…was the question of how imperial spoils were being channelled as capital accumulation, urban wealth and grandeur in the metropolis" (Verma 48).What marks their commonalty is their *reading back* to the empire's cosmopolitan modernity .

The vanitas of the (male) modernist milieu is read into by Rhys in "Tea with an Artist". The narrator of the story finds herself drawn to the figure of an artist in a Parisian café. Verhausen, the narrator's friend informs her, is a maverick and a loner, who jealously guards his own pictures and refuses to exhibit them. He is reported to be living with a girl he " had picked up in some awful brothel" (*Stories* 30).When the narrator seeks an appointment to at least see his paintings, he insists on her consuming two cups of tea before she sees them- "Two cups of tea all English must have before they contemplate works of art"(31). The story constantly fluctuates between the homely and the unhomely- the ritual of tea to make the narrator feel at home, the long row of Verhausen's pipes hanging on the wall that the narrator comments on as suggesting the "Dutch homely"(31) . The homeliness, even ordinariness, of the proceedings is counterbalanced by the artist's separateness. When the narrator compliments him on his work, she observes that "He received my compliments with pleasure,

but with the quite superficial pleasure of the artist who is supremely indifferent to the opinion other people might have about his work" (32). In the midst of the banal, Verhausen retains the exclusive elevatedness of the artist figure.And the irony of this is most visible in how the homeliness of the muse's homecoming, after a round of daily shopping , makes Verhausen uncomfortable and becomes the catalyst for his denigration of the woman who he otherwise exalts in his paintings.

In Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, the woman artist discounts Julia's reality and gives scant credence to Julia's possibly having a narrative of her own to tell. Similarly, in "Tea with an Artist", Marthe, Verhausen's model and mistress, remains suspended between his sublime art and her ordinary, mundane reality. Rhys's enquiring glance is trained more towards Verhausen whose extravagant painterly presentation of Marthe clashes with his chuckling dismissal of her small-mindedness- "When I am dead Marthe will try to sell them and not succeed, probably…Then she will burn them. She dislikes rubbish, the good Marthe" (33).In a reprisal of the mind-body dualism, Verhausen views her physicality through an aesthetic prism but belittles her intellect and understanding. In pronouncing that to her his work is "rubbish", he lets slip the unadorned truth about the purportedly 'intense', exalting, artist-muse connection. In fact, he looks distinctly uncomfortable once Martha enters the scene, and the narrator sniffs the "antagonism" in the air. The aura of "modernist mentoring" is evoked and punctured in various pieces by Rhys (Kineke 281) such as here. His embrace of alterity[20]- he has picked her up from a brothel- and his pious homilies about the virtuousness of fallen women only go so far, then. The narrator on the other hand assesses her as armed with the necessary qualities that would help her survive in the urban jungle. She notes that the woman whose lack of training limits her to "small horizons" seems capable nevertheless of "quick, hard judgements"(33). No glib judgements are passed on the girl. She

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[20]It would perhaps be interesting to read Mansfield's "A Cup of Tea" alongside this story from Rhys's oeuvre since both stories are about brushes with alterity, with the ritual of an 'English' cup of tea occupying a central place in the narrative. Rosemary Fell who is portrayed as quite the salonniere brings home a wastrel, as a way of 'exotically' experimenting with otherness (*Collected* 398). Mansfield plays on the idea of the tea table as the site of the exchange. Given the imperial origins of tea, Mansfield like Rhys, touches on the idea of homely/ unhomely, mundane and exotic, and the experimental proclivities of the modernist salons.

is only shown to display signs that bespeak her enculturation-with her knowledge of sexual barter, the narrator's last glimpse is of her caressing Verhausen's cheek with a "certain sureness" of touch. She leaves the couple gloating over Marthe's purchase of artichokes, with Verhausen "looking pleased and greedy", and the greed can be variously read as artistically appropriative, sexual or simply gastronomic(33). This is a typical Rhysian maneouvre-moving from the spectacular to the quotidian and prosaic. Thus Rhys constantly pits the worldly and material against the sublimely artistic, so that the tantalizing figure in the painting holding a glass of "green liquer" gives way to the original coming in from outside , carrying a bag full of "green groceries"(32). Rhys offers a wry reading of the gender imbalances that underpin narratives of bohemia.

Rhys even more than Mansfield remained precariously poised vis-à-vis the modernist coterie-in a relationship with Ford, she certainly partook of the atmospherics of modernist experimentalism, in art as in life. But as has been the overall argument of this study, her addendum to modernist iconoclasm is best appreciated if one looks at her as retaining a disaffiliation from the master-narrative of high modernism. All of Rhys's protagonist who have an experience of artistic circles, such as Julia Martin, both in her role as model for a sculptor and in her comments on her (former) lover's connoisseurly pursuits, seem to be at the fringes of the art establishment. In a story such as 'At the Villa d'Or' Rhys"s woman protagonist, "Sara of Montparnasse" as she is described at the beginning of the story (73), clearly occupies an uneasy relationship with the art world-dependent on its patronage yet uncomfortably aware of its hypocrisies and pretentiousness. The opening words are a direct comment on how in the modernist period, locations defined and underpinned artistic worth, whether it be Montparnasse or Bloomsbury or as another site of modernist high jinks that Sara compares her present location to - The Golden Calf. Peter Brooker's *Bohemia in London* has an entire chapter on how The Cave of the Golden Calf became an important club for art congregations of the bohemia. Its brochure, an extension of modernist manifestos as Brooker points out announced-"We want a place given up to gaiety, to a gaiety stimulating thought, rather than crushing it"(75). The eponymous calf formed the centrepiece of the decoration and the "animalistic" atmosphere was accentuated by painted scenes of jungle and hunting (74). The cabaret of course was a reminder of the ubiquity of the libidinal in the experimental flights of the 'high Bohemia'. Recent work such as Christopher Reed's *Bloomsbury Rooms* has shown how modernism had a strong atmospheric bias, so much that the interiors (and even the facades) of its creative sites such as Bloomsbury that is the focal point for Reed, were calculated to discard the conventional and to suggest the sensual and the breakaway.

With her allusion to the Golden Calf, Rhys points to how modernist coteries envisaged their rebellion in spatial terms. Thus the "sumptuous" decor of Mrs Valentine's house as also her arranging herself on the sofa with her five Pekinese around her (perhaps a nod in the direction of 'The Calf's' superb patroness Frida Strindberg and her cultivation of the voluptuous) are details that satirically point towards Rhys's ironizing of the self-narrativization of the arty Bohemia (75). From the luxurious depths of the plush arm-chair in which she finds herself seated, Sara finds the world carrying a promise of 'coffee, peace, optimism" (73). As a 'find' Sara is mined by rich patrons, who like Mrs Valentine pride themselves on their eye to spot talent. But that there are rules of belonging, hierarchies and unwritten codes is contained in this sly reference-"…Mr Pauloff, a little Bulgarian who lived in Vienna, occupied a sumptuous bedroom on the second floor. He painted. Sara, who sang, was installed on the third floor, though as she was a female and relatively unimportant, her room was less sumptuous"(75).Substantiating the narrative voice's claim that Mrs Valentine was " A romantic, but only on the surface"(75), this points to how such artistic mentoring far from being free-spirited or non-utilitarian, worked along carefully calibrated lines.The story plays off Mrs Valentine as the high priestess of art as against her businessman husband who finds beauty and art in bottles since he started off his career in a chemist's shop. In his sexual interest in Sara, the erotic as the subtext of the bohemian is reiterated. Thus both the man and the woman are seen as pursuing bohemian atmospherics for their own ends-the wife as a way out of marital monotony and the man as lending refinement to his moneyed existence.

If most self-privileging accounts of the Parisian bohemia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century marked it as a bustling community of intellectual fervour and artistic freedoms, Rhys depicts it somewhat differently. Similarly, Mansfield too looks at the 'Blooms Berries' from the positionality of an outré figure, and is able to delve into the faultlines of its articulations of heresy. The plush interiors of Bertha's bourgeois salon in "Bliss" becomes the locus of Mansfield's wry look at modernist sites such as Bloomsbury. Mansfield's conflictual and divided relationship with Bloomsbury is figured in "Bliss" in terms of the split between Bertha and the rest of the arty set. Bertha's toying with Bloomsburian notions is seen as gendered and personalized, as opposed to the facetious and parodic Bohemianism of the others. Mansfield's edgy positioning vis-à-vis the Bloomsburian insiders rendered her recalcitrant to its expansive gestures - the earthbound nature of her vision resisted their etherealized flights and stubbornly brought the unsublime corporeal into the frame. Again, in 'Bliss' this is presented more from the inside in Bertha's revolt against civilization's wanting to keep the body shut in a case like a "rare, rare fiddle"(92), her desire

to open out her body to taste the 'brimming cup of bliss" (101). Mansfield reserves her wickedest satire for the poseur-guests at Bertha's party. Koppen speaks of the sartorial derring do of the Bloomsburians as a crucial facet in their self-invention. As the Norman Knights enter, the narrator lingers over the attire sported by Mrs Norman Knight, a bright orange coat with a procession of monkeys embroidered on its hem. The coat comes off to reveal a dress a vivid yellow, made out of scraped banana skins. If one recalls Vanessa Bell's account of Duncan Grant's inspired visualization of her studio at Gordon Square as a giant tropical forest, or if we turn for a minute to Eric Hobsbawm's reminder of how tropical fruits like banana flooded the imperial city, one sees how the riotous excess built into her look visually elucidates Janet Lyon's reference to an imperializing cosmopolitanism (Wollaeger and Eatough 394). The lady follows up the visual challenge with this remark- "…Why! Why! Why is the middle class so stodgy-so utterly without a sense of humour!…For my darling monkeys so upset the train that it rose to a man and simply ate me with its eyes. Didn't laugh-wasn't amused-that I should have loved. No, just stared-and bored me through and through" (97). Writing against the backdrop of empire, Mansfield would want us to take note of the imperial-racial registers of both the design elements and the phobic hostility with which it is received. Recent work on colonialism has revealed that with imperial progeny and the empire's material spillover dotting the imperial corridors, the colonial gaze was transplanted into the metropolis.While the passengers on the train enact its hysterics, Mrs Norman Knight parades her willingness to plunge into the diaphanous folds of the imperial fabric. Modernism's fascination with cultural difference is legendary-what these moments make us ask is-did that necessarily entail a dialogue between cultures?

What Mansfield brings into the story with the entry of the arty clique is, in Garrity's words, "the unremitting newness of modernity"which is portrayed in all its cannibalistic zeal, borrowing from other, (ironically) older cultures and art forms('Obsolescence'19). In her almost filmic description, Mansfield draws on her own experiences of being witness to Bloomsbury high jinks. Alison Light reminds us for instance that "The Stephen siblings were not Bohemians glorying in…eating scratch meals" and that their bohemianism existed in uneasy conjunction with a thorough "dependence" on servants (53,xvii). With her own brushes with poverty and deprivation, Mansfield in her of/not of position, could catch these ironies better.

Quartet is of course Rhys's most sustained analysis of Parisian avant gardism. Rhys was a figure plagued by non-belonging, yet as a one time lover of as high-profile a figure as Ford, she was also on the fringes of the metropolitan art-scene and as such, would certainly have

been witness to its matrix of coteries, clubs and manifestoes. Ihor Junyk speaks of how the increasingly multicultural milieu of the first quarter of the twentieth century was "seen as the heroic era of Parisian modernism" (3). He also notes that the foreign artists flocking into "the profoundly international enclaves" of Paris channelized the exuberant onrush of experimentalism towards producing "new forms of art and society that rejected purity, homogeneity and stability in favour of …open forms of identity"(7). This is the surface text of the lives of the representatives of bohemia, Heidler and Lois, in the novel. And yet what Rhys looks at is how the anti-establishment becomes an establishment in itself.

It is this paradox that characterizes Lois's and Heidler's attitude towards Marya. They seem to fluctuate between casting her as the exoticised, unknown quantity and mocking her for clinging to sentimentalized attitudes, and hence annoyingly given to "drama" as Lois says (unrefined in its intensity as against the performative finesse of Lois and Heidler) , instead of participating in the ease and excitement of 'open forms of identity"(65). But that posture is problematized by Marya's insight into how certain errancies are sanctioned and in fact actively courted but ones that ruffle the implicit codes of these 'bohemian' circles invite excommunication. The Heidlers' and their ilk conduct their transgressions with a managerial efficiency. Thus it is that a Countess for some undefined infringement of these tacit codes is cut off with a certain juridical relish-"as though they had sacrificed to some tribal god" (91). Even as the Heidlers' sneer at Marya's untutoredness, Marya begins to read the internal fissures in this version of free spiritedness.

In fact, from the beginning even as the Heidlers sense and encourage Marya's off-centre positioning, they also seek to check those aspects of her personality that do not conform to their script and that could prove an obstruction to its smooth playing out. In getting drawn into their narrative of staged cosmopolitan adventurism, Marya, contrary to her articulated desire to experience "joy…like some splendid caged animal roused and fighting to get out" (59), is sucked into an alternate system of chaperonage.The Heidlers wish to convey the impression of unconventionality, dutifully taking their cue from the freewheeling atmosphere of the Parisian bohemia, yet their assertions point in the opposite direction. As Marya models for Lois, Lois works to contain the various characters that populate the cultural canvas into categories - "She liked explaining, classifying, fitting the inhabitants…into their proper places in the scheme of things. The Beautiful Young Men, the Dazzlers…the Freaks who never would do anything, the Freaks who just possibly might" (48). Lois's taxonomical zeal is a return to Rhys's recurrent theme of the Anglo-Saxon technologies of containment but equally significantly, it is an unmasking of the Heidlers' claim to non-conformism. They

have built their reputation on this impression of their being aesthetic adventurers and how that extends to their non-conventional personal life. As patrons of freaks, as spotters of as yet untapped talent and through their arty soirees, they fit in with the culture of the bohemia. Rhys however effects her exposé by underlining how their 'experimental' marital arrangement depends on conformity from the third party, in this case Marya. Sean Latham points to how Lois counsels Marya -"Lois…reassures Marya that anything so conventional as monogamy or marriage is merely a Victorian artifact and that she is making too much trouble about the unusual affair"(162). Latham also observes how this "adherence to bohemian sensuality is almost immediately given the lie" (162). The advice to comply comes not just from Lois but also from Heidler. His argument is for a clinical grasp of these affairs-" 'You are so excitable yourself', declared Heidler. 'You tear yourself to pieces over everything and of course your fantastic existence has made you worse. You simply don't realize that most people take things calmly….They have a sense of proportion and so on' " (61). His citing of Lois as not excitable is meant to teach Marya that exemplary code of deportment. At the same time, his ascribing a fantastic background to Marya as also his and Lois's continued reference to her excitableness, her wildness, slot her as the unteachable, exotic other.

Heidler seeks out Marya's otherness but at the same time pathologizes it. In the Parisian milieu that seems to be conducive to transgressionist excesses and a breaking of taboos, Marya is invited to break from the over-codified, to be "modern" and to experience adventure, the yearning that defined her original quest. But she discovers soon that the break from norms is to be conducted in the most coded manner- and with a certain savoir faire, where these complex human alignments are to unfold with artistic (artful?) calibration. Miss De Solla mentions to Marya about Heidler's having had a breakdown, perhaps another nod towards bohemian edginess. Marya's reading of him is rather different-she focusses on his radiating a placidity, 'sturdiness' and 'healthfulness' that seems to be directly related it is implied by the text to his domination of others-such as when in the very first meeting Marya feels the iron grip of his hand on her knee (12). There is an implication there that the subtext of the system of patronage that Heidler runs with such flourish is the alliance between the artistic and the libidinal.

Rhys cleverly deconstructs the 'bohemian' flair of the men in the novel, one of the continuing strands in the text. For instance though Stephan's self-image is that of a vagabond there is much in him that suggests utilitarian calculatedness - such as this passage where he prides himself on his acceptance of Marya as a sign of his non subscription to societal orthodoxies-

"But he was without bourgeois prejudices, or he imagined that he was, and he had all his life acted on impulse, though always in a clear and businesslike manner" (17).

Stephan's 'business' relies on his sourcing of obscure objects, passed off as royal heirlooms, or imperial exotica, which make them that much more alluring for the buyer. Thus the novel focusses in a sustained way on the connection that Rhys sees between these Parisian art circles and plunder, of minds, talents, native forms and objects, foreign bodies etc[21]. And Sieglinde Lemke's observation of how the avant-gardist formations in Paris set out to make insurrectional forays into bourgeois notions of propriety by embracing tabooed objects - African masks and prostitutes- is reflected in Heidler's casting Marya as the "savage" (102). Rhys and Mansfield often combine their qualified depiction of modernist highbrows with their examination of the gendered subtext of modernist self fashioning .A story that has great fun with the high jinks of male modernism is "Mr Reginald Peacock's Day". The story offers a reading of marriage as a trap, a succubus that drains creativity out of life. Reginald Peacock's day begins with his wife's raucous, unmusical, rumblings, indicating how he sees the martial as a bind. Urmila Seshagiri makes an important point when she says that the short story being Mansfield's only favoured form, her work could, and has, invited grumblings of insubstantiality and thinness but Ezra Pound's two line poem continues to be a revered piece of art(*Race* 127).The reference to Peacock's day in fact sets in motion the trope of modernist literature finding its inspiration in the ordinary rush and tumble of one day - *Mrs Dalloway*, *Ulysses*, would be the canonized novelistic masterpieces through which modernist literature's finding its muse in the mundane becomes a part of critical lore. Mansfield's story would be an interesting test-case for the same leitmotif- how the peep into this one day in the life of Reginald Peacock, lays bare gender hierarchies, both age-old as also specific to the avant-garde milieu.

As in "Tea with an Artist", the domestic and the aesthetic are fractiously yet seminally intertwined in Peacock's existence as an artist. The musician seeks to aestheticise every aspect of banal existence- even the act of getting up in the morning must be a languorously decorous one, erotically volatilized by fantasies of his female pupils, his many muses- " one ought to wake exquisitely, reluctantly, he thought , slipping down in the warm bed. He began

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[21] Carole Sweeney has written at length on the 'negrophilia' that swept Paris in the first few decades of the twentieth century and how a desire to experiment with freer modes of being meant, as she says, that " cultural fascination with blackness" stood in as a free-floating signifier for artistic pursuit of otherness (2).

to imagine a series of enchanting scenes, which ended with his latest, most charming pupil putting her bare, scented arms around her neck…"(145). He bristles with outrage at the patently uncreative, uninspiring, start to the morning-being woken up by his wife as she moves about at her tasks, in an overall with a handkerchief around her head. It is the prosaic reminders of her domestic labour that offend his artistic sensibilities more than the actual fact of that labour. Mansfield establishes in these initial paragraphs modernism's, more specifically male modernism's, looking at the 'feminine', here vis a vis the marital, as arcane baggage that needed to be cast off to approach artistic plenitude. As Linda A Kinnahan notes, male modernists like Pound vocalized a suspicion of the feminine, of getting sucked into its "emotional slither" and into its 'messy', 'sentimantilistic' bog, which would only detract from the pursuit of a robust poetics (McHale and Stevenson 24)[22]. In Mansfield's story, this becomes the grounds for Mr Peacock's chafing against the emotional drain of marriage- "the truth was that once you married a woman she became insatiable" (144). The marital and the domestic are seen as depotentiating the potent inventiveness of the male artist. Mansfield's terminology is carefully chosen- "with every throb he felt his energy escaping him" (144). Given the heavily eroticized nature of his artistic 'transactions', this bespeaks how the domestic impedes the libidinally charged outflow of the male artist.

Mansfield makes the split clear - the grandiose aspirations of the male artist are pitted against the trivial that resides in marriage. Reginald Peacock tries to elevate into artistic interludes the most mundane daily rituals- apart from his desire to awaken with a luxuriant flourish, he makes his bath a time to polish his musical skills- interestingly he chooses lines from a George Meredith poem that show the poet dreaming of his sweet love being pressed into shape by her mother- as she 'tends' the daughter in front of the "laughing mirror", accomplishing the disciplining of her feminine exuberance by tightening her stays- who envisages a time when the "wild thing" will be "wedded"- the lines speak cleverly not only of Peacock's penchant for romantic dalliances, but also of his desire to tame his 'untamed' wife. The way his voice climbs several notes on the word "wedded" is indicative of how his conception of marriage is linked to the idea of female subordination (145). In spite of his self declared forays into the unconventional registers of the boheme, he remains bound by convention. The class bound nature of his vision of artistic improvement is ironized when he

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[22]Ezra Pound 'Prologomena [sic]', in *Poetry Review* 1.2 February: 72-6. Reprinted as 'Prolegomena' in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* ed. T.S.Eliot, London: Faber and Faber, 8-9.

exhorts his son to wish him good morning and to formally shake hands with him, in a bid to transplant a lesson in decorum he picked up from an aristocratic patron. There is a scene later in the story when he overhears his wife and son bonding over the child's sharing his imaginative discoveries with his mother. These only have a soporific effect on Mr Peacock - "Reginald dozed" (152). Mansfield is having great fun here with the divisions of highbrow and lowbrow, with his own lessons in refinement to his son standing counterpointed against his disinterest in the childish prattle of mother and son.

The ardent adulation of his female pupils is based on his ability to present art as an "escape from life" (148). While we have begun now to respond to how modernism responded to the material facts of urban existence, we cannot completely reject the idea of how the high modernists have a tendency to sample and then process those quotidian discoveries in Olympian solitude. It is that conception of art as providing a glimpse of rarefied realms that is the implication in the story. One suspects however that Mansfield is also hinting at how Peacock's pitching his singing lessons somewhere at the borderline of romantic assignation and an initiation into music, implies another kind of escape too. With the hints of the erotic as charging up these encounters, the many songs of love that Peacock and his pupils practice together make possible his (perhaps their) "exultant defiance" of the staid claims of the marital (151). In his encounter with Countess Wilkowska in particular, Mansfield plays upon the contemporary fascination with the foreign.

At the end of the story as he re-enters his house, floating on the wings of triumph, both artistic and romantic, he finds himself chafing against the familiar, after his soaring forays into the unfamiliar, vis a vis class, nationality etc. There is a moment when he seeks to reconnect with his wife, but it comes to nothing as he finds himself repeating what he says to all his women friends-" Dear lady, I should be so charmed…".

Mansfield shows Reginald Peacock's artistic self-definition fluctuating between a chafing against worldly conventions and a quite worldly desire to make cultural capital of his accomplishments. This becomes of critical purchase since Mansfield and Rhys, in most of their depictions of the artistic backdrop against which and about which they wrote, satirize the vain self-constructions of these artistic formations and the elitism and classism, and in this story, the problematic gender configuration, that formed the undercurrent. While Mansfield keeps her satirical insights in this story frothy, Rhys's are more acid-laden.This issue comes to a head in the reminiscences about her days as a ghost writer that Sasha shares with Rene in *Good Morning, Midnight*. It is vintage Rhysian irony that the one scene which reveals one of Rhys's women as a writer(as opposed to her many readers) is where she is

ghost writing for a woman whose writing hovers suspiciously close to a genealogy of modernist tropes - “Persian garden. Long words. Chiaroscuro?” (140).The woman wishes to write an allegory that is set in a Persian setting. And Sasha’s aside on how she needs to get the “centrifugal flux” to culminate in the Persian garden cannot be read as innocent of Rhys’s awareness of modernism’s outward movements (140).With a self-reflexive glance at her own writing practice, Rhys portrays with irony how Sasha is exhorted by the woman to use long words if she knows any and delicately told off for writing the stories in “words of one syllable”, a direct echo of how Rhys in one of her letters spoke of her own “one syllable mind”(Wyndham and Melly 24).

The question in Rhys comes back again to writerly wherewithal - Sasha’s writerly space is ultimately a room that is hardly her own-the rich authoress enters at will and expects Sasha’s quill to move to her commands. Sasha is supposed to add the necessary writerly flourish to the woman’s exoticist fictional wanderings. Noting how the woman’s centrifugal quest as an artist is paralleled by the panorama of collectibles that she fiercely guards, Sasha comments- “They explain people like that by saying that their minds are in watertight compartments, but it never seemed so to me. It’s all washing about, like the bilge in a hold of a ship…Fairies, red roses, the sense of property- Of course they don’t feel things like we do- Lilies in the moonlight…Samuel has forgotten to buy his suppositories- Pity would be out of place in this instance- I never take people like that to expensive restaurants…Nevertheless all the little birdies sing- Psychoanalysis might help. Adler might be more wholesome than Freud…English judges never make a mistake-The piano is quite Egyptian in feeling…” (140-41). It is significant that writing a novel set in Paris, Rhys wrenches us away from the heady narrative of Parisian artistic communities transgressing social and cultural norms and chooses to write of an author in whom a crude and petty worldliness, a taste for aristocratic décor, a faith in English institutional authority vie with her creation of an artistic persona through her eagerness to speak the psychoanalytic parlance of her time, her nod towards the ex-centric (fairy stories of Persian gardens), her cultivation of an anti-insular knowledge of things global, and how this mix that swills around ultimately remains beholden to Rhys’s schematics of the high and the low, the lilies in the moonlight as against the material exigencies implied by suppositories (going back again to where Rhys would clearly place herself vis-à-vis the “aesthetics of respectability”).

If Rhys depicts a Parisian writer who seems far away from the life and times of the bohemia, then Mansfield’s depiction of Raoul Duquette in “Je ne parle pas français” is almost an anti-narrative to the freespirited imaginativeness and unworldly incorruptibility of the artistic set.

Perhaps as a throwback to her own outsiderness, it is through that quintessential outsider, pariah figure, Raoul, that Mansfield unleashes her readerly excoriation of modernist tenets.

As a master mimic and reader of his times, Raoul is invested with the combative readerliness that I wish to foreground in Mansfield's work. His entire persona is built on inventing for himself a complex, layered enough backstory to guarantee entry into the art circles of his times.His image of himself as the custom official rifling through hidden caches is a deliberate toying with the modernist novel's epistemological provenance- its excavation of the buried,whether it be the terra incognita of Woolf's tunnelling process or Freud's projecting himself as a conquistador. The zealous embrace of the labyrinthine by the canonical modernists is at one level trivialized by Raoul's sleazy images. And yet one cannot shrug off the feeling that the writer wants us to look beyond the crassness of his observations. Mansfield's own eager acceptance of the label of lowbrow and upstart suggests that there is a subversive vision that she gives to her protagonist, who both enacts modernism and yet the glee with which he performs it becomes a conduit to marking its blindspots.Modernism's drawing of its creative energy from "a connoisseurship of mental states" (to borrow a phrase used by Esty in a different context) is grotesquely reflected in Raoul's voyeuristic cannibalizing of the lives of others for literary mileage (*Shrinking Island* 167). Mansfield recounts Raoul's abasement sans frills- he does however provide an insight into the vanitas of the artistic milieu he so darkly and macabrely mirrors. To that extent, this story lends itself to being interpreted schismatically-even as the reader is drawn into evaluating the morally compromised protagonist, the protagonists's own evaluations of the surrounding ethos take on a critical resonance.

In his self-specularity, in the unabashedness with which he fits himself out to make a mark as a modern, he mimes modernism's self-fashioning. Mansfield lingers over the description of Raoul's room, and makes the looking glass and Raoul's luxuriating in front of it the focus. Raoul's strolls and wanderings through salons and soirees with women recumbent on cubist sofas culminate in the moments when he stands in front of the looking glass, fitting himself out to be a worthy contender for the "modernist honorific" (*Unseasonble Youth* Esty). It is only through being a master reader of his times that Raoul writes himself into being. Speaking to the "radiant vision" that stares back at him, Raoul fashions himself as the writer of the "submerged world"(67).His comments seem saturated with malice and entirely self-gratificaory venom- and yet there is the voice of the writer lurking in his comments.In one of his asides he says of stray observations made in the course of his peregrinations-"one never knows when a little tag like that may come in useful to round off a paragraph", surely a

sceptical glance at how the quotidian became very often a conduit to the epiphanic in modernist novels (63). He speaks of his moment of ‘geste' coming upon him suddenly in his haunting of cafes-when among the cliched scrawls and stock love phrases scrawled on the pink blotting paper, soggy and limp, “like the tongue of a dead kitten”, he chances upon that “stale” little phrase-‘je ne …’(63-64). Raoul seems to imply a moment when the dead limpness of narrative, its unvirile flaccidity, imaged in the tired notings inscribed onto the limp blotting paper, pulsates into life as his eyes alight on that phrase.The femininity of that note of helplessness restores his confidence in his creative mastery. Since the phrase is associated in the story with Mouse, figured throughout in tropes of passivity and emotionalism, that the phrase leads Raoul to a sense of his creative prowess suggests how modernism’s move towards a more robust aesthetic was coded along gendered lines. Can one read this, given the gendering, as an allegorized reference to modernism’s triumphal distancing of itself from the uninitiated mass? In heavily libidinized imagery, Mansfield points to modernism’s many claims to invigorate the literary scene, to inseminate it with surcharged vitality- the limpness and bagginess to be replaced by fecundation- expressed inimitably by Pound thus -“driving any new idea into the great passive vulva of London”(qtd. in Brooker et al 161). Fittingly the kick of that epiphanic instant reconfirming Raoul’s artistic self valorization is described as an almost post orgasmic high - “And up I puffed and puffed, blowing off finally with: ‘After all I must be first-rate. No second rate mind could have experienced such intensity of feeling’” (64).

Mansfield points to the appropriativeness of modernism along the lines of both gender and race. Urmila Seshagiri notes that Raoul’s attribution of his authorial talents to clandestine sexual trysts with the African woman can be linked to Mansfield’s offering a “retrospective view of the varied racial formations that enabled avant-garde development” (*Race* 125). He scarcely nods in the direction of his family background, saying he sees no point in mentioning it, but does circle back continually to the heavily sexualized nature of his brush with the African woman.Mansfield arranges almost a setpiece of racial stereotypes- the frizzy hair, the buxomness, the sexuality oozing from every pore- as Raoul speaks of how his childhood was “ kissed away” under the caresses of the woman (66). Mansfield’s complex depiction of Raoul makes his statements reek of distorted emphasis such that one wonders how much is self-construction and how much is approximative to the truth.For instance when he says-“I was tiny for my age and pale with a lovely little half-open mouth-I feel sure of that”(66). Lending himself the requisite degree of enigma through brushes with the forbidden, Raoul is Mansfield’s dark paean to modernist self-birthing- the contemporary cults

of artistic self-cultivation lurk in such statements as this-“I have no family; I don’t want any… In fact there’s only one memory that stands out at all.That is rather interesting because it seems to me now so very significant from the literary point of view” (66).From here on, having established a back story that adds a murky depth to his ‘character’, he stakes his claim to the writerly via his insight into the subterranean animalisms that undergird civilization- “I am going to write about things that have never been touched on before”(67).The encounter with the African laundress is seen as the enabling condition for his forays into the uncharted a la Kurtz, in a reprisal of modernism’s courting of the primitive as a conduit to visionary expansion.

To conclude, while Mansfield and Rhys wrote within the rubrics of modernism, their interstitial location ensured they weren't completely taken in by its expansive flourishes, its liquefying malleability. The materialist vocabulary and iconography of the colonies permeated the avant-gardists’ lifestyle, yet the visceral histories associated with the origins of these objects were written out of the script.This section has attempted to examine the thin line that Mansfield and Rhys tread (Mansfield more of a participant than Rhys) as both players in and caustic readers/recorders of the conversational, performative and ideational exuberance of these avant garde groupings. From their inside-outside location, they read astutely the coterie nature of these formations.

Walking A Fine Line: Women, Mobility, Adventure

Not only is an itinerant mode of existence at the heart of the work of these two writers, but travel is crucial to their diagnostic insights. Mansfield’s “A Truthful Adventure” is one of her many compendium of stories revolving around the woman traveller. These are Mansfield’s versions of the adventure story, and the question of gender is quite the moot point. Like Rhys, the realm of adventure is the city. The protagonists are mostly young women who often find themselves trying hard to negotiate through unfamiliar territory, and the hostile, obstructionist, element is more often than not a man. “A Truthful Adventure” opens with the central character reading of the intoxicating promise of Bruges from a guide-book- which true to form dwells on the quaint, the antiquated, the fantastic and the enchanting. At this stage, the narrator, weary from the journey, finds the claims of the guide-book reassuring Thus Mansfield sets up the woman as a reader yet it is quickly made clear that she is not a compliant one-she already dreams of spending her time in luxuriating in an individualized mode of travel, not necessarily the touristy one of the guide manuals. The narrator receives her first reality check when the landlady of the hotel announces with considerable relish that there is no room to let, and that those arriving for a short stay would find it doubly hard to

find one, looking meaningfully meanwhile at Katherine's small bag. Under her withering gaze both the traveller's suitcase and her expansive dreams of adventure seem to "dwindle" (*Collected* 530). Finally able to convince the owner of her plan to stay long, she is offered a room at the lady's private house. Stopping to have dinner- omelette and coffee- in the hotel's dining room, the young woman comments on how the mirrors there reflect a dismal, endlessly multiplied, tableaux of "unlimited empty tables and watchful waiters and solitary ladies finding sad comfort in omelettes"(531). The registers of adventure are certainly measured against gendered conventions in this image.The traveller finds herself in a room that is determinedly,oppressively pink down to its last details, as if to emphasize how her adventurous foray asks for a necessary and tricky navigation between compliant femininity and womanly autonomy.

'Katherine' continues to find it hard to navigate between the pre-inscribed (the tourist manuals) and the individual. Egged on by the glorious descriptions in the guide books, she decides to hire a boat-but resistant to routes already laid down, she insists that she wishes to go solo since she would like to chart her own course- "I wish to go alone and return when I like"(533).When persuaded by the boatman that as a newcomer to the place, she could not find her way around, she agrees to hire a guide but again with an important rider - "Then I will take one on the condition that he is silent and points out no beauties to me"(533). Having won at least partly this battle over space, or so she thinks and finally handed over to 'Pierre', she seats herself in the barge only to have her space again invaded, this time by a couple who are suddenly seized by an overpowering desire to join in. Her fierce need to self-script her journey dodders as she finds the script taken out of her hands-Pierre assures the couple that "Mademoiselle would not mind at all"(533). Again, he enquires of her whether she wishes to see the Lac d' Amour and while she looks undecided, the issue is taken out of her hands by the reply of the couple. When Madame falls into the water while stepping out of the boat, it is Mademoiselle's rashness that is blamed and Pierre displays a "loathing" for her refusal to be tutored and to duly follow the script (534).

Emily Ridge's fascinating article on "The Problem of the Woman's Bag" is extremely pertinent to a discussion of the leitmotif of women voyagers at the turn of the twentieth century up until the early decades of the century. Ridge argues that the woman's portmanteau became an evocative symbol of women's new found freedom but she puts in the proviso that her argument cannot invest in a uniformly exhilarative sense of emancipatory mobility since the question of class must be borne in mind. In the exchange between the hotel owner and the woman voyager, the landlady tries to ascertain her money power from the number and size of

her luggage items, and feels a little less sceptical about letting her a room when assured that the young traveller has a "larger box" waiting at the station, even as 'Katherine' is secretly assailed by doubts about whether she has enough clothes to last her a month (530). Ridge notes-"To be sensitive to the semiotic powers of luggage is to be sensitive to the social standing of the luggage owner" (759). Thus Ridge argues that just as the bag was an unstable signifier, so too was the figure of the New Woman. Pertinently for the story under discussion, Ridge asserts that the woman with the bag signalled " her assertion of autonomous self-control and desire for adventure"(759).The woman in the story, presumably constrained for resources , and acutely aware of the judgemental sneer ("loathing") cast her way from a society that looks askance at the spirit of adventure when displayed by a woman from not quite the upper echelons, thus becomes as much a reader of societal attitudes to women's travel as of the sights and delights of Bruges. She tries throughout to resist subservience to the etched and the inscribed.

One does not quite know how to read the concluding episode of the story since this would be ostensibly at odds with her striving for autonomy. She runs into a friend from her New Zealand days and the girl declares, in the same breath as she introduces Katherine to her husband and announces that she has a baby, that they are "frightfully keen on the suffrage" (535).This is another model of the new woman-where Ridge's article looks at the lone woman traveller as signifying the turn of the century gender redefinitions, her primary example being Ibsen's Nora, this is an instance of progressiveness from within the marital structure. Guy and Betty urge the narrator to see the wonders of Bruges with them, and their talk suggests that they have ingested the existing literature on the place enthusiastically. When the narrator turns down this invitation, they urge her to at least thrash out the suffrage issue with them over dinner, since Betty remembers that Katherine was always keen on the future of women. Singularly reluctant to participate, Katherine begs off, but not without a significant glance at the ubiquitious guide-book peeping out of Guy's pocket. Does this also explain the scepticism in her tone when Betty declares that being in a different place puts things in a new light? Is Mansfield again displaying a suspicion of the incorporating power of prior scriptings and master narratives, whether from the point of view of travel or when talking of suffrage? Does the narrator wish to preserve autonomy over her belief in women's rights and not structure her rebellion in accordance with a pre-inscribed master-discourse?

From their exilic and liminal position, these writers offer an astute reading of the chinks in enshrined scripts/structures. This wariness extends even to potentially affirmative structures such as suffragism in Mansfield's story.

Mansfield's and Rhys's canvas is replete with the figure of the unchaperoned woman but again this does not necessarily translate into an emancipatory scenario. Particularly in Rhys, the women adventurers are eventually found in incarcerating structures such as sanatoriums, so that the adventure part remains mostly pre-textual. The reader is usually confronted more with the bleak aftermath of their solo sojourns. While their attempt to go against established conventions only entraps them in doubly repressive scenarios, it gives them a direct insight into the inhumane workings of the machine. Rhys invests her women with a readerly acumen. This also belies critical interpretations that see Rhys's women as supine. If one looks at a story like "Outside the Machine", which incidentally is as far from the adventure format (as traditionally conceived) as can be, one is placed in a community of women, and it is, typically, the unmoored ones that draw Rhys's attention. Inez Best is quite the obverse of the New Woman-defeated, suicidal, haunted. Yet the reason why I want to look at this story is because the critical axes found in Emily Ridge's article curiously applies to it in many respects. I also want to emphasize that I use the term 'adventure' in the broader sense of a challenge (real or perceived) to societal norms, that is, to understand that most of the women in her fiction are unmoored, alone, unaccounted for and at a remove from the familial.

The story opens with the reader getting acquainted with Inez Best through the contents of her bag- the matron frowns upon her dependence on the make-up articles ranged on her bed table-"rouge, powder, lipstick and hand-mirror"(*Stories* 189). Though she tries to explain that these articles are there to lift her flagging spirits, for the women who sneer at her from within their entrenched world-view, this only confirms her dubiousness. Obviously alone and with an out of the ordinary back-story, she would fall into Ridge's elucidation of the morally suspect configuration of the 'adventuress'. Ridge quotes Alexandra Lapierre to underline that while male adventure marked a point of departure and self-assertion, the term adventuress carried pejorative connotations of "ambitiousness, intrigue, mercenary sex"(762). Ridge adds that "the idea of a woman's travelling light was thus transformed from a literal sense of physical mobility to a metaphorical sense of moral questionability" (762). Inez Best travels 'light'-she carries primarily make-up articles in her bag and otherwise seems shorn of articles that from the societal point of view suggest anchorage. It is a different matter whether Rhys's women venture out by choice or as a result of being bereft of choice- though we do have clear statements from Julia Martin or even Anna Morgan on their shunning the safety of the familial structure, with Julia of course speaking of her yearning for novelty that held her in a vice-like grip. If Conrad as John Marx points out made cultural capital out of the painstaking work he had to do to salvage the adventure tale from getting mired in the bogs of mass

culture, then Rhys re-casts the format from the point of view of women caught between a desire for autonomy but with scant access to it (Marx "Conrad's Gout" 92).

Through the briefest of references Rhys acquaints us with Inez's reveries revolving around trees and smooth water or in moments of anguish, the ward becomes "a long, grey river; the beds were ships in a mist…" (195). Not only is the imagery of movement evoked but perhaps we are again back to Rhys's women being of undefined backgrounds whose Englishness itself is thus a matter of debate- " An English person? English, what sort of English? To which of the sixty-nine subdivisions and thousand-and-three sub-subdivisions do you belong?(But only one sauce, damn you)" (192). These are the most familiar axes along which Rhys's protagonists 'venture'- as outsiders, they journey into metropolitan hubs, and their eventual embitterment not only makes for a counter-response to both the male as well as the imperial adventure tale, but also makes for a piercing insight into the regressive thought patterns of these centres of progress and civilization. For instance Inez Best though struggling to keep her hold on life at one level, sees through the manufactured workings of the bulwarks of social stability- marriage, religion etc. The visit from the pastor sets rolling the "interminable conversation" inside Inez's head (199), as she sees the defenses of the powerless not fortified but cast in doubt by the clergyman- self-pity leads nowhere, cynicism is passé and rebellion –that is futile as also the greatest sacrilege of all, since it shows an infirm faith.The story directs a counter-sneer at the discriminatory sneer of the respectable and the 'normal'- when a deeply troubled woman at the facility, Mrs Murphy, tries to kill herself, the spokeswoman of societal decorum, Mrs Wilson announces- "Oughtn't a woman like that to be hung?", this since the woman has a husband and children and so mental illness in a married woman is seen as a sign of dangerous, irresponsible, indulgence, a dereliction of the wifely and maternal role (204).

If unchecked mobility in a woman in Ridge's formulation and given the hold of prescriptive gender categories, amounts to delinquency, then Rhys's women are certainly a dark variant on that theme. As women cast adrift, either adventuring is the starting point of their slide into infamy, as in the case of Julia, or their delinquent, dubious, status is the consequence of their nonbelongingness, as in Anna Morgan, so that they are perceived and bracketed as sexual adventuresses. Though this brooding underside to the masculine adventure tale does not translate into sublimity, it is the un-sublime poetics of protest it catalyzes that become the writer's marked achievement. As the voyaging motif as centred in the city devolves into its lowermost point in Rhys, with sites such as lavabos figuring prominently, we encounter female adventure at its nadir. Certeau is relevant here when he says-"From the nooks of all

sorts of ‘reading rooms’ (including lavatories) emerge subconscious gestures, grumblings, tics, stretchings, rustlings…”(175). Also perhaps by choosing to focus on the site of the lavatory, Rhys is hinting at how colonials in the eyes of their metrocentric English compatriots were in Boucher’s phrase “human refuse” (Sandiford 6). In ‘Outside the Machine’, the hospital ward where death lurks, becomes such a reading room, where cultural orthodoxies are microscopically excoriated. The story’s title is extremely significant since one of the primary components of the modernists’ self-image was their desire to be seen as functioning outside of and retaining a critical distance to the machinery of the establishment. On the other hand, Rhys’s work seems to have been read as a repeated iteration of how much her women are in the grip of the machine.Though taking cognizance of that interpretative frame, what this study strives to highlight is that they remain resistant consumers of the “vocabulary of established languages” (Certeau 34).

Thus, two things need to be kept in mind-one, that in story after story, Rhys deliberately chooses the non-marital, non-domestic space for her women-not always, but in most cases. Though her choice of space does not necessarily make for salutary emancipatory scenarios, it at the same time is a considered choice. we are shown how a man’s escapades, if ending in tragedy can be looked at tolerantly,even heroized, but the same act in a woman cannot be condoned-it only re-confirms the unnaturalness of her going off the societal grid in the first place-“ It seemed that they knew all about Mrs Murphy. ..And what a thing to do, to try to kill yourself! If it had been a man, now, you might have been sorry. You might have said, ‘Perhaps the poor devil had a rotten time.’ But a woman!” (203). I think that Rhys writes an epitaph to the traditional adventure tale here, thus registering her acute awareness of the discriminatory sneer of gender orthodoxies- death by way of male volition gone wrong, even if self-perpetrated , is admissible, but in women, bound to a pre-written script, it is grossly anomalous. In these statements of condemnation, the transgressive for women is foreclosed. Thus my own self-doubts about whether to even employ the adventure format as viable in a discussion of Rhys linger, yet if female adventure is about recalcitrance(whether by way of scepticism or rupture) towards the institutional, then looked at from a different angle, Rhys’s works are institutionally profane. She treads between the paradigms of the New Woman and the Fallen Woman. Though her works conspicuously lack what Jane Garrity calls the “renegade dynamism” of feminism (‘Obsolescence’ 15), in the ferocity with which which they represent the grip of institutionalized structures, they cut them open from within.

If adventure is relocated in the metropolis, then the mode of flânerie would be an important constituent. Parsons mentions that what is of essence to the figure of the flâneur, male or

female, is a " lack of place in bourgeois society and an aura of isolation"(20). It is interesting to note that even Rhys's married protagonists seem to convey the impression of being unimplicated in a structure and their origins and antecedents lack fixity. In *Quartet*, Miss De Solla has doubts about Marya's marital status-"Is she really married to the Zelli man, I wonder?"(8).She also seems momentarily shocked when Marya tells her that she is entirely unacquainted with the community of English expatriates in Paris.A little later in the text, Heidler feels compelled to doublecheck with her-"But you are English-or aren't you?"(12).These are some of the significant and tactical contradictions of Rhys's work then-her fiction is an arena where women are compulsively mobile yet incarcerated, where the iron grip of disciplinary grids is most felt and yet also corrosively undone, her women are sucked into the machine yet retain enough of a critical voice to unravel its workings.

In her relentless portrayal of 'respectability' cutting its teeth on the disreputable, Rhys shows the declining graph of adventure. For instance in *Quartet*, Marya's desire to go on stage begins at the level of the transgressive but soon settles into a mechanical predictability-"Gradually passivity replaced her earlier adventurousness. She learned, after long and painstaking effort to talk like a chorus girl, to dress like a chorus girl and to think like a chorus girl-up to a point. Beyond that point she remained apart, lonely, frightened of her loneliness, resenting it passionately" (15). Her women understand the social imperatives of role-playing, yet this also makes dissection of these their 'performative' field. This would imply that ingestion does not translate into absorption-their critical faculty, the interminable inner skirmishing with outer text, is the tactical space for creative resistance, to invoke Certeau. And that of course includes excoriating the marital structure-such as at the outset of the novel, when we are told that Marya's husband, secretive and unforthcoming,and involved in the most 'sordid' transactions himself, objects " with violence to these wanderings in sordid streets"(9). This is vis-à-vis the fact that it is the underbelly of the city that Marya prefers to explore in her peregrinations-"shabby parfumeries, second-hand book-stalls, cheap hat-shops, bars frequented by gaily-painted ladies and loud-voiced men, midwives' premises…"(9). Richard E. Ziekowitz speaks of how "Marya constructs her own Paris-one at odds with the ordered, stable, masculine city that oppresses her" (1).

Both Mansfield and Rhys seem to be probing the limits and possibilities of female freedom. As someone who starts off with all the excitement of a lone voyager, Marya in *Quartet* hopes to hold on to some of that abandon in her marriage- she feels that perhaps with a man like Stephan, "natural", as she describes him, this might even be possible . She in fact categorizes her life with Stephan as "haphazard" (10), although it eventually turns out to be more

haphazard than she bargained for. This randomness is she learns not to be confused with freedom from the power equations written into marriage- in prison, her husband turns into a 'manager' of her activities and urges her to benefit from the 'help' that the Heidlers are proffering. He takes a rather utilitarian approach, which is quite at odds with his own surreptitious adventuring into dark areas. Lois says at one point that Marya must rise to the occasion and then she would be able to "row your little boat along" (51). But by drawing Marya into an, by now rehearsed and refined, amorous arrangement, that possibility is also curtailed. The freedom that the Heidlers offer her is based on a self-serving rationale. Closer inspection reveals that their own attempts to retain a bohemian flavour even within marriage are rendered suspect since they in fact expect Heidler's timed indiscretions to work with clockwork efficiency and the 'irregularities' are part of a regulated and orchestrated script. Thus Marya's marital and non-marital voyages, segue between mobility and entrapment. Thus Marya's journey fluctuates between an atypical existence and a life that brings home an acute awareness of the gender traps that lurk in ostensibly libertarian scenarios. Most of Rhys's protagonists are on a journey - though the voyage is hardly one of liberation,it does portray astutely how the journey of these urban voyagers and strollers becomes another deployment of the counter-lens on the part of the writer- both to the 'sneer' that pursues them through their wanderings and to the modernist celebration of the amplitude of urban flânerie. If Ridge comments on the gendered and classed gaze cast at women's luggage, Varma speaks of the space of the hotel and how a woman would be received into it-"The hotel provides the space of anonymous, temporary encounters allegorically signifying the evisceration of sociality within the modernist city"(63), and notes that the sexual politics would be exacerbated in the case of women without material belongings, male escort or social status.Mansfield and Rhys show the inter-negotiations between restrictive societal binds and moments of gender transition.

Rhys's work follows the female voyager from mobility to varying forms of enclosedness. Jeremy Hawthorn sees this pattern as inscribed into her writings, and the title of his essay indubitably establishes that, which show "rapid and geographical movement accompanied by increasing enclosure or incarceration" (Fincham, Hawthorn and Lothe 66). He traces in Rhys's fiction a shift from free movement to "soul-destroying solitary confinement"(66). One has already seen this in a story like 'Outside the Machine'. But what needs to be said is that shrinking space does not preclude Certeau's "rumblings" of insubordination.These cast-offs of society keep the confrontationalist conversation inside their head going. In fact, when Mrs Murphy is sneered at by the sanctimonious voices, Inez's silent conversation with these

repressive forces finds outward expression as she becomes the only one in the ward to stand up for the persecuted woman - "You hold your head up and curse them back, Mrs Murphy. It'll do you a lot of good" (205). It is through those raw expressions of rage, internal and verbalized, that the un-sublime poetics of protest unfold in Rhys.

No Sheaves to Bind

Both modernism and post-colonialism, the two primary vectors in my assessment of Rhys, can be said to be animated by a "purgative energy" (Stephen Slemon's phrase for post colonial writing) yet with this substantive difference- the former invests heavily in the writerly whereas the inceptionary stages of post-colonialism are marked by its readerly disobedience, especially for those of Rhys's ilk, who find themselves cramped in the interstices (Adam and Tiffin 4). That is to say, modernism sneeringly elides the previously inscribed and purges society of its leaden weight, whereas the inception of the anti-colonial brings us determinedly back to the blinkered and inequitable in canonical literature, as the founding site of counter-discursive energy. The stories of Mansfield and Rhys exhibit this preoccupation with resistant readings/readers directly or through clever detours.

In a letter that Mansfield wrote to South African novelist Sarah Gertrude Millen, Mansfield spoke of her placelessness as also her being bound to New Zealand in the same breath-"Let me tell you my experience. I am a colonial…always my thoughts and feelings go back to New Zealand- rediscovering it, finding beauty in it, re-living it…I am sure it does a writer no good to be transplanted-it does harm. One reaps the glittering top of the field but there are no sheaves to bind. And there's something disintegrating, false, agitating in that literary life…I think the only way to be alive as a writer is to draw upon one's real familiar life…our secret life, the life we return to over and over again, the 'do you remember' life…"(Sullivan 4). Admirers of Mansfield may not necessarily concur with this self-assessment, yet what strikes one is how her as also Rhys's 're-living' of their birthplace is never simply about reaping the glittering top of the field-their stories set in their colonies of birth resist being read as colonial romances. Though there is certainly nostalgia in their reminiscences, the complex power formations prevailing in these peripheries of the empire do not allow for an idyllic presentation.

Their 'do you remember' life is reflected in their fictional narratives in all its particularity as in all its tension and violence, manifest or suppressed. Rhys's short pieces look back at the Caribbean component in different ways - there are those as already discussed that are set in the metropolises and with protagonists of Caribbean lineage. But there also ones that base themselves in the nuances of Caribbean life. Of these 'The Day they Burned the Books' is

apposite to how Rhys's depiction of the Caribbean milieu is so shadowed by the fraught power relationships, gendered and racial, as to temper the nostalgia.The beginning of the story establishes the entrenched stratifications of Caribbean society- with the narrative filter being a Creole child's consciousness, who wonders about her friend Eddie's father.Her pronouncements on the man, reveal how even the child's psyche is shaped by these hierarchies. For her, he is a strange anomaly in the Caribbean since he is neither one of the "resident romantics" who fall in love with the Caribees moon nor does he fall easily within the bracket of a gentleman from the home country-he "hadn't an 'h' in his composition" (*Stories* 151). His fringe position in the Creolized formations is exacerbated by his puzzling decision to marry a coloured woman, since the marriage only intensifies his innate sense of a divide between metropole and colony, as he subjects her to an unceasing torrent of abuse at her being a "half caste"(152). It is the child who reacts against his father's bullish obeisance to the idea of England- he announces his refusal to celebrate the daffodils of English poetry, rebelling against how his father always goes on about them. His childlike assault on how all things English are blindly overvalued by the colonial expatriates is publically scandalous yet privately for the narrator it confirms her own discomfort with the stranglehold of Englishness, with all its complex rites of passage-for instance when she is told that those hallowed portals are barred for her since she is " a horrid colonial" (153).

For the children of the expatriates, the locally born progeny are non-Western upstarts. To the narrator, Eddie's comments against the romanticisation of all things English, coming from that suspect position, seem even bolder. The narrator confesses that she has often "thought hard" about the thorny issue of belonging yet Eddie was bold enough to articulate his scepticism in public (153). It is in these details that Rhys slips in the issue of gender. Significantly, while Eddie opposes hierarchies at one level, his own private fantasies are built on exotic images from the East - the narrator tells us that physically Eddie was the quintessential English lad and on hot days he felt particularly 'energetic' and stimulated- this would be an indirect reference to colonialist literature's fantasies of abundance and fecundity of the sunny West Indies islands (153). Their childish playacting revolves around a scenario conjured by Eddie -"you can pretend you are dying of thirst in the desert and I'm an Arab chieftain bringing you water" (153).The narrator comments that it was then that she learnt the "voluptuousness of drinking slowly" (154). Eddie's fantasy scenarios result in the narrator's growing awareness of prevailing racial and gendered hegemonies. As a child born of an English father and a coloured mother, the overt narrative of Eddie's revolt from paternalism is problematised by his having inherited his father's divided attitude to difference- even when

indulging in racial masquerade (Kalliney points out that this is what is thematized in *Kim*, the book Eddie manages to retrieve from the library at the end), he retains the upper hand by instating himself as the authoritative figure. It is the women who are multiply disadvantaged in these complex colonial structurings- both Mr Sawyer and Eddie seek to offset their own inferiorization in the colonial economy by casting women in roles of servitude.

The ubiquitous image of the colonial library predominates in the story- Mr Sawyer who doesn't strike one as much of a reading man has nevertheless built this sanctum in the house in an extension of his zealous transplantation of English values. The imperial library becomes the site of the tensions running in the family- Eddie reacts against his father but is extremely possessive about the library, thus reconfirming how his is a conflicted legacy, both chafing against his father's obsequious 'mimicry' and yet beholden to Eurocentric legacies of culture, and goes against his mother on that score. Mrs Sawyer's silence, commented on by the narrator in the earlier part of the story, turns into enraged expressiveness as she decides to consign her husband's prized possession to the flames. One could of course contend that in the metaphor of the conflagration, the last rites of an antiquated colonial binarism are quite literally performed ,laying the groundwork for a layered understanding of intermeshed trajectories. But such readings though anticipatorily reflective of post colonial debates on hybridity, should not depreciate the presentness of these stories which I think is what Rhys is getting at. It is the vignettes of violence and rage inscribed into these stories that resist sublimation into abstract theorizations- images such as Mr Sawyer yanking at his wife's hair, the explosive fury of the Mrs Sawyer finding expression in the bonfire of books, these convey a disturbing and visceral sense of the brutalizations wrought on the psyches of colonizer and colonized by the fractious atmosphere in the colonies.

A story like "Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose", again set in Dominica, brings to the fore a different category of violence-a young girl's sexual abuse at the hands of a much older man.An autobiographical piece, the story speaks above all of violation, a subject that with its varying applicability to the West Indian scenario, Rhys would have understood from within. The man in question is importantly an outsider - someone well-travelled and from his speaking of both his war experiences and his time in India, a part of England's colonial machinery. In the complex formations of Caribbean society, the girl is fascinated by his being much more knowledgeable about the metropole. For instance, when she asks him if he knows the Kew Gardens, her desire to impress him takes this form of displaying her own knowledge about the mother-country. It is his outsiderness that defines her entrancement by him and that then leads to the scene of violation.In this short tale of sexual abuse, the registers of gender

and location both need to be taken into account to understand the girl's seduction at the hands of the outsider. As the Captain and his wife prepare to sail back to London, Phoebe wonders what made him so sure that " she was not a good girl" (*Stories* 289). Is this to be viewed in terms of how tropical climates were associated with sexual laxity? These issues lie at the back of the story, and show how Phoebe's desire to not necessarily be a good girl, her scepticism of that model, gets caught up in her placement as a degenerate colonial. Rhys's stories ask these uncomfortable questions about race and gender intersectionality, and the distortions it breeds. Far from being idylls, then, Rhys's stories set in her native Dominica are disturbing vignettes of her growing up years there.

To look at some of the Mansfield stories set in New Zealand, one finds that they carry similar intimations of violence that as Majumdar suggests rupture through the quotidian rhythms of settler life. "Millie" is an instance of such a story where as Majumdar points out, the "feminized tedium of this interior" is invaded by the masculine display of settler violence whose target this time is not the Maori indigene but the metropolitan intruder (91). "Millie" opens on to a scene of a feminine domain- as the men fade into the distance, Millie's thoughts however linger over the masculine realm and her unflinching portraiture of the bloody terrain of their masculine wrangling shows her own imbrication in the settler ethos. But in characteristic Mansfield fashion, slowly a counter-narrative begins to emerge through Millie's reflections. Mansfield evokes the lassitude of Millie's domesticated existence and contrasts that with the expansive promise contained in the coloured print on the wall, that proudly exhibits the "flowery ladies" of English royalty sitting framed in the safety of the Union Jacks, whose lustre and might is preserved by the men in service of the Queen, who also incidentally figures in the print (*Collected* 572). The description is deliberately meant to evoke, in its antiquated stasis, a disseverance between life in core and periphery. Millie's existence is shown to be one of hardihood in keeping with the terrain and hence the figures in the print seem comic book in their decorousness to her. That picture is presented through Millie's eyes in juxtaposition with another, a wedding picture that in turn shows her in feminine attire but that aura is quickly dispelled by her subsequent matter-of-fact musings on her childlessness – she believes that her husband perhaps would be " softer" on the subject (573). Coming right after her gazing at the picture of Windsor Castle suggestive of Britain's imperial might, emblematized by the sweeping majesty of the Union Jacks, the subject of the maternal certainly leads one back to its overwhelming importance in the shaping of a healthy empire.

The subject of the management of maternity in the service of empire was discussed widely. It was alternately eulogized and pathologized, depending on whether the progeny were deemed fit to lead the imperial mission, and one cannot forget that the settler colonies were very often seen as the dump yards for the effluvia .If as Majumdar suggests, "white settler society tried its utmost to ensure the construction of a feminized domestic space" sheltered from conflict, then more can be read into the reference to the reproductive (92). Somewhat later in the story, there is a suggestion that Millie's maternal side responds to the English Johnny who seems little more than a boy. Is that a sign of her nostalgia for the home country, the severance never quite accomplished between centre and periphery? Thus the violence that undergirds the story is a sign of the many unresolved undercurrents that the empire gave rise to. Millie herself is complexly situated within that discourse - decidedly espousing the doctrine of disaffiliation on the one hand and yet subliminally drawn to older connections. That leads to her moment of going 'soft'- of rediscovering a residual allegiance to forms from which she explicitly distances herself. The story ends however with Millie responding with gusto to the hunting down of the young boy and the refined, homely, instincts of a moment ago giving way to the primitive joy of the chase-"They were after him in a flash. And at the sight of Harrison in the distance, and the three men hot after, a strange mad joy smothered everything else"(577). Mansfield's depiction of New Zealand settler life is far from idyllic-she focusses like Rhys on the violence that throbs underneath and threatens to erupt, an idea that is thrown into greater relief by using the domestic space as the site that sees the unleashing of violent instincts. It is in these micro spaces that these writers find the political subcurrents that would be more theoretically dealt with by later writers. Janet Wilson sees in the traces of "disturbed psychology" and "radical alienation" of the protagonists of her New Zealand stories like 'The Woman at the Store' a sign of the ambivalent, contested, relations with the mother country (Kimber and Wilson 183).

The work of both these writers is "gorged with memory" but it cannot be fitted into a unproblematized ode to their place of birth and thus their compositions need to be distinguished from the more evidently pastoralized celebrations (Murry 144).There is a focus on the beauty of these places yet the violence that simmers beneath and mars the landscape is registered in various ways. Rhys's descriptions are in fact marked by the corporeal immediacy the memories assume – such as in the way *Voyage in the Dark* which begins on this note, where Anna's olfactory recall of the West Indies is also an indication of the varied racial and class divisions that go into its make-up- from the smell of the streets where the black women sell fish-cakes to the frangipani of the plantations to the smell of the crush of

patients waiting for medical attention outside a surgery. Mansfield's stories are sometimes more genteel in their chosen spatial circumference, since many focus on the lives of the upper middle classes in New Zealand but even these carry a note of dissonance for instance how 'The Garden Party' problematises the ambit suggested by the title and exposes the precariousness of the pastoral. The beginning of the story sets up a contrast between natural beauty such as that of the Karaka trees against the artifice of the marquee and the arrangement of the pink lilies ordered by the truckload. Laura as the central consciousness seeks to strike a balance between the spontaneous and the constructed. Mansfield suggests indirectly how the Sheridans seek to inject into their existence in the colony all the decorum and finesse of upper class English life. The death in the cottages at the end brings the same conflicts of settler life to the fore- the desire for self-definition versus the need to validate their prior Englishness, the forays into the unfamiliar and the new counterbalanced by a deference to the old, the natural landscape of the occupied terrain versus the compulsive need to 'transplant' English culture. As Laura and Laurie, the two more 'sensitized' members of the Sheridan family approach adulthood they often break the injunction against straying into the forbidden other world , since "one must go everywhere; one must see everything" (254).Their "prowls" make them shudder with discomfort yet the compulsion to broaden the realms of existence beyond the bourgeois impels them (254).There is a conjunction of the colonial and modernist frames as Laura's chafing against the constructed and her desire to embrace the untamed and the natural is both indulged and delicately ironized by the narrative voice. The reader is witness to Laura's trembling consciousness of her difference and simultaneously a sense of her genuine restlessness with the superciliousness of her family in clinging to the idyllic in the face of misfortune.To that extent, Laura reprises the idea of modernist voyages, with the backdrop of colonialism as the frame. Where Laura's family transplants an alien model of home into the unhomely, Laura attempts to engage with the alien, much like the modernists, yet her venture is over-determined by her background and also largely aesthetic in its contours.

The place of both Rhys and Mansfield in the postcolonial canon continues to be in dispute[23]-

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[23]See for instance Helen Carr's "Jean Rhys: West Indian Intellectual" (Schwarz 93-113) for an insight into the disputes over whether Rhys should be a part of the Caribbean post-colonial corpus, the debate again interestingly led by male figures such as Kenneth Ramchand and Kamau Braithwaite, almost as an ironic replay of Ford's 'wonderment' at where to slot her in the emerging modernist canon.

yet what stands out in the work of these writers is that their schismed positionality ensured that they never presumed to speak for their place of birth but certainly and overwhelmingly spoke of it, not only in their indigenous tales but even through their metropolitan fictions.Mark Williams says of Mansfield's engagements with Maoriland that her fictional depictions "involved much more than a nostalgic return to the innocence of a colonial childhood and much less than a developed critique of colonial culture" (Booth and Rigby 256).Their claim is not for recovering the indigenous or the authentic, yet via their critique of the colonial journeys of modernism, they , as insiders to the colonial matrix, do establish that there is no one 'voice' that can encompassingly speak the indigenous,whether Western or non-Western. As Trinh T Minh-ha observes, "For there can hardly be such a thing as an essential inside that can be homogeneously represented by all insiders" (75). This understanding can be recovered from the work of those eternal outsiders, Rhys and Mansfield.

Chapter Five

The White Hush Between Two Sentences

“ The Hell of those who seek, strive, rebel. The heaven of those who cannot think or avoid thought, who have no imagination”.

Rhys, ‘A Diary’ (*Smile Please* 172**)**

This final chapter, the conclusion, is also in the nature of an epilogue. As I mention in the first chapter, the fact that my trajectory as a reader of Rhys traced a somewhat different arc in that I came to *Wide Sargasso Sea* only after reading her other texts, has in fact been a crucial catalyzer to my greater interest in her readings of /ripostes to modernism. This study has in part also looked at where her writing would be placed vis-à-vis postcolonial writing, since in the later years of Rhys’s writing career, especially, the ‘writing back’ model was in place and it is particularly interesting to evaluate a writer like Rhys, the thematics of whose work rely so much on talking back to authority, in the light of these developments.With that in mind, I look at the work on which her fame deservedly but perhaps too overwhelmingly rests in this final chapter .This is also an attempt to go back to the frame of ‘halfness’ with which I began and would now like to end. Walcott’s evocative image of Rhys points to that.

In keeping with how I have viewed the fiction of Rhys as stemming so much from the ‘readerly’, I see *Wide Sargasso Sea* as reinforcing that in Rhys as a writer, the transition from the ‘reading back’ to the ‘writing back’ model remains processual rather than accomplished. And this connects with, as has been suggested, some of the other registers of in-betweenness- for instance the way in which Rhys’s fiction is decidedly women centric but uneasily placed vis-à-vis feminism; in which her work remains disturbingly suspended between the descriptive and the contestatory, an unrelenting reflector of power structures but also an implicit poser to them in terms of the unflinching ferocity with which their grip is portrayed and more importantly analyzed by the writer. Her protagonists are disturbingly complicitious in the power structures that define society. They are,however, also the most unsparing commentators of their own debasement and of tracing that back to societal prejudices and hegemonies.It is through this that the writer gives an edge to their beholdenness to social imperatives- their searching knowledge of the skewed power equations, asymmetries and biases written into these oppressive structures.The quote from her diary above underlines both the compulsive urge to challenge authoritarian structures but in the fact that she sees the challengers as making up a hell of their own, one can locate also the lack (due to both historical and identitarian factors as has been discussed) of a forward-looking stance in her

writing. However, the fact that Rhys's work burrows in the spaces of scripted authority forms a continuity between the earlier parts of the study and the discussion of her last work here.This study has deployed Rhys's in-betweenness as an entry point into examining the governing temper of the modernist period and to 'de-canonize' certain aspects of the work of the high modernists. It has primarily done so by setting up Rhys's work as a 'reading back' - this is where I effect a transition in the final section of this chapter between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the previous chapters.

> The lark of iconoclasm can, after all, plunge a work and its readers back in the realm of icons.
>
> Paul K. Saint Amour (Berman 84)

The primary thrust of this study has been on how Rhys's work comments on and tempers the iconoclastic in the work of the high modernists. Rather than 'redressing' her placeless halfness as most studies eager to co-opt her into one or the other rubric attempt to do, I have attempted to see her halfness as integral to her dismantling of societal/ colonial/canonical strangleholds. Since a conclusion ideally serves to tie up strands, my endeavour is to in some ways come full circle by studying Rhys's last and major work from within the framework of the core thematics of this dissertation, namely the sneer as directed at the outsider figure and the counter-reading that emerges from their rage against judgemental appartuses. I look at *Wide Sargasso Sea* in terms of this study's interest in the textually dialogic nature of Rhys's work.This is admittedly a selective reading of the text in that it keeps to the theoretical axes of this theses. Keeping to the frame of 'halfness', I have divided my observations on the text into two sections- one, where I look at Antoinette as a Creole and her compromised ('ensneered', if one might coin that word) placement within imperial hierarchies that this entails, and second, to look at the novel as the "hush" between an anti-colonial readerly oppositionality and the empowering model of post-colonial self-expression.Thus this study's continuing focus on the readerly component in Rhys, her excoriation of enshrined narratives (modernist, imperial, Eurocentric), her delineation of the sneer directed at the impure and bastardized (Creolized in this case), and the halfness of her work, are all brought to bear on *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

With a view to Walcott's description of Rhys and her work as the "white hush" I look at how *Wide Sargasso Sea* tackles in-betweenness in various and often discomfitting ways (Walcott 301), discomfitting especially to any easy understanding of Rhys's last work as a radical

inaugurator of the 'writing back' model, given her acute awareness (inscribed into the text as well) of her paradoxical locationality. This would be my attempt to close this study on a note that is in contiguity with the readerly challenge contained in her work (studied vis-à-vis modernism in the earlier chapters) and to probe how far *Wide Sargasso Sea* radicalizes and optimizes that strand. If postcolonial literature hinges on the 'writing back' model, combating Eurocentric, metropolitan, idioms with a self-authenticating discourse, then work such as Rhys's as already argued, in its skirmishes with the dominant literary idioms of her time, paves the way. In what way does her last work encode and carry forward this continuing concern in her writing- that is what forms the focus of my discussion of it. Towards the end of the chapter, I cast a brief glance at how the juxtaposed readings in this study, with Rhys's work as the entry point, have helped me think anew about the field of modernist studies- primarily about how the iconoclastic temper of the ideas and works of the canonical modernists, the zest with which they decimated icons, might paradoxically and insidiously establish them as icons hard to dislodge from pedagogic/ canonical pedestals. This is how I read the (above) statement from Paul K. Saint Amour. Since the sceptical edginess in Rhys acts towards de-pedestalizing her contemporary literary ethos, I lead on from there and it is on that note, of a re-look at the new turn in modernist studies, that I end.

"None of you understand about us"

If colonial binaries perpetuated a world of hierarchies and divided the world along the lines of 'us' and 'them', then Rhys's text asks a pertinent question-on which side of the grid of binaries would the Creole figure belong? At one point in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, responding to Mr Mason's glib pronouncements on West Indian society, Antoinette mouths silently, "None of you understand about us" (14). This is a variation on the imperial schematics of us versus them and in fact its unsustainability in the Caribbean context.The remark registers Britain's lack of understanding about the dynamics of Caribbean society since Mason as a new entrant into that field is portrayed as exemplifying the mixture of superciliousness and non-implicatedness that characterized Britain's attitude towards its stake in these regions and towards the resident European/ British population to whom they transferred the culpability for some of the worst excesses in colonial history. As Ian Baucom points out, what Antoinette's husband wishes to throttle above all is the excess embodied in his wife- "As a narrative of containment…Rhys's novel treats the English attempts to discipline colonialism's less manageable , less mentionable figures ,of excess. These excesses –of sexuality, memory, language and desire- reside in the figure of Antoinette Cosway" (170).

That (already referred to) mention of Anna Morgan's "sharp eyes" in Rhys's *A Voyage in the Dark* finds even more sustained comment in *Wide Sargasso Sea* where Antoinette's husband expresses his discomfort with her probing, sharp, eyes-" I watched her critically. She wore a tricorne hat which became her. At least it shadowed her eyes which are too large and can be disconcerting. She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (40). Revealingly, the unblinking fixity of the look from her too large eyes is linked to her dubious place in the colonial grid. The eyes seem to connote for the 'English' husband the Creole wife's 'disconcertingly' intimate knowledge of the local- whether in terms of landscape or more importantly the troubling legacies of colonial power in the Caribbean.

Rhys's textual presentation of the Creole woman focusses on how she is constructed along the twin and opposing poles of the spectral and the embodied- on the one hand, battling a lack of place, hence a blank, and on the other hand, trapped within the overwhelming frame of the debased body. This is a direct engagement on Rhys's part with Bronte's depiction of the Creole woman - who is both a voice and a silence in the text, an insistently (stridently?) disruptive, dissonant note and also in so far as Bertha is more heard (of) than seen, an invisibilized spectre.

In *Jane Eyre*, the obsessive need to contain and incarcerate the colonial spectre once it enters the metropolitan space is related to the idea of contagion. Alan Bewell's article on "*Jane Eyre* and Victorian Medical Geography" takes a look at how in eighteenth and nineteenth century medical discourse the colonial map was medicalized in terms of the "unequal exchange of pathogens"(776). Bewell indicates that the insidious logic of this medical 'science' lay in the shift from "anatomy to ecology, from the study of the body as the locus of disease to the analysis of the disease-bearing aspects of physical environments" (776). His article is a reminder of how colonial ideologies worked on the lines of the healthful versus the contaminated and contaminating. These ideas had powerful currency vis-à-vis the creolized. Bewell points out how women were seen as especially vulnerable to the effects of the tropical environments- in such a region, whose very landscape seemed to signify excess, "women-like plants-were believed to mature more quickly, their bodily and sexual needs gaining the upper hand over their minds and morals". As Antoinette and Rochester move towards Granbois, his comments on the landscape are telling-"Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green"(42). It is that categorization of the land as signifying the unchecked and the riotous that is seen to 'infect' the women most of all.

Antoinette's husband after his conversation with her 'half brother' repeatedly addresses her as 'Bertha'- sneeringly manoeuvring her into the scripted slot of the Creole woman as a figure of unchecked excess, amounting to rankness almost. But as Baucom suggests, Rhys also marks Antoinette's excess to lie in her inside, intimate, understanding and memory of colonial wrongs. His addressing her as Bertha is indicative of how what threatens to be released through her voice needs to be urgently contained- his doodling conjures an English house with a third floor and a woman safely boxed in it. In Rhys, Rochester's urgent need to throttle Antoinette's voice, to turn her into a "marionette" (99), is crucially related to the question of memory-because she speaks to block the metropolis's attempts at extrication from the colonial stigmatizations it has itself instituted.

Antoinette is chained to a disgraced history but it is her willingness to speak its ambivalences and horrors that merges her with the insubordination in Bertha's demonic laugh- whose inchoate rage is the first step in the incursion into the sealed borders of the Western narrative which Antoinette's voice further threatens to unspool. As the patriarchs of imperialism, pre or post emancipation, the husbands seek to regain control of the narrative more so when confronted by the alien word. Bertha destroys Thornfield but the robustness is resurrected in the form of Ferndean. In destroying Thornfield, she also destroys herself- the text is cleansed of the aberrations of the colonial journey. The fire to that extent is purgative- erasing the pathogenic from the English climes and paving the way for a more felicitiously democratic, non-aristocratic, alliance between Jane and Rochester. Bronte's text engages with aristocratic, decadent patriarchy and seems to posit as desirable an ending that seems to suggest transformation, but one that is ultimately internal and self-correcting. Rochester's voyage out implants a sense of the nation's porousness into the text- yet its logic presses towards establishing with even greater urgency the English nation as self-identical. Jane's scrupulous sense of rectitude catalyzes self-rectification but the injustice to the other is jettisoned from the textual frame. The European text reseals its perforated textual borders against the colonial spectres even more pointedly. It is those sealed spaces that Rhys's text sets out to rupture.When Antoinette narrates to Rochester a history of her family, he tries to block her narrative- "Some other time", he tells her. And in response, she says, "No other time, now. You frightened? ". Rochester registers that she drawls out the last words, "imitating a Negro's voice, singing and insolent" (82). That is an indication of how Antoinette's words voice the tale of colonial guilt, and Rochester knows that his attempts at occlusion will fail in the face of these revelations, emanating as they do from someone whose association with

colonial economies is as guilt laden, but also more immediate, intimate and visceral, and who foils his own metropolitan attempt at distancing.

This same paradox, of the divisiveness of race and class, and yet also interpenetratedness in the way the slave and master seem to look into and read each other is what the new crop of representatives from the metropolis, Mason and Rochester,find perplexing. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Annette's new husband Mason laughs at her for entertaining fanciful notions about the cunning and guile of black people on the one hand and yet flying at him "like a little wild cat" for calling them 'niggers'. Her response is that he needs to "believe in the other side" (15). Mason represents the unimaginative new planter class who perhaps finds it easier to turn the blacks into ciphers rather than to participate in Annette's intensity of contact, whether of hatred or dependence. It is detachment born out of a pragmatic materialism that governs Mason. Is there almost a nostalgia for the pre-emancipation days that one detects in Rhys's text, as the fractious closeness of the earlier times between slave and master is replaced as Christophine says by the "letter of law", more impersonal yet as iniquitous? (11). With her personal experience of the cross-currents of Caribbean society, and how the horrors of slavery forever imprinted a certain image of the West Indies on English minds who nonetheless continued to weave into their everyday lives products gleaned at great cost from those climes (sugar primarily), Rhys certainly wished to display to the metropolitans " the other side", to underline that moralistic condemnation and a profiteering imperial interest could not go together. She articulates in her fiction how it feels to know and to belong to both sides and yet to none. She portrays from the inside, with characteristic economy, how the psyche of both slave and master, colonizer and colonized, needs to be studied taking full cognizance of the distortions bred by the colonial economy.

That in the context of empire those identities were slippery in the extreme and tied to location is an insight that pervades Rhys's fiction- for instance in the way Antoinette's husband represents both the paradigms of colonial patriarchy- the paternalistic as well as the brutal. He never really gives the impression of belonging to the robust narrative of English nationhood- his uneasy relationship to his father is suggestive of his awkward relationship to the codification of imperial masculinity. His carrying out of the diktats of his father seems at best desultory in the early part of the novel. He seems to want to reject any implicatedness in the power structures of imperialism. When he and Antoinette arrive at Granbois, and he notices some wreaths of frangipani laid out on the bed for them, he mock wears one but throws it off when his wife tells him that he looks like an emperor with the wreath around his head. In fact, soon after that exchange the shadow of another institutional space that was

directly linked to the power asymmetries of imperialism, the colonial library, is evoked vis-à-vis Rochester. He notices that his desk resides in the shadow of certain moth-eaten, decrepit, classics of Western literature. In Ankhi Mukherjee's *What is a Classic?* , the ubiquity of the glass fronted bookcase in the colonies inevitably 'carrying' the weight of colonial legacies in the form of the Western classics is discussed (2).The Western-centric literary balance of power becomes indicative of how the colonized negotiated their way through imposed literary-cultural legacies. Rhys adds another dimension to this discussion - she shows how even the European whites rediscover their affiliation to their own culture in distant lands, often moving from disaffiliation to entrenchment. Thus it is that Rochester frames his letter to his father in the looming shadow of the imperial library (or at least its residual remains). He takes his place in the circuitry between metropole and colony, albeit hesitantly, that was so crucial to the colonial economy. He writes the letter but defers the posting of it-the letter however speaks of his compliance with his father's wishes. Thus fluctuating between distaste at colonial machinations and succumbing to its economic exigencies, he remains uneasily affiliated to the imperial narrative. But as the novel progresses, he seems to get more firmly entrenched in its dynamics-from being a reluctant participant in the manipulation of Antoinette, he begins to relish the vanquishing of the Creole other.

Though much critical attention has been spent in discussing the intricacies of Antoinette's interstitial positionality, the question of where to place the English husband remains a relatively under-addressed one. Rochester's fluctuating between identification and disidentification vis-à-vis the imperial imperative is I believe related to a more generalized observation on the writer's part- she seems to be studying how his distance from the immediacies of the colonial traffic allow him to hold onto the illusion of a liberalism that however morphs into a subscription to patriarchal codes once he goes out there. Catherine Hall's pithy remark, interestingly taking Eyre, the Governor of Jamaica and the orchestrator of the Morant Bay atrocities as her test case, that "Men were made white by Empire in a way that was never articulated 'at home' " can shed light on how both the Rochester of *Jane Eyre* as in Rhys' text, find their "white voice" while in the Caribbean (Chambers and Curti 76). Hall traces Eyre's transformation from a benign paternalistic voice to a more strident manifestation of colonial arrogance, a change that was effected by the change of backdrop from Australia to the Caribbean.Hall argues that the difference in approach, from someone who championed the cause of the Aborigines in Australia to spearheading the violence of Morant Bay came from the changed location-in Australia he could look upon the powerless Aborigines as 'children' in need of benevolent care. But in the Caribbean he looked at the

freed population of the blacks with incomprehending hostility-some of them quite prosperous with some members of the coloured population occupying seats in political institutions. The vocabulary deployed by him in Australia ran out of lexical relevance in this scenario (73-74).

The wider point that emerges from Hall's discussion is that locations were of paramount importance in dictating imperial attitudes.Rhys incorporates this nuanced understanding into her portrayal of how Rochester from looking at his wife detachedly begins to hunger to erase her difference, even if it means incarcerating her in the English estate- his possession of her stemming from a need to dispossess her of her identity. Rhys depicts his sliding into patriarchal brutalism first through the half-challenge to his father in the letter he composes though he doesn't send it off right then-his defiance is also expressed in his considering the rum too mild for his awakened machismo. That that manhood comes in significant part from his desire to subdue the challenge represented by his "lunatic wife" is conveyed in the climax to that scene- his drawing a house with his wife imprisoned inside.

As he others her, he 'finds' his own masculinity, in its most conservative manifestations- he declares that he has no patience for poetry and has come to hate the music that he so loved at one point of time(106). Even his comments on the scenery around him as they prepare to leave Granbois speak of his demanding subservience from the recalcitrant Antoinette. He notes that the hurricane season is not far away and his thoughts dwell on the towering nature that surrounds him will soon be shorn of its majesty- the terminology is laden with his vicious intolerance of his wife's veering away from the given role- he almost fantasizes about the bamboos being laid low by the wild wind, rendered 'abject' by the superior power- " …they bend to the earth and lie there, creaking, groaning, crying for mercy. The contemptuous wind passes, not caring for these abject things…Howling, shrieking, laughing the wild blast passes" (107). Then his thoughts turn to how his wife had told him that the Royal palms, though stripped bare, continue to stand tall and defiant. The violence of the imagery as he imagines the bamboos prostrate on the ground,broken by the force of the wind, is indicative of the degree of 'abjection' that he wishes to reduce her to. In fact he dwells on this parallelism himself when he muses-"I could not touch her. Excepting as the hurricane will touch that tree- and break it…Now I'll do it". This as he lingers over how he plans to deprive his "moonstruck" wife of the sun (107). Both the alternatives, her excess (sun) and her 'absence' (blank…moonstruck), serve to make him hate her. Admittedly, as much as he wishes to constrict her within the given script, he feels his control over the narrative to be under assault- for instance, the sight of the lonely house, its forlornness, strikes him with sadness. Thus Hall's point that heterogeneous locations of empire wrought changes in the

psyche of both colonized and colonizer is borne out by how Rochester struggles to be more of an Englishman and feels that Englishness under challenge from his spousal affiliation with a Creole - his affiliation to the script of imperial patriarchy is an embattled one, yet seems to gather in intensity when faced with otherness. Evelyn O' Callaghan argues that the stereotype of the tainted Creole woman served to bolster England's myth of separateness from colonial taint-"Ideologically overdetermined by discourses of national/sexual/class and race identity already imprinted within the metanarrative of empire, such accounts suggest an investment in preserving a space for originary nationhood/virtue/purity" (38-39). It is that aspect of Bertha's construction in Bronte's text that Rhys picks on as she portrays how, carrying forward from Rochester's concerted 'othering' of Bertha in Bronte's text, Antoinette's husband dwells on his wife as an inferiorized version of the imperial subject- and sees himself increasingly as a 'purer' embodiment of Englishness.

The three letters, mentally addressing his father, that he composes become an addendum to the burden of writing the empire into being-but in their discomfort with the exploitative colonial economy, they are also in contention with it. This is also important since the networks of empire depended on knowledge-sharing between metropole and colony- but Rochester's writings do not serve the empire in quite that way. However, as his stay in the Caribbean extends in scope and time, he comes to embody precisely those excesses that he abhors in writing- in his racial slurs, in his purported superiority to the Creolized population and in his arrogant, casual,boundary-crossing sexuality (with Amelie). Thus he re-enacts that gap between the overt and the covert in the operations of empire- overtly, he wants to distance himself from all that is profligate in it, yet in his intimate, private, conduct, he reprises that brutal profligacy. It cannot be denied that his position entails as much disorientation as does Antoinette's - he seems to be a pawn in the hands of his father. Yet in salvaging his authority through reducing his wife to a "marionette" (99) , he attempts to dispel that unbelongingness. It is right after his final conversation with Christophine, wherein she mocks and challenges him, that he draws the English house, with his wife incarcerated in it. The empire went to work on its stakeholders in insidious ways- and Rochester's trajectory through Rhys's text demonstrates this. His reclamation of origins births itself in distant climes- and then seeks to authenticate itself by punishing any perceived aberrations from its norms. Mouthing his hatred silently, he says-"No more false heavens…You hate me and I hate you. We'll see who hates best. But first, first I will destroy your hatred. Now. My hate is colder, stronger, and you'll have no hate to warm yourself. You will have nothing" (110).

From a point of disaffection to the imperial grid, he seems to violently embrace the system of binaries, where Antoniette's in-betweenness amounts to all the negatives of the binaries of colonial discourse attaching to her- lasciviousness, over-sexedness, inclined to irrational, magical beliefs. And he watches closely as he manoeuvres her into the corridors of the preordained space (the textual space of *Jane Eyre*), her slide into becoming a 'ghost'. As they prepare to leave, a young boy, who has begun to idolize Rochester, and dreams of accompanying him, starts to sob loudly at their departure. The Englishman shudders at the prospect of any further contagion of otherness- "God! A half-savage boy as …well as…". Antoinette mentions that the boy knows English, to which her husband responds-"He hasn't learned any English that I can understand" (111), the text's reiteration of the various stratifications within which 'genuine' Englishness sought to differentiate itself from its colonial, inauthentic, varieties. Rose Kamel points out that it took Rhys nine years to give Rochester a narrative voice (8). So it was clearly important to her portrayal of the liminal zones that the Empire opened up- not only for Creoles like Antoinette who struggle to tie themselves to an absent centre, the imperial metropolis, but also for the likes of Rochester who purport to speak from the edges of the empire's workings yet increasingly get co-opted into its imperial arrogance.

Rhys's work brings into the metropolitan writerly space of the Western world a knowledge of colonial horrors that is tactile and hence asks of its readers an engagement beyond the cerebral. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is important not only because it writes back to the Western canon but also because it speaks of how the Creole other is seen by the West as the excess whose invasion of metropolitan space needs to be panoptically monitored .Given the fact that a substantial part of her fiction is about the peripheral outsider invading the metropolitan centre, her work forces the implied Western interlocutor to confront its stake in these imperial economies and hierarchies. It asks of the metropolis that it acknowledge its willed unknowingness. For the metropolitan subjects, the West Indies was a site for usurious passions (economic, sexual, material). But that the West reaped the benefit of the barbaric slave system is a knowledge that Rhys's work unleashes into its cultural (such as the Bourne's cocoa advertisement in *Voyage in the Dark* as already discussed) and textual spaces. In his analysis of white Creole positionality, David Lambert sees Creole identity as ambivalently poised between colonial loyalty and colonial opposition, particularly in context of anti-abolitionism. On the same subject, he cites D. B. Davis who points to how an invidious social geography emerged that rested on "a conceptual differentiation between what can only be termed a 'slave world' aberration and the 'free world' norm" (8). There was a

growing sentiment in Britain that colonial slavery was antithetical to 'human progress' (10). What Rhys's fiction does is to underline the horrors of colonial iniquities, including slavery, but also to problematize such narratives of implicit exoneration. By focusing on the racially undergirded taxonomies and stratifications of the imperial core, Rhys implicates metropolitan Britons in the colonial process and troubles any attempt at what Graham Macphee terms "imperial innocence"(67).

Rhys's unforgiving vision bores into these attempts at occlusion-the overwhelming, resolutely repetitive iteration of discriminatory apparatuses might begin to make more sense if read in this light-as blocking all attempts at metropolitan distancing. That the canonized giants of the English cultural archive- Ruskin, Carlyle- formed a part of Eyre's supporters tells its own story. The cross incursions of Rhys's fiction underline this- that an imperially configured nation could not simultaneously sustain the myth of pristine self-containment. The map that had been coloured pink threw back a "roseate" shadow(Rushdie's term) over England's walls – whether in the glow of pride or more disturbingly in the reminders of bloody horrors such as the one perpetrated by Eyre's troops (qtd in Macphee 6).

Rhys's text never loses sight of the ways in which the Creoles (the women in particular) were the objects of metrocentric anxieties about cultural pollution. But if Rhys shows how the Creole figure is rigidly 'placed', gridlocked within degrading stereotypes in the metropolitan imagination, she dwells equally on the placelessness of the creolized. In an incident captured by Rhys at the beginning of *Smile, Please,* she recalls a picture taken of herself when she was six, and scrutinising it carefully three years later, the young Rhys is filled with dismay at this simultaneous recognition and non-recognition- "I remembered the dress she was wearing, so much prettier than anything I had now, but the curls, the dimples, surely belonged to somebody else…Why I didn't know, she wasn't me any longer". Almost immediately after Rhys describes how, catching sight of herself in the looking glass, she despairs that "I had grown into a thin girl, tall for my age" (19-20). In this proliferation of self-images, the notion of despair I believe is tied to the desperate need to fix an essence.

It is this dilemma of the Creole that Rhys writes into Antoinette's frantic desire to seal her identity in the face of its proliferating segments.She stands infinitely, fragmentarily replicated, as a counter to how the colonizer relied on establishing an identity whose boundaries could be and needed to be firmly policed.As Hardt and Negri note, the purity of identity is what ultimately connoted the triumphal separateness of colony and metropole.It is on that rationale that her English husband can configure Antoinette as dissolute, as without boundaries, the ultimate expression of which in his eyes is her carnal intemperance-"She'll

thirst 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" (106). Antoinette's frustration as a child at not being at one with her own self (the one in the mirror) is a powerful insight into the incommensurabilities at the heart of Creole existence, a comment on the incessant battle between identification and disidentification. It is revealing that the first two words of the text are-"They say…"- a clear pointer to how deeply Rhys's text engages with the self-exonerating logic of imperial discourse, where 'they', those who wrote the imperial script perpetuated hierarchies that caught all, they themselves that is the English English, Creole English and blacks/coloureds in an eviscerating grip (5). Some of the memories recorded in *Smile ,Please* speak directly to how Rhys battled with the slipperiness of identity-formation in a context where multiple subject positions adjudicated over her future-where she felt watched and disapproved of continually along the axes of given identities- as she listens to the song " Night has a thousand eyes" as a young girl, it sets off a paranoia of a million eyes lurking and trained on her-" yes, everything has eyes, spiders have eyes, a good many eyes it seems if you look at a spider through a microscope. Moths have eyes, beetles have eyes, so have centipedes I suppose" (65). This affective awareness of a gaze that seems to forever put one's self-constitution (or the lack of it) under the lens sheds light on the discursive context of colonialism- becoming a commentary on what H.Adlai Murdoch terms "Creole indeterminacy" as he discusses the "subjective maelstrom" that would result from this fractured position (Johnson and Moran 146, 150).

In a passage that comes almost at the end of the text, Antoinette remembers how in her growing up years, intensely lonely, she would stand in front of the looking glass, watching herself as she ran a brush through her hair. She recalls how she would want to reach out to that reflection, to kiss it, and how that fumbling attempt at intimacy was blocked by the mirror, "hard, cold and misted over" (117). This instance of self-doubling is an echo of that other moment, when Antoinette figures Tia as a mirror extension of herself (see also Smith xxi). This is just after the description of the burning down of Coulibri. As Antoinette and her family flee the site, she spots Tia in the crowd and runs towards her. Her need to reprise the history of her contact with Tia amounts to wanting to resurrect Coulibri from the ruins or at least to salvage its memory, but it also entails elision of its racially divisive and exploitative foundational history. In seeking to reconnect with Tia, Antoinette attempts to recover their companionship- "We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river"- but this involves excising the racially fraught registers of their previous exchange (24). There

is that important moment in their past history where, when their exchange turns ugly, Tia walks off wearing Antoinette's dress, so that Antoinette in turn has to return home attired in Tia's. As always with Rhys, it is the little details that speak to the composite,complex, history of racism- Antoinette's donning Tia's dress but " hating her" all the while, her reference to how Tia left alone her underclothes, since she never wore any, and her mother's hysteria at discovering her daughter in this forced situation of racial cross-dressing, asking Christophine to burn the dress, also an explanation in itself of how Antoinette struggles between seeking to overcome racial barriers and her entrapment within inherited racial attitudes (10). Her desire to align with Tia against the backdrop of a burning Coulibri or her flailing attempts to lavish affection on the forlorn face staring back at her in the mirror, are all part of Rhys's portrayal of how the Creole in the Caribbean struggled against multiple, conflicting, positionalities that translated into a placelessness, perhaps an implicit judgement on their incursions into the spaces of the other. Thus there is infinite doubling which thwarts any easy access to self-integration. At various points in the novel, Antoinette sees herself or is seen as the mirror image of Tia, Amelie, Bertha Mason, her mother.

As in other texts by Rhys, such as *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight* (as already discussed), the ex-centric positioning of her protagonists, leads them to hover close to lunacy.As Antoinette's husband plans to carry her away to England, both despairing of and yet at least in part responsible for the marionette figure that she has become, he speaks of nurturing the lunatic in her- a sign of helplessness in her instead of that " blank hating moonstruck face" would garner a gentler response from him- " Antoinetta-I can be gentle too…you'll soon see how gentle. My lunatic. My mad girl. Here's a cloudy day to help you. No brazen sun. No sun…No sun. The weather's changed". The gentleness he promises relies on a dissolution of the Caribbean registers of her personality-in the imperial imaginary, these were imaged in the excessive, " brazen", brightness of the sun, as against which he sets the restrained, grey-toned world, to which he is taking her (107). The repetitious cadences of " No sun…no sun" clearly linger on how he plans to take control of her-her induction into the European narrative is contingent on his writerly censoring of the tempestuous Creole elements of her identity (107). The mechanics of incorporation, as far as they are resisted by her, provoke a violence in him- a despairing collapse, on the other hand, engenders the erotics of compliance and submission. As he seeks to bind her in the imperial script, her journey into that text hovers dangerously on the cusp of the 'voyage out' and the 'voyage in'- the voyage out of that script is not yet possible in any other way than to voyage into it, to read it anew, to plague it, to insinuate a nagging under-text into its dominant discourse.

It is apposite that in Rhys's final work and for many the work they most identify her with, the battle should be one over textually configured space. Rhys's novels have been read in this study as a readerly riposte to the narrative of Western exemplarity, enshrined most often for those living in the peripheries in the imperial library. In a crucial conversation between Rochester (who is never so designated, so that the critical act of using the name only serves to underline the hold of the canon) and Christophine where he essentially, perhaps defensively, sneers at ways of knowing that are alien to him, and which culminates in Christophine leaving the house, he offers that she could write to Antoinette and she responds- " Read and write I don't know. Other things I know" (104). So it is not just through Antoinette that Bertha's spectre is raised. It is also those like Christophine who trouble the Western text-from its margins erupts Bertha's bared laughter but equally Christophine's suppressed countersneer.

"Not a Forgetting Person"

(*Wide Sargasso Sea* 85)

Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a text that for many in fact is a model of "eroding the monocultural optic of its canonical pre-text" (Thieme 84). It has now become a frequent citation in critical work on the postcolonial dynamics of rewriting. But it is important to recognize that in many ways the release from the canon is not envisaged in Rhys quite in the way we have begun to expect from postcolonial literature-it is not so much a writing back as a reprisal, a re 'visitation' that asks for a shift of perspective from the reader. In fact, in the text Antoinette travels back into the textual spaces of Bronte's masterpiece; in terms of its narrative positioning as a prequel, she seems to become increasingly trapped in the pages of *Jane Eyre*. In the latter half of the book her husband reinvokes the sceptre of Bertha Mason with a vengeful insistence. Angela Smith mentions in the introduction to the text that Rhys herself was a spectral presence-for instance, given her fading from the writerly circuit for quite a while, her neighbour by her own admission (in a letter written to a friend in 1949), believed she was a fraud impersonating the dead writer Jean Rhys (vii). This coming back from the dead is now a part of the Rhys story. Rhys came back to writing with a last book that haunted both the canon and the imperial myth- and to that extent *Wide Sargasso Sea* carried forward the pivotal concerns of her earlier writing. And again more than a rescripting, Rhys penetrates into the insides of the pre-text and conducts a readerly excoriation of the gaps and silences in it. It is only by re-experiencing the incarceration that the existential dilemmas of the Creole figure can be revisited and drawn out, from where they were muffled in Bronte's text. Thieme's reading of the challenges that Rhys's reworking of Bronte's

narrative poses is incisive, yet there is one crucial adjunct that I wish to add. I believe that the narrative trajectory of Antoinette is of essence here-while we only know the incarcerated Bertha Mason, as she is revealed to us in the attic in our first glimpse of her, Antoinette's progressive incarceration is played out in front of the reader. Thus Rhys almost deliberately takes Antoinette back into the confinement of the attic as well as into the confining spaces of the canonical text. It is as if the travelling back is essential to the act of burrowing into sealed spaces (textual-canonical, imperial-metropolitan), of opening them out to examination. Antoinette's entrapment is both within a structure and a narrative, and by taking her deeper into those enclosing brackets, Rhys turns Antoinette's counter-sneer, her readerly combativeness, at the structures that hold her in their grip.

In the latest compendium on Rhys, *Jean Rhys-Twenty First Century Approaches*, the editors point out how there are relatively few extant full length studies on the writer. It seems that most studies on Rhys work forward from that premise of resurrection. Chiming with Smith's reference to the idea of Rhys coming back from the dead, the editors of this volume too speak of the spectral as being at the heart of both Rhys's own story as well as being a part of the textual thematics of her oeuvre(6). Through some carefully picked citations from biographical sources, they argue that Rhys seemed to battle against being reduced to a ghostly insubstantiality. But I think what they fail to capture is how there is also a wicked strain in her noting of these reactions- in other words, how the paranoid and the satirical co-exist in her excoriation of societal responses.For instance when she recounts how people had given her up for dead, she admits to it being a "nightmarish" experience but also adds that she is aware of the "rum stories" being made up about her by those who scarcely knew her (Johnson and Moran 7). Thus it is important to note that in Rhys, the societal is delineated as much at the level of the affective as the critical/ expository. To over-emphasize the affective would be to ignore the insubordinate slyness of her protagonists' comments on their beleaguered situation.

While the servitude of the blacks in the novel is economic and racial, Antoinette's is textual. Grace Poole comments on the "fierce" look in Antoinette's eyes (116). And there is correspondingly a mention from Antoinette of how there is no looking glass in her room at Thornfield. The Antoinette whose gaze is turned so much and so searchingly at her own identity, now looks outward at the gridlock of prejudicial narratives that strangulate it. She fails to bring the disparate parts of herself together, figured so evocatively in her desire to be one with her reflected image; she cannot in other words write herself into being. But in her journey back into Bronte's world, she does turn her reader's gaze (as pointed out, noted for

its incisiveness by both the husband and Grace Poole) onto imperial strongholds-the word know/ knew occurs repeatedly as she speaks of weaving her way through the corridors of the mansion. The implication is of haunting anew the textual spaces that designate her inferior and of unsealing their biased testimonies. It is in the training of a reverse gaze, Antoinette's, at the imperial space that Rhys's counter-stance most clearly manifests itself- since this is a direct counter to how in Bronte's text we see Bertha mainly through the gaze of others.

Both Antoinette and the unnamed husband in a sense enact parallel trajectories- one of regress. Antoinette comes increasingly to be trapped within textual tropes- her final envisaged act of arson also more an end than a beginning. Interestingly in a letter Rhys describes her creative journey vis-à-vis *Wide Sargasso Sea* thus-"I've got the end. Not the start". This takes one back to the original premise of the argument- that in the context of post-colonial writing as an enabling discourse, access to agency is absent from Rhys's fiction but a contentious spirit certainly broods insubordinately in its crevices. Rhys writes into being the insubordinate spirit that broods in the crevices of textual/ canonical/ imperial-patriarchal authority. It can be argued that in its developmental trajectory, post-colonial literature travels from a cathartic impulse ,that is, expunging the ghosts of colonialism to the more self-affirmative phase of the 'birthing' of selfhood. Only in moving beyond the overwhelming focus on the 'Rhys woman' can we recover in her early fiction the buried iteration of the inceptionary gestures of postcolonialism. In her insightful recording of how the oppressed read the minds of the oppressors, she endows her protagonists with a readerly insurrectionism that would then gather into the later, full-blown focus on writerly agency. In *Voyage in the Dark*'s Anna Morgan covertly resides a capacity to read into and decrypt the master-narrative of colonialism, yet caught at a moment of historical impasse, she cannot write her own identity; when pregnant, she can only envisage 'birthing' a monster. Rhys's and her protagonist's in-betweenness render it difficult to traverse the distance from counter-narrative to self-narrativization, the latter connoting the culmination of the combative in post-colonial literature. "Circulation is a global exodus and, or really nomadism; and it is a corporeal exodus, or really miscegenation", say Hardt and Negri. It is the corporeal experience of otherness that Rhys details , where the miscegenated body remains an abjected or deferred reality.

It is the 'insider-outsider' dichotomy that accounts for the piquant, often frustratingly slippery, quality of Rhys's work- the contradiction for example between an avowed fascination for the qualities she attached to the blacks and coloureds , but frequently disrupted by intimations of danger and terror, which for Ramchand is a pointer to the "terrified

consciousness of the Creoles" (qtd in Edmondson 204). Though such observations normally accrue to a reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this admixture of nostalgic yearning and an awareness of lurking violence is present in *Voyage in the Dark* as well- for example underlying the entire description of lovely moonlit boatrides with the vividly remembered boatman 'Black Pappy' is an undertow of anxiety at Black Pappy's warning about lurking barracoutas- "then you would imagine the barracoutas- hundreds of them…waiting to snap" (46). Is this only a child's overactive imagination? There is certainly the thrill of transgression that Anna feels in keeping the company of the 'other' but the sense of violence waiting to erupt is also palpably conveyed. Perhaps that little detail about the frayed seat of Black Pappy's trousers patched with sacking is not so casual after all -this linkage of images suggestive of menace, a brooding danger born of asymmetry- all convey Anna's sense of the increasingly tenuous, capsizable, foundations of an unjust plantocratic society. The pervasive visuality and sensoriness of Rhys's work deals too much in specificities to fall into the simplistic lures of colonial romance. This hallmark of her fiction, her swooping down on minutiae, her resistance to generalized commentary and aerial overviews, is one way in which her writing resists subsumption into racial stereotypes.

In Certeau's words, "the procedures of contemporary consumption appear to constitute a subtle act of "renters" who know how to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text" (xxii). Jean Rhys and her heroines are undoubtedly 'renters', and I believe that the suggestion of unsettledness that the word carries bears the conceptual weight of the shiftiness of Rhys's 'voyage in' within the dominant discourse of modernism and post colonialism. As a renter, Rhys was shorn of a space to call her own-her authorial imprint emerges instead from insurrectionist forays into the spaces of modernist discourse, and this gives her writing a Janus-faced creative force-looking back at and bringing into view the reactionary backrooms of modernism's emancipatory salons on the one hand and prefiguring the anti-imperial genesis of postcolonial writing on the other. Buffeted from place to place and room to room, the sheer corrosiveness of the renter's non-belongingness becomes a poser for the master-narrative of modernism. Conversely, her searing analysis of the dis-empowerments wrought by colonialism does not quite knit into the later integrated empowering notes of postcolonial discourse. Bill Schwarz points out how most of the potential writers and artists who migrated from the Caribbean had already found a voice of their own before the voyage in-they had as he puts it "their typewritten novels and poems in their suitcases, mimeographed manifestoes" so that while they were still 'renters', the internal processing of colonially inscribed space was already a work in progress for them (3). Rhys

emerges, then, more as a provocateur in Certeau's terms; a creative, recalcitrant, occupier of inscribed spaces. Critics like Jed Esty and John Clement Ball have traced the efflorescence of West Indian literature in the mid-twentieth century London as a collective phenomenon. Esty is of the opinion that though writers from the colonial peripheries like Rhys and Mansfield had been a part of the London scene, "the colonial writers of the 1950s represent a distinct phase in the remaking of English culture insofar as their work participates in the transformation of centre-periphery relations at the end of empire" (*Shrinking Island* 200). As a white Creole, Rhys was never part of these emerging collectives, and here one cannot but note that Phyllis Shand Alfrey, a Creole like Rhys, played a formative influence in the developing West Indian nationalistic narrative and in island politics. Battling a schismed identity, and 'ghosted' at the level of class (since her stage career marked her as déclassé, unlike Alfrey), background and gender, Rhys's work is expository rather than constitutive. If as the editors of *Postcolonial Geographies* argue, "Postcolonialism has an expansive understanding of the potentialities of agency, sharing a social optimism with other discourses, such as those surrounding gender and sexuality…", (Blunt and McEwan 6) then that utopianism is singularly absent from Rhys's fiction but the fractious and contentious spirit that would go on to enact a final rupture with repressive, monocultural authority certainly broods insubordinately in its crevices. And it is that spirit that finds its culminating point in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

"Always Half-and-Half" (*Good Morning, Midnight* 95)

In *Smile Please* Rhys writes that as a child "Before I could read, almost a baby, I imagined that God, this strange thing or person I heard about, was a book" (27). This study has focussed on how it is in a foregrounding of readerly power to excoriate the authority of 'texts'- of various kinds, as seen in the previous chapters- that Rhys's works find an oppositional valency. It is thus fitting that her last work, and the final work that my thesis looks at, should operate so much in the realm of the readerly.

At various points in this study, I have referred to the many instances of failed 'birthing' in Rhys's fiction. Interestingly, in one of her letters she described the creative process of bringing *Wide Sargasso Sea* into being through metaphors of childbirth-" I've dreamt several times that I was going to have a baby…Finally I dreamt that I was looking at the baby in a cradle-such a weak and puny thing" (Wyndham and Melly 301). History would testify otherwise-Rhys's text is for countless readers and scholars one of the seminal texts in the empire's attempt to write back. But I think the statement from Rhys reflects her painful awareness of the paradoxes of her positionality and identity, such as made her writing hard to

categorize as radical.That for me is the paradox that governs her career as a writer-that the inceptionary impulse of her fiction lies in a contestatory thrust and yet its failure to offer a progressive, forward looking vision opens it out to being read as regressive. Even as one acknowledges that Rhys's works cannot but be read under the shadow of that impasse, this study has tried to locate a countersentence in her writing in the realm of textuality. The authors of *Empire* look at the question of difference vis-a-vis empire in terms of the split between ingestion and contamination-as they say "While from this juridical perspective differences must be set aside, from the cultural perspective differences are celebrated", elaborating on this further by pointing out that "these differences are considered now to be cultural and contingent rather than biological and essential" (Hardt and Negri 199). In this study, I have tried to locate modernism's interest in difference as leaning towards celebration of plural, alternate cultures, yet also not entirely free of the fears and phobias resulting from the latter attitude. And in Rhys's textual engagement with modernist tropes, it is that problematic split that she identifies as a necessary and qualifying adjunct to any study of modernism's iconoclastic agendas.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau makes an important distinction between strategy and tactic, and his theorization gave me a framework to understand the convergence/ divergence between the profane in Rhys and the high modernists-

> I call a "strategy" the calculus of force relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment". A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors…clienteles)…
>
> I call a "tactic" on the other hand a calculus which cannot count on a proper (a spatial or institutional localization) …The place of the tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place…Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking etc) are tactical in character (xix).

This could in fact describe how the adversarial element in Rhys's work stands at a distance from the modernist narrative of iconoclasm. Theirs is a concerted strategic position that stems from their institutional emplacement- hers is an off-kilter, tactical, deployment of the resources available to the 'outsider'. A number of critics have noted that modernism came to function as a cartel whose anti-institutional thrust became an alternate institutional locus. The resistant nerves centres of Rhys's fiction, unfolding in the interstices of compliance and wry critique, stand differentiated from the more strategic, sure-footed, purgative energies of

modernism. For instance Johnson and Moran, in their Introduction to *Jean Rhys:Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, recount how Rhys once wrote to Francis Wyndham complaining of the paucity of fiction on "the mind"- this when the twentieth century writers who were her contemporaries, such as Woolf, saw their work as excavating the hidden recesses of the mind. Rhys significantly praises a lesser known writer, Anna Kavan, for her craft.This is a pointer to how while the modernists saw themselves as infiltrating into the bastions of power, writers like Rhys see them as strategically ensconced themselves and inclines towards writers who launch tactical skirmishes as opposed to the theorized iconoclasm of the modernist vanguard. Rhys's expressing affinity with a relatively obscure writer tells of someone who understood what being outside of institutional strongholds and power centres meant. And that in her mind mainstream modernism was such a power formation is clear-this is not just Ford's "lurid passion for the underdog" making itself manifest-it is also an understanding of power structures that only the non-privileged can bring to the discussion.

Rhys's writings, though they speak so directly to the thematics of women's oppression continue to frustrate, again as the hush, the caesura in-between articulation and agency. One has to concede that there are no enabling narratives of revolt in Rhys's work. But the silence, the absence, of her protagonists evokes that interim space between oppositionality and resistance. As Iain Chambers notes, a politics of silence, a refusal to fully occupy the syntax of the dominator, is an under-theorized premise-" Silence can also be seen as a marker of agency…Silence as a will not to say, or to unsay, and as a language of its own has barely been explored. The refusal to respond can mark the refutation of a language in which one is being addressed…This refusal of the 'vocal mandate' disrupts the positioning of power through the iruption of silence" (51). It is the blank mask that most frustrates Rochester-his patriarchal ego is better positioned to 'subdue' a raving Antoinette, but the Antoinette who presents a stony blankness, unnerves him. In many of Rhys's novels, in fact, the off-centre responses of her protagonists reconfirm their 'pottiness' in the minds of their interlocutors. Thus Rhys's work is the hush, the pause, in more ways than one- the suspended space between recalcitrance and vocal opposition, between the excoriation of modernist rebellion and the agency of post colonialism, between (if one thinks of the way the women seem to be both so sucked into structures and yet retaining a vagrancy) co-option and uninhabitation, between the readerly and the writerly.

The purgative impulse can be seen as the throbbing centre of both modernism and postcolonial writing. Rhys, in straddling both, stands outside of their impulse to rewrite and instead probes the compromised dynamics of the one and the utopian re-centrism of the other.

Most analyses of colonialism probe the tropes of the homely and the unhomely .Rhys, forever poised on the cusp of these conflictualities, is thus the proverbial renter (Certeau). Her works proliferate in the interstices of the codified. She remains ever sceptical of "invariant essences" (Gilroy in Chambers and Curti 23), both in looking askance at modernism's enshrined narrative and in remaining disconnected, both positionally and affectively, from the postcolony's resurgent self-writing.

Inter-Readings and Re-Visionings

This study, though specifically related to Rhys's writings, simultaneously sees her work as rich in commentative value- her work, in its thematic concern with empire, intersects and enters into a conversation with both modernism and post-colonialism. I have tried to argue that her non-belongingness, the debates that have formed a staple of Rhys criticism vis-a-vis where to place her, might lead us alternately to looking into this under-worked aspect of her work,that is, its interlocutory scope. Rather than fighting to restore her to the modernist canon or to see her instated as one of the inaugural voices of the post-colonial canon, this study argues for holding on to her halfness, her 'expatriateness', as a way to probe and expand/ interrogate these literary periods/moments. In the first chapter, I start with this idea of halfness, with all its related implications of placelessness, outsiderness and bastardization, as a way of understanding the 'sneer' in Rhys. The idea of the sneer in Rhys, its recurrent usage as a term and as coming into play at the conceptual level, marked the genesis of my interest in how there is the combative that resides in Rhys and that also finds a manifestation, albeit truncated and compromised, in the enraged pyschospace of her protagonists, where in fact they enter into a fractious conversation with societal inequities.

Taking the sneer as my conceptual frame, I thus began to look for places where the counter-sneer makes itself felt. Rhys gives her characters a sneer that slices though the sneer directed at them, that is, a voice that conducts an unsparing scrutiny of hegemonic structures. In this way Rhys's work amounts to an extended dissection of the prejudicial components of the empire's as well as patriarchy's machinery. This led me to explore whether Rhys's outsiderness could be read as of a piece with the heretic non-conformism of her more renowned modernist counterparts. This study largely stems from that endeavour. An important component of my extended reading of the sneer in Rhys is to explore how that could be understood as a scepticism levelled against an identifiably iconoclastic anti-establishment stance, the sneering suspicion of the establishment world in the canonical modernists. It is what that dialogism between Rhys's off-centre positioning and the more placed modernists yielded that forms one of the core elements of my study. In the first

chapter, I have dealt with how the idea of the sneer increasingly became my entry-point into Rhys's work. Feminist criticism has found it hard to grapple with the repetitious enactment of women's oppression in Rhys's work. The Rhys woman's acute, affective, consciousness of the 'sneer' directed at her variously configured outsider status, and Rhys covering that terrain in text after text, can and has been a stumbling block for a feminist reading looking for agency in her texts. But my reading of the sneer led me to see the obdurate repetitiousness as in itself an expression of rage. Her women's acute apprehension of the social sneer that is trained at the disempowered becomes a searing, enraged, glance back at the axes of power that render them pariahs.

Molly Hite speaks of how Rhys's work needs to be read after casting out certain assumptions about women's literature-as she says, the impatience that is often expressed towards her 'victims' presumes that a change in their attitude would be enough to "surmount whatever obstacles stood in their paths".(Hite ' Other Side' 27). This would also lead forward into my next point-a suggestion that undergirds my second chapter, where I have attempted a side-by-side reading of Rhys and Woolf. Anne Donadey talks of how as literary syllabi becomes more multicultural, the way we look at questions of gender oppression must move from the "monist" to the "intersectional" (82). She argues that in any analysis of women's victimization, if a gender-only parameter is adopted, then the issue of privilege along other power differentials, gets silenced (89). It is to some extent on that that my reading of the differentials in these writers' work on women hinges, so preoccupied with similar concerns, of rooms and spaces vis-a-vis women, otherwise. The second chapter is an attempt to explore how the trope of the room becomes in the hands of both Rhys and Woolf a way of exploring women's spatial positioning and the ensuing challenges. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is so much a pioneer text in feminist polemics and Rhys's engagement with the concept of the room as delineated in her fiction seems to read at times as a clear engagement with, and a need to affix an addendum, to Woolf's concern with women and space. The chapter focusses on how the iconoclasm of the metropolitan modernists, such as Woolf's overhauling of patriarchy's definition and control of space, is in turn read as partial by writers like Rhys, more attuned to registers of disadvantage other than gender.Both writers are masterful readers of the subterfuges employed by patriarchy to rationalize the spatial repression/ exclusion of women. While one looks to Woolf for a forward-looking stance, a progressivist argument, Rhys's work in its bleak endings and impasses may seem almost regressive in comparison. But my chapter makes 'space' for alternately looking at Rhys's work, albeit a record of entrapment and without emancipatory energy, as a way of reading the gaps in a writer like

Woolf, gaps that as I mentioned activists like Adrienne Rich and commentaries like that of Donadey's , now trace back to the limitations of a white, upper middle-class feminism.

This also spans out directly into one of the core arguments of this study- that rather than seeing the work of new modernist studies as one of expansionism through incorporation, where writers of Rhys's ilk are taken into,'bestowed', a place in the canon, it could well be about how fiction such as hers de-centres certain assumptions undergirding metropolitan modernism itself. It this not so much about creating more space at the nodal centre of the modernist canon, but about probing how the node itself is de-centred. This argument might be a dangerous one on the grounds that new modernist studies in fact sets out to question the currency of the canon. But I have tried to suggest that it does this not so much by disassembling but by expanding. As the curriculum becomes more diverse and multi-locational, writers from locations other than the Anglo-American corpus, are welcomed into the ever-expanding folds of modernist syllabi. It is their contiguity with the modernist tenets that is foregrounded. Even where their alternateness is recognized, it is seen as at one with the declared outsiderness of Woolf for instance, such that their bringing a recalcitrant strain into modernism stands co-opted. It is the symbiosis that is celebrated. In this thesis, however, I have attempted to bring up front statements from Rhys and Mansfield that show awareness of their outre positioning and how they see they see their work as skirmishing with that of their metropolitan counterparts.As far as this argument holds currency in the context of feminism, Donnette Francis's article on "Strategies of Caribbean Feminism" throws up an interesting formulation- that of antiromance. Francis argues that the generative romance of the feminist bildungsroman is replaced in the Caribbean context by a more conflicted model of women's agency-in her words, " It resists an unqualified celebration of redemption and revolution in favour of a layered engagement with subjectivities born and reborn in the everyday experiences of Caribbean women and girls"(Bucknor and Donnell 341). And though her reference is perhaps more to coloured women, it does illuminate Rhys's depiction in a rather direct way.

This idea of moving away from the homologies in the work of the 'colonials' and the Anglo-American modernists and of seeing in fact the work of the former as expatiating on certain problematic strands in the latter is again the core enquiry at the heart of my juxtaposed reading of Rhys and Conrad. If colonialism leant itself to the largely masculine writing tradition of the voyage out, I see Rhys as paralleling it , as did many writers from the colonial extremities, with the voyage in. In the chapter bringing together Rhys and Conrad, I have suggested that both writers focus on the colonial journey as a dislocating one, but while

Conrad's focus is on how it destabilizes the assumptions of the colonizer, Rhys probes how it proves a challenge for the person travelling from the colonial borderland to the centre to hold on to their view of the colonial core as the fount of largesse. Where the imperial adventure tradition was about mapping and mastering alien territory, at however high a cost, both these writers see the colonial voyage as unfolding more along the lines of an unmapping, of a loss of co-ordinates.But the question that I have tried to pose by modulating my reading of Conrad by placing it alongside Rhys's fiction is whether Conrad entirely relinquishes a residual fascination for the masculinist adventurism of such fiction. Does the narrative of adventure both get wrenched out of its familiar vocabulary (such as in the lugubrious pace of the narrative as against the raciness of action-packed adventure), and yet get reconstituted around a more cerebral/ metaphysical axis? I have tried to argue that in framing Kurtz's 'breakdown', Conrad records a failure of colonial imperatives but in this proto-modernist text, this is also the moment of instantiation of modernist journeys into the untrodden- and there Kurtz leads from the front. So even as Kurtz would hardly qualify as the proverbial colonial hero, his heroism is constituted along a different axis- in his capacity to enter and immerse himself in the extremities of human experience.Anna Morgan, Rhys's voyager, conducting the reverse journey into the imperial metropole, is privy to another category of subterranean knowledge- the underbellum of the flourishing imperial centre. While Kurtz can lay an epistemic claim to the borderline areas, the substratum of human experience, via the voyage out to the colony, Anna Morgan gazes into the sordid underside of the colonial capital in the course of her voyage in. The distinction spans out to suggest the difference in the two writers-one whose sweep moves from the historical to the universal, the other whose look at history too is through a focus on the micro and minute.

While the second and third chapters read Rhys's work in conjunction with that of the canonical writers, in the fourth chapter I have attempted a cross-reading of Mansfield and Rhys in terms of their convergence as voices from the colonial margins.I trace the continuities in their preoccupation with gender, location, the modernist moment and the colonial context.The chapter essentially argues that if Rhys's and Mansfield's piquant position within the colonial structure(and in Mansfield's case her chosen writerly province, as a writer of short stories) made them something of parvenus, they seem to embrace the label and proceed to turn into a leveraging point to cut into modernism's self-monumentality.

A survey of critical work on these writers reveals a recurrent pattern-most compendiums start off by acknowledging that these voices were never quite a part of the modernist gallery of honour-and to argue that they be recognized as substantial figures in the modernist pantheon

.This thesis comes at the debate from the other side-to argue that mainstreaming these writers should not translate into writing out of the script the resistant strand in their writing. Simon During in an article on Mansfield puts this argument into a theoretical frame when he talks of how " the consecration of a global canon has been organised from the old imperial centres" (35). The over-zealousness of enfolding gestures of inclusion that follows from this might mean a subsuming of what the peripheralness (both positional but also obdurately self-conscious as I have shown) of those like Mansfield and Rhys can bring to the discussion. By choosing fiction that is almost completely steeped in their own literary ethos, the chapter bringing the two writers together attempts to probe the critical and interrogative combativeness with which Rhys and Mansfield engaged with the literary parameters being set and espoused by their metropolitan contemporaries. This is to put a slightly different spin on recent efforts to re-map modernism as a pluralized, de-homogeneized body of writing. Rather than tracing concurrences between the established figureheads and the late entrants, identifying and foregrounding points of non-identity might be a more interesting way of opening up the canon. Trinh T. Minh-Ha's theorization of a middle as "alert in-betweenness" is where I place these writers interstiality as chanelling into a contestatory reading of their times (234). By probing how the chequered politics of the high modernists were being read into and dissected by their contemporaries from the margins, the study of modernism can be opened up in crucia ways.

Researching on Rhys catalyzed another thought process in me- how even in these times where there is so much talk of opening up the canon, one still finds, for example, such a vast difference in the editions of Rhys and Woolf. Almost all editions of Woolf are well-substantiated whereas there is a complete absence of explanatory gloss/ notes in the Rhys ones. Andrew Thacker speaks of the recent spurt in scholarly editions of the female modernists but also notes how Rhys lags far behind. In the same article he talks of the various ways in which notions of Rhys as an inebriated, sentimental, writer can be challenged, such as her minute and persevering efforts to edit her work/s. I would like to close my thesis by suggesting that understanding and appreciating the contextualized and specific references in her fiction and having editions that do justice to these are perhaps more crucial than extending an enfolding embrace to writers like her in the current climate of curricular re-visions. It is only then that we can travel that final 'hush'(and that too is a 'white hush' in terms of the predominance of white European writers in the canon) , that gap , between only a resuscitation of modernist studies(where the canon in fact gets another shot in the arm,

where icons are in fact reinstated in more contemporary guises) and a genuine opening up of the territory.

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