CHAPTER FOUR

Jean Rhys: West Indian intellectual

Helen Carr

Samuel Beckett, it is said, when asked in Paris on one occasion if he were English, replied unequivocally, '*au contraire*'. Jean Rhys might have said much the same. If she was sure about her identity in any way, it was in her certainty that she was not English – 'pseudo-English' at the most, as she puts in her memoir, *Smile Please*.¹ But what was she? In what sense could she be called a West Indian? Rhys herself was uncertain at times, and some of her critics have hotly debated the question. There is no doubt of her love for the disturbing beauty of her native Dominica, a recurrent if occasional theme from her earliest stories onwards, evoked most powerfully in her final novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Yet in all her writing about the island there is the sense, sometimes sad, sometimes envious, sometimes resentful, that it belongs more to the black majority than to the white creoles: they were, she wrote, 'more a part of the place than we were'.² On the one hand, she could say, like Anna in *Voyage in the Dark*, 'I'm a real West Indian ... I'm the fifth generation on my mother's side'.³ Yet on the other, like Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a white cockroach to the ex-slaves and a white nigger to the English, she could also say – and during the time she was writing that novel increasingly felt – 'between you I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all'.⁴

As the white descendant of slave-owners, coming to England in 1907 at the age of seventeen, and during the course of her long life returning only once for a visit to her birthplace, should she be considered a West Indian writer at all? After all, three of her first four novels, and many of her short stories, are placed in Europe, and have heroines with no apparent knowledge of the Caribbean. Yet her situation has in fact some striking similarities to that of her fellow colonial, Beckett, also born a member of an affluent, ethnically distinct, Protestant minority, in a part of the British empire where the majority were poor Catholics,

leaving that country as a young adult, and spending a long life elsewhere. He similarly often produced works whose setting was by no means overtly that of his native land. The Irish, however, have had no problem claiming Beckett an Irish writer, even though he went even further than Rhys in his denial of an English heritage by starting to write in French. More direct comparisons with other West Indian writers have been made by Evelyn O'Callaghan. Jamaica Kincaid, V. S. Naipaul and Caryl Phillips, she points out, are all emigrant writers, Phillips 'arriv[ing] in England "at the portable age" of one'.⁵ They too have written fiction that does not have a Caribbean setting. Yet their right to be called West Indian writers is not questioned. It is Rhys's race that calls her status in doubt, for herself as much as for others.

The fiercest battle over her place in West Indian literature was fought out in the 1970s, though it was revived again in the pages of *Wasafiri* in the 1990s. Until the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, few of her critics or readers – and there were not in any case a large number of them – thought of her as Caribbean. An exception was Ford Madox Ford, who first published her in his journal, the *transatlantic review*, and who wrote the introduction to her first collection of short stories, *The Left Bank* (1927). With his usual insight, he made clear the importance of her origins for her writing: 'Coming from the Antilles', he wrote, 'with a terrifying insight, and a terrific – an almost lurid! – passion for stating the case of the underdog, she has let her pen loose on the Left Banks of the Old World – on its gaols, its studios, its salons, its cafés, its criminals, its midinettes – with a bias of admiration for its midinettes and of sympathy for its law-breakers'.⁶ One might note that it was of course easier for Ford than reviewers of, say *Quartet*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, and *Good Morning, Midnight* to recognise her Caribbean roots. For one thing, in three of the stories in *The Left Bank* the narrator identifies herself as West Indian; in addition, Ford knew Rhys personally, and during the course of their love affair her alien origins were for him both a source of fascination and of eventual alarm. Alec Waugh was another exception. He had met Rhys in England, and mentioned her in passing in an article he wrote on Dominica in 1948. He makes it clear he does not expect many of his readers to have heard of her: 'Her novels have not reached a large public', he writes apologetically, 'but they have a personal flavour'. But he then goes on to say: 'Re-reading *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, I could see how many flashbacks to Dominica – imperceptible to the unacquainted reader – occurred in it. I could see how Dominica had coloured her temperament and outlook.'⁷ Such a view would not be put forward again for many years.

When *Wide Sargasso Sea* first appeared in 1966, most British and American critics continued to ignore the question of Rhys's origins,

Paul Theroux in 1972 going so far as to ask if it was her 'placelessness' which had caused her to be neglected for so long.⁸ With those from the Caribbean itself it was another story. The idea that there could be something called West Indian literature was just emerging, and both Wally Look Lai in 1968 and Kenneth Ramchand in 1970 wanted to claim the novel as specifically West Indian.⁹ However, Kamau Brathwaite in a fierce denunciation famously propagated the contrary view: 'White creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf, and have contributed too little culturally, as a group, to give credence to the notion that they can, given the present structure, meaningfully identify or be identified with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso Sea'.¹⁰ Revisiting these comments twenty years later, Brathwaite tempered his argument, if not his tone. On this occasion he was replying to an article by Peter Hulme, on the location of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which Hulme had criticised Brathwaite for exploiting as part of his argument the non-African derivation of Rhys's supporters, Ramchand being of East Indian origin, and Look Lai of Chinese.¹¹ In his stormy but illuminating response, Brathwaite made clear that his earlier comments had to be read in the historical context of African-Caribbean writers' determination to establish their work as central to West Indian writing, and in the wider framework of black nationalism in the West Indies in a period, 'not so long after', as Elaine Savory puts it, when 'virtual apartheid' prevailed in Brathwaite's native Barbados.¹² His anger in 1974, Brathwaite explained, had been directed against those whom he saw as using *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a weapon to attack 'African barbarism & darkness' in writers like himself.¹³ In his 1995 reading, Brathwaite explicitly refers to *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a 'great Caribbean novel', and in fact is hostile to other kinds of identification that can be given it, most vehemently rejecting the appellation 'postcolonial'.¹⁴ He points out that 'When WSS first appeared ... it was we West Indians who paid it mind. It was "ours" as it shd be. But since in the 60s we were so race-consciously fragmented, some of us at least fought over the importance / value / significance of its ... ENIGMA. CO [his 1974 book, *Contradictory Omens*] in fact, from that point of view, is part of those uncivil civil wars in Caribb culture & I can't tell you how we get beyond that yet.'¹⁵ His point had been, he stresses, that 'in talking about Caribb culture ... who you are inc yr ETHNICITY determines how you SEE Caribb (or any?) culture'.¹⁶ Jean Rhys at least would have concurred with that last comment, once saying: 'What you see depends on what you are'.¹⁷

The Caribbean's violent imperial history has as its legacy a population which is heterogeneous and hybrid; its inhabitants include African Caribbeans, East Indian Caribbeans, Far Eastern Caribbeans, white

Caribbeans of various European extractions, people of a mixture of races and a small number of indigenous Caribs. As Brathwaite indicates, there have been historical tensions and hostilities between them all, and, as he says, 'those uncivil civil wars in Caribb culture' are by no means over. The position of the white European Caribbeans is, of course, different in kind from any of the others; they were the historical oppressors, responsible, in the pursuit of their own wealth, for the presence in the region of all the others except the Caribs – in their case being responsible for their scarcity – and thus ultimately responsible as well for giving rise to all of those 'uncivil civil wars'. Yet their lives have been shaped by that brutal history as much as have the other groups; they are part of the material social reality of the West Indies, even if their right to be part of its 'spiritual world' has been challenged. Even Brathwaite, who in the 1970s wanted to see the white Creole as an alien outsider – something Jean Rhys makes clear she at times felt herself to be – by the 1990s accepts her as a part of that dark history; but he still wants to suggest that though 'Rhys was honest in her sense of GUILT', she self-defensively makes a 'beautiful figment' of Antoinette's relationship with Tia and Christophine, of white with black.¹⁸

How any of the inhabitants of the Caribbean, including the white creoles, 'SEE Caribb (or any?) culture', does, as Brathwaite argues, depend on their ethnicity, historical experience and cultural memories of the Caribbean. It will also depend on which island or part of the mainland they come from. One further way in which Jean Rhys only ambiguously belongs to the West Indies is that the term – West Indies – is traditionally used only of the British Caribbean. Her island, Dominica, was owned by the French for many years, sandwiched between the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and only finally secured for good by the British in 1805, though even then remaining predominantly French in sympathy as J. A. Froude observed with disapproval in the 1880s. There was in Rhys's childhood only a tiny English Protestant elite; the island was overwhelmingly Catholic, and the African-Caribbean majority, as now, spoke a French patois. Rhys went to a Catholic convent school, where whites were in the minority, so it was only at home that she learned to absorb British culture, inculcated in the British Caribbean through the school system. As a white creole from Dominica she was 'West Indian' in a different way from the other figures examined in this book, but the importance of her Caribbean childhood and its legacy have been increasingly recognised.¹⁹ Paradoxically, her lifelong sense of homelessness begins there. Rejected as she felt herself to be by her mother, and ignored for the most part by her father, she longed to be black, one of those who were 'part of the place', but she repeatedly discovered she was alien,

suspect, even hated. Even though she loved the beauty of the island, the place itself, she felt, rejected her: 'I wanted to identify myself with it, to lose myself in it. (But it turned its head away, indifferent, and that broke my heart.)'²⁰ When she arrived in England from the West Indies, Rhys would find herself alien again, and that experience would, as it did for many of her fellow West Indians, play a crucial part in forming her understanding of the world. From her disturbing Dominican childhood and that painful entry into the metropolis came the beginnings of her insights into the workings of the hierarchical English social system, insights that grew with her struggles against prejudice and poverty in the metropolitan world.

Yet though Jean Rhys's sense of homelessness, even in her native island, is undoubtedly stronger than for some of her fellow Caribbeans, perhaps even that is something that is more common in the West Indies rather than is customarily acknowledged. Bill Schwarz raises in his introduction the question of what is specific to the West Indian expatriate situation, asking if, as well as similarities, there are differences between West Indian and other colonial immigrants. Perhaps one difference lies here. Almost everyone in the West Indies has come, or their ancestors have come, from elsewhere. No one is wholly at home. Even the indigenous Caribs, on their poverty-stricken reservations, have been encircled and displaced, their home made unhomely. In the West Indies there was nothing comparable to the insistent ideological construction of nationhood that formed the United States, and turned its immigrants into a nation. As colonies, the West Indies related to Britain; historically their identity was unequivocally dependent. C. L. R. James describes himself in his youth as 'A British intellectual long before I was ten, already an alien in my own environment, even my own family'.²¹ The West Indian spiritual world that Brathwaite evokes is significantly an African one: the West Indies is only in a partial sense, a hyphenated sense, the African-Caribbean's home. 'The Caribbean', George Lamming suggests, 'may be defined as the continuum of a journey in space and consciousness.'²² Or as Stuart Hall has pointed out, 'The Caribbean is already the diaspora of Africa, Europe, China, Asia, India, and this diaspora re-diasporized itself [in Britain]'.²³ And as he reflects on his own migration: 'I am not entirely of either place. And that's exactly the diasporic experience, far enough to experience the sense of exile and loss, close enough to understand the enigma of an always-postponed "arrival"'.²⁴ Jean Rhys is another diasporic intellectual, with the migrant's consciousness of the shifting complexity of identities and the impossibility of an assured 'arrival'. But that is not to say her diasporic experience is not very specifically shaped by the culture that she has come from and that which she meets.

The other term in the title of this book, 'intellectual', has been as contentious a term to apply to Jean Rhys as West Indian. When, late in life she achieved fame and critical attention in the wake of the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one reason for the breakthrough was the changed cultural climate; her attacks on the established order, on snobishness, on conventional English sexual mores, on racism, were now in tune with the times. It was a very different period from the years of postwar Cold War conformity, when she had been unable to persuade Constable to publish a book of her short stories. Her long publishing silence from 1939 was not the result of her ceasing to write; what she had to say proved unacceptable. Even in the 1920s and 1930s Rhys's books had frequently been described as 'sordid', but in the 1960s she had become up-to-date. Yet the circumstances that made her late success possible also adversely affected the way in which she came to be defined as a writer. Each novel, it was averred, told the story of the 'Rhys woman', as her heroines were dubbed, avatars always of herself. They were the transcription of experience, very sensitive, very fine, but they had no message beyond the delineation of her individual life. In addition, for all the liberalisation of sexual attitudes, 1966 predated the feminist reaction against the 1960s' simultaneous hyper-sexualisation and infantilisation of women. Rhys's own reliance as a young woman on her sexual attractiveness – in this she was undoubtedly like her heroines – as chorus girl, artist's model, mannequin and mistress necessarily meant she could not be considered as a thinker. It was still difficult to think of a woman as both sexual and intellectual, or indeed as intellectual at all. Ironically, it's a complaint some of Rhys's heroines make themselves. Frances, in Rhys's early short story, 'Vienne', bemoans how she's been damaged by men 'always disdaining my mind and concentrating on my body'.²⁵ When Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* says to the gigolo René that she is a '*cérébrale*', he rejects the idea out of hand saying: 'I should have thought you were rather stupid ... Don't be vexed. I don't mean stupid. I mean that you feel better than you think.'²⁶ That stereotype of the feeling rather than thinking woman was firmly attached to Rhys, even by some of her most admiring critics. When Al Alvarez sealed her reputation in 1974 by claiming in the *New York Times* that she was 'the best living novelist', he insisted that although she 'has a marvellous artistic intelligence – no detail is superfluous and her poise never falters as she walks her wicked emotional way – yet [she] is absolutely non-intellectual: no axes to grind, no ideas to tout'.²⁷ For him this is wholly admirable. But it meant the powerful social critique that emerges from Rhys's fiction could not be seen.

The myth of the naïve, ignorant yet instinctive writer has been particularly emphasised by those who have written about Rhys biograph-

ically who, ignoring the ample evidence of her wide reading, have portrayed her working unaware of other writers and in isolation from the intellectual currents of her day. David Plante, in his grimly unsympathetic and luridly sensation-seeking account of her old age, produced a list of writers he claims that she said she had not read, most of whom are mentioned in her novels and letters and whose work she clearly knew.²⁸ At much the same time, however, Judith Kegan Gardiner, wrote a ground-breaking essay in which she argued against the prevailing trend, demonstrating that Rhys was a literary, self-conscious and modernist writer, who in *Good Morning, Midnight* alone alluded to Emily Dickinson, Joyce, Keats, Rimbaud, Wilde, Anatole France, Woolf and Colette.²⁹ Already in the 1980s more attentive readings of Rhys's fiction and letters made it more difficult to ignore her extensive knowledge of literature, particularly English and French nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, to say nothing of the visual arts and history. Yet in 1990, Carole Angier, in her 700-page biography of Rhys, was still writing: 'This is one of the most intriguing of all the paradoxes about Jean Rhys, that she knew so little, and wrote only about herself, and yet she managed to write novels which were completely modern, full of feeling, ideas, even literary terms that were absolutely of her time'.³⁰ Angier has done extensive work in tracing acquaintances and lovers, but she makes no attempt at intellectual biography. She is horrified by Rhys's bad behaviour, her drunkenness, her conflicts with the law, her rows at dinner parties, and in the end sees a split between the genius and the anarchic woman. Ironically, given her uncompromisingly biographical approach to Rhys's fiction, she is unable to reconcile Rhys's refusal to accept the status quo in her life with the same refusal in her work.

Angier is aware that Rhys condemns the metropolitan world that she met when she came to England, but she ascribes those criticisms to Rhys's desire to vindicate her own failures rather than to any insight. Even Diana Athill, her editor at Deutsch who gave Rhys much support as a writer and friend in her later years, and who gives a less morally reproving account of Rhys in her memoir, makes Rhys's condemnation simply the response of a frightened, ignorant colonial from the outback, coming from a world so limited that it could not even be considered parochial.³¹ She suggests that Rhys, who, she points out, could not even recognise a train when she first reached England, remained incapable of learning to understand this new world, escaping into impotent rage whenever baffled or defeated. Yet though Rhys had not learned in Dominica that landlords were mean with hot water, or that young ladies must not walk out by themselves, she had learned other things. She knew about injustice, she knew about racial hatred, she knew

'there is always another side'.³² She knew whites had money and that blacks did not. She knew the colonialists in the past had behaved with unspeakable cruelty; she knew they still assumed their right to oppress economically and to maintain a legal system in their own interests. She knew about fear. She saw in stark and extreme form all the inequalities and prejudices that she would meet in England; there was no danger that she would not recognise their more subtle formations when she reached 'home'. Jean Rhys was never an intellectual in the sense that she published discursive essays or theoretical books. The language of her fiction and memoirs – and here she has much in common with other West Indian writers – is always the vernacular, and though it is often a different vernacular from, say, Selvon's, like him she writes in the voice of the disempowered. Rather than use, she mocks and exposes the authoritative language of power.

Like other West Indians, Rhys met immediate prejudice when she reached England. When she arrived in 1907 she was not marked out as different by skin-colour as the majority of her fellow Caribbeans would be but, as soon as she spoke, her strong Caribbean accent identified her as alien. Accents were all important in assigning places in the English class system, and were only just beginning to lose their defining role when Rhys died in the late 1970s. In *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna's step-mother Hester, Anna tells us, had 'an English lady's voice with a sharp cutting edge' which said to her interlocutor: 'Now I've spoken you can hear that I'm 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.'³³ As with the inquisitive Mrs Wilson in Rhys's short story 'Outside the machine', the silent question would be asked: 'An English person? English, what sort of English? To which of the seven divisions, sixty-nine subdivisions, and thousand-and-three sub-subdivisions do you belong?'³⁴ Rhys was forced to give up her desire to be an actress because her drama school could not rid her of her West Indian voice, and for years afterwards she would only talk in a whisper. In *Voyage in the Dark* Anna is accused by Hester of having an 'awful sing-song voice ... Exactly like a nigger you talked – and still do'.³⁵ Probably the same comments were made to Rhys; they were certainly made of her. In Dominica, Rhys, the daughter of a government doctor and landowner was undoubtedly respectable, undoubtedly a lady. In England her status was immediately in question.

As Catherine Hall argues in her chapter, both white and black West Indians were stigmatised in Britain in the nineteenth century. The image of plantocracy culture that grew up in the days of slavery was a deeply insalubrious one, partly perhaps an evasion of metropolitan guilt over the wealth garnered through slavery by the projection of all blame

on to the depraved colonial executors. In spite of efforts to dispel it, the white creole reputation for degeneracy was still circulating in the early twentieth century. (The image of white West Indian creoles contrasts with that of Anglo-Indian colonials, who lived in India in social isolation from the native population, and were regarded as respectable, noble upholders of empire.) White creoles were reputed to be, as Kenneth Ramchand points out, 'indolent' and 'licentious', qualities also ascribed to black Caribbeans, the planter class having undoubtedly gone native in terms of moral character, and very likely having interbred as well.³⁶ They could no longer be regarded as wholly white, and certainly not as truly English. White creole women were reputed to be even more corrupt than the men. As Rochester had said of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, in the words Jean Rhys would echo many years later in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, they were seen as 'intemperate and unchaste', those harsh condemnatory Victorian words that drop like dead weights, cold and inhuman, in the fluid and poetic language of Antoinette's thoughts.³⁷ The qualities associated with the 'coloured' or 'mulatto' women, 'highly sexed and sensuous', as Ramchand puts it, are ascribed to white creole women, but in addition, like Bertha, they are deeply dangerous.³⁸

Whilst Jean Rhys most powerfully writes back to this set of stereotypes in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she presents the viewpoint of the 'intemperate and unchaste' woman in all her novels. Jean D'Costa has suggested that *Wide Sargasso Sea* 'predates conceptually all other Rhys texts', and certainly that is true here; looking back from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, one can see she is arguing the case for the despised creole woman all along.³⁹ Even when her heroines are not explicitly Caribbean, they are regarded with suspicion; they fail to pass, as Sacha realises in *Good Morning, Midnight*, as '*femmes convenables*'.⁴⁰ As Ford had gone on to make clear, the reason that Rhys's Caribbean origins gave her a 'passion for stating the case of the underdog' was that those origins in themselves labelled her as unacceptable; they link her by association with the prostitutes and lawbreakers who engage her sympathy. That note of sympathy, he had gone on to say, is one 'of which we do not have too much in Occidental literature with its perennial bias towards satisfaction with things as they are. But it is a note that needs sounding, that badly needs sounding, since the real activities of the world are seldom moved forward by the accepted, or even by the *Hautes Bourgeoisies*'.⁴¹ Rhys's fiction is always engaged in giving the viewpoint of those like herself who are not accepted, those who are despised by the *hautes bourgeoisies*. Unacceptably white in Dominica, she was still racially unacceptable in Europe; if she did not have the experience of other West Indians arriving in England that Bill Schwarz refers to as 'becoming black', she certainly became something besmirched, muddied. Had she

been more adept at acquiring the required accent, she could of course, unlike most of her fellow West Indians, have learnt to 'pass'. But, as Ford was aware, she had rapidly fallen foul of the English rules of respectability in ways other than her colonial origins. Becoming a chorus girl symbolised a downward step, a move into one of those professions, like acting or dancing, which at that period were always suspected of sexual laxity. Chorus girls were largely working class, and could perhaps be acceptable as such. As Mrs Wilson, the suspicious interrogator in 'Outside the machine', says of a working-class chorus girl: 'Yes, this is permissible; it has its uses. Pretty English chorus girl – north country – with a happy, independent disposition and bright teasing eyes. Placed! All correct'.⁴² A chorus girl who had been brought up to be a lady, however, was indubitably incorrect. Elaine Savory comments that Jean Lenglet, Rhys's first husband, had in 1939 'argued that her clarity of vision resulted in part from her experience of leaving behind an idyllic Caribbean childhood for the brutal realities of London's disappointed and marginalised: he understood Rhys's change of class status as critical in her writing'.⁴³ Her childhood was not always idyllic (though it is surely significant that she had given Lenglet the impression it was), but by and large Lenglet is right about the importance of that cultural shock. Savory herself suggests that Rhys became 'effectively working class' in taking on the job of a chorus girl, but that is to misunderstand the workings of the British class system.⁴⁴ People do not become working class by changing occupations. In *Voyage in the Dark* Anna's use of language is quite different in class terms from that of the other chorus girls. After all it's Anna who is actually reading *Nana* with, incidentally a picture on the cover of a 'stout, dark woman brandishing a wine glass' – unchaste *and* intemperate – and dark into the bargain. It's the working-class Maudie, however, who forthrightly pronounces: 'That's a dirty book, isn't it? ... I know; it's about a tart. I think it's disgusting. I bet you a man writing about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another. Besides, all books are like that – just someone stuffing you up.'⁴⁵ Maudie comments that Anna 'always look[s] ladylike', but Anna, by becoming a chorus girl, can no longer be considered to *be* ladylike. As a West Indian, her position is already ambiguous: her fellow chorus girls call her the 'Hottentot', drawing from a vernacular rooted in nineteenth-century racial theory, implying that she exists on the lowest rung of the human evolutionary ladder, and also that she is highly sexed.⁴⁶ Through her dubious occupation, she has slipped further out of the respectable middle classes, into the interstices of the English class system, neither one thing nor the other; an anomaly; unlike the pretty north-country chorus girl, she is out of place, liable always to rejection or insult. Walter asks her if her stepmother thinks

'she disgraced the family or something', and Anna shrinks, thinking 'Oh God, he's the sneering sort. I wish I hadn't come.'⁴⁷

Becoming a kept woman was Jean Rhys's next step down the social ladder, a signifier both of her sexual fall and of her poverty. 'Intact, or not intact, that's the first question. An income or not an income, that's the second', as Marya imagines Heidler putting it in *Quartet*.⁴⁸ In the English system class and money were not the same thing, but they were closely entwined. Just as in the West Indies, Rhys suggests, it was hard to be truly 'white' without money, in England it is difficult to remain a 'lady' without an income. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Julia's sister Norah strives to do so against the odds. She is appalled that Julia 'doesn't even look like a lady now', and wonders, 'What can she have been doing with herself?' She herself is

labelled for all to see ... 'Middleclass, no money.' Hardly enough to keep herself in clean linen. And yet scrupulously, fiercely clean, but with all the daintiness and prettiness perforce cut out. Everything about her betrayed the woman who had been brought up to certain tastes, then left without the money to gratify them; trained to certain opinions which forbade her even the relief of rebellion against her lot; yet holding desperately to both her tastes and her opinions.⁴⁹

As Julia thinks as she walks round the West End later, 'This place tells you all the time, "Get money, get money, get money, or be for ever damned"'.⁵⁰ Julia is damned in one way, Norah in another.

Throughout Rhys's fiction, she not only gives the viewpoint of 'underdogs' like herself (one reviewer described *Voyage in the Dark* as being 'like a Salvation Army tract rewritten from the inside'); she contests the way the society that she met judges those like her.⁵¹ That is not to say her heroines always successfully contest the social order – they are more often defeated – but Rhys's imaginative vision exposes the injustices that keep, in Ford's words, 'things as they are'. The women in her stories are often silenced by their oppressors, male or female, but they argue with them in their thoughts. Nancy Harrison has pointed out how much 'talking back' Rhys's heroines do in their heads, so the fiction itself presents their defiance, even though it may be telling the story of their apparent defeat.⁵² Julia thinks of Neil James, when she goes to him to appeal for money: 'Because he has money he's a kind of god. Because I have none I'm a kind of worm. A worm because I've failed and I have no money.' But her very statement of those terms of social power presents their immorality, though all she says aloud is: 'I got fed up. I felt I needed a rest. I thought perhaps you'd help me to have a rest.'⁵³

Writing back to *Jane Eyre* and giving the first Mrs Rochester a chance

to give her point of view was perhaps the culmination of this technique. But although Rhys is conscious of the way women are the losers in the patriarchal metropolitan and colonial world, she is also aware that women can oppress and men be oppressed. Downtrodden men are shown as much sympathy as exploited women: in 'Vienne', Frances says silently to the deceived, diminutive André, 'Hail, brother Doormat, in a world of Boots'.⁵⁴ Even in *Wide Sargasso Sea* part of the skilful shaping of the plot is achieved by the way in which, when we first meet the Rochester figure, we realise he as second son is himself the unhappy victim of a patriarchal system; as the novel goes on and he finds wealth and power, Rhys depicts the process whereby through fear, jealousy and fierce suppression he takes on the role of cruel patriarch, a mercenary and possessive oppressor himself. In Rhys's analysis, metropolitan society operates, as she says in 'Vienne', as a 'huge machine of law, order, respectability' that destroys or maims those who do not fit in, whether they are misfits for reasons of race, class, nation, sexual mores or poverty.⁵⁵ She is most scathing about what she sees as the English bourgeois desire for conformity. Mr Mackenzie – one of the most mocked of all her creations – had 'a certain code of morals and manners, from which he seldom departed ... His code was perfectly adapted to the social system, and in any argument he could have defended it against any attack whatsoever. However, he never argued about it, because that was part of the code. You didn't argue about these things. Simply under certain circumstances you did this, and under certain circumstances you did that.'⁵⁶ Her stories do not deal with the really wealthy and powerful – even the rich lovers are generally working in the City, and would have been sniffed at in the best circles. Power for Rhys takes many different forms at different levels of society; it operates in stepmother Hester's voice, and through Mrs Wilson's inquisitorial gaze. It is found in the bullying landlord in a Paris hotel, who looks like a fish 'lording it in his own particular tank, staring at the world outside with a glassy and unbelieving eye'.⁵⁷ It is found repeatedly in the dealings of well-to-do men and their impoverished mistresses. It is possessed by the black policeman in '*Temps perdu*', well supplied with bayoneted rifles with which to control the Carib reservation in Dominica. When asked if there had been anyone hurt in a riot, the policeman replies: 'Oh, no, only two or three Caribs ... two-three Caribs were killed'; the narrator comments – 'It could have been an Englishman speaking'.⁵⁸

Yet in Rhys's writing while prejudice, cruelty and hypocrisy can be found in both men and women, and in people of any race, the primary focus of her attack is on English patriarchy. Rhys's attitudes are never simple, and she says at one point that her hatred of England was really

'disappointed love'.⁵⁹ As a colonial child, her reading was of English books, and her view of England, she says, was taken from them. She had grown up thinking England was glamorous, magnificent. When she arrived she found it cold, grey, unwelcoming, xenophobic, snobbish and endemically misogynist. Yet at times Rhys suggests that her critical stance towards the English was already developing in Dominica. She wrote much later that the reason she hated the English was that as a child she had realised 'the white people have everything and the black people have nothing, in money'.⁶⁰ Economics again, something unavoidable in a childhood in the Caribbean, where as Lamming insists, the Europeans carried out 'their first experiment in capitalism overseas'.⁶¹ In 'The day they burned the books', the young creole protagonist is told by visiting English children that she is not really English, just a 'horrid colonial', and she reacts by retorting she doesn't want to be English: she'd rather be French or Spanish – very much Rhys's own view. There are other elements in her upbringing perhaps that prevented her from succumbing to the norms of English hierarchy. It was because her father was a 'liberal' in Dominican terms, prepared to meet socially with the non-whites, even though vociferously opposed to the coloured middle classes in Dominican politics, that she was allowed to attend the mixed-race Catholic convent. Her fellow Dominican novelist, Phyllis Shand Allfrey, by contrast had an English-born father who did not hold with 'mixing', and who was thus educated at home. (Allfrey's grandfather, a doctor like Rhys's father, would always examine his black patients with gloves on.)⁶² Rhys had met more non-whites than other white creoles might have done, and even if, as her account of her convent education shows, that taught her as much about racial tensions as racial tolerance, it gave her insights she might not otherwise have had. Significantly, in addition, the convent had introduced her to the French language and to French poetry, to which she was deeply drawn and which she felt had far more affinities with the black Dominicans than English did. It was in Paris that she began to write, and French writers were her models. In 1959 she wrote to Francis Wyndham, 'When I say write for love I mean that there are two places for me. Paris (or what it was to me) and Dominica, a most lovely and melancholy place ... Both these places or the thought of them make me want to write.'⁶³

One other element in her estrangement from Englishness might also have been her identification with her Celtic origins. Her father, whom she often idealised, in spite, or perhaps because, of his comparative neglect of her, was Welsh – Jean Rhys's name was originally Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams. She had an Irish grandmother who sent her fairy-tales and books of legends, and her mother's ancestry was

Scottish. Sue Thomas notes that Rhys felt her family, though middle class, was regarded as below 'the solidly English middle classes' in the island.⁶⁴ This is confirmed by an incident recounted in Phyllis Shand Allfrey's biography: Allfrey met Rhys in England in the 1930s, and when on one occasion she was asked, 'How were the white people now in Dominica?' replied they were now 'of the common variety, the Smiths and the Browns'.⁶⁵ Rhys was enraged, saying she had been one of the Smiths, and refused to speak to Allfrey for the rest of the evening. It is unlikely her family's tone was lowered by her mother – the Lockharts were a well-respected family among the whites. So it must have been her Welsh father, and while it may not have been to do with his Welshness, Rhys may well have felt it was. She remained proud of the fact that she only had one-sixteenth English blood. Her enemy was emphatically only the English. As a writer she believed her work was only possible because she had 'escaped from an exclusively Anglo-Saxon influence and ... never returned to it'.⁶⁶

Rhys, Savory suggests, can be seen as deeply Caribbean in her consciousness of her colour.⁶⁷ As George Lamming writes of Caribbean society, 'Race is the persistent legacy ... No one born and nurtured in this soil has escaped its scars, and ... everyone – whatever their ancestral origin – is endowed with an acute racial consciousness'.⁶⁸ Some critics, most notably Veronica Marie Gregg, have argued that Jean Rhys is racist; Savory concludes she is both racist and anti-racist. Rhys certainly does not escape the racial generalisations of her time. That could be said of her depiction of the English as much as of the black Caribbeans (though as far as I know the only critic to protest on behalf of the English is Robert Young). For her day she was remarkably opposed to racism, endeavouring to resist or complicate conventional essentialising definitions.⁶⁹ Rhys's characters can be situated within the archive of colonial stereotypes with which we are now so familiar, but they most often break out of them. Gregg appears to interpret her awareness that the whites are regarded with hostility or hatred by some of the black or coloured Dominicans as racist; it might be thought more, in the early twentieth century and possibly even more in 1936, when Rhys had her one return visit, a painfully honest realisation of the facts.⁷⁰ Rhys says that as a child she felt the black Caribbeans were 'more alive' than the white, that she longed 'so fiercely to be black and to dance', but she also records the fear and shock that those glimpses of hostility aroused in her.⁷¹ Her nurse Meta who 'always seemed to be brooding over some terrible, unforgettable, wrong' was the 'terror of [her] life'; as if to punish the white child for the cruelties of colonialism she terrorises her with tales of *soucriants*, *lous-garoux* and

zombies, introducing her to 'a world of fear and distrust', the 'terrified consciousness' which Ramchand identifies as central to the colonial subjectivity.⁷² Rhys describes another black servant, Francine, who also introduces her to African traditions, but whose 'stories were quite different, full of jokes and laughter'.⁷³ To Gregg, Rhys is simply setting up the stereotypically good versus bad native, but as Savory points out, she 'marks both women as fundamentally influential in her cultural development: she was often engaged with both elements in a binary split'.⁷⁴ What is significant is that Meta's hostility, like that of the blacks who burn Coulibri in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is not presented as a product of a savage nature, but of a colonial history. It is the English Mr Mason who deals in essentialising racist assumptions: the blacks are 'children' and 'too damn lazy to be dangerous'. He pays no attention when Annette says to him: 'You don't like, or even recognise, the good in them ... and you won't believe in the other side ... They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, and they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn't understand.'⁷⁵

Rhys's fiction imagines Englishness as the apotheosis of whiteness, in contrast to Caribbean blackness. This is another area in which her use of racial tropes has been questioned. In *Voyage in the Dark*, she writes, 'Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad'.⁷⁶ The Caribbean is a place of scents and colours; England a place of grey streets and dark houses. English culture is figured as machine-like, unfeeling, driven by money, repressed. The Caribbean is sensuous, passionate, vibrant, spontaneous. England, Teresa O'Connor has argued, is for Rhys male-dominated; the Caribbean is largely identified with women. Anglo-Saxon men, Rhys complains, despise women writers. In her version of the Caribbean, women are always singing songs, telling stories. Ramchand famously called *Voyage in the Dark* 'our first negritude novel', and certainly there is much in common with *négritude's* celebration of black warmth and creativity.⁷⁷ Rhys deeply admired many European writers. Yet she does, intriguingly, in one unpublished essay, talk of 'us black people', and she sees the West Indies as a source of creativity that she weaves into her multivoiced, heteroglossial texts.⁷⁸ She wrote in 1962: 'I am very sold on the poems of a man called Derek Walcott (I think) from Lucia coloured I believe or a Negro. Read some & was delighted ... Do you know I believe the West Indies may produce artists and poets – the climate, atmosphere and the mixture of races all exactly what is wanted'.⁷⁹

Sue Thomas has quite rightly pointed out the close links between Rhys's portrayal of the Caribbean and other forms of modernist primitivism current at the time, of which *négritude* is one.⁸⁰ *Négritude* inverted many of the conventional colonial assumptions about race, and

many conceptual and political difficulties followed. But its historical importance should not be underestimated. Modernist primitivism took many forms, and one suspects Rhys's version, which places so much emphasis on song and dance, as well as growing out of her childhood experiences, was influenced by the fascination with blackness, and in particular with black music and dance, in Paris in the 1920s, where she lived for most of the decade. She was later to tell her friend Peggy Kirkcaldy, 'Adore Negro music ... It's life according to my gospel'.⁸¹ Its popularity in Paris at the time must be one more reason for her sense of being more at home there than in Britain. *Négritude* took root in Paris. Like the *négritude* writers, Rhys's inversion of the usual assumptions of white superiority marked a significant political statement. European modernist primitivism is often most importantly a sign of the loss of confidence in Western civilisation, an unsettling, even if not a routing, of nineteenth-century racial hierarchies. But as far as Rhys is concerned one can make another point. Simon Gikandi has argued that one of the characteristics of modernist primitivism is what he calls its 'regressive temporality', in which the primitive is relegated to some former time or to timelessness itself.⁸² *Voyage in the Dark*, the story of a young white Caribbean woman, still in her teens, facing the emotional as well as metrological chill of England, does indeed present the modernist trope of the loss of a warmer, vital past in a devitalised, mechanised modern world, as in many ways the novel is shaped by the contrast between metropolitan bleakness and Anna's vivid memories of her Caribbean childhood. But there is no comforting 'regressive temporality': the fact of a shared and disturbing history which black and white cohabit breaks through the nostalgia. Anna's memories of the warm, laughing Francine are jolted by the thought of the day she saw Francine looking at her with hatred because of her whiteness. Her Uncle Bo, who first figures in her recollections in opposition to the supercilious Hester, easy-going, affectionate, jovial, with his numerous illegitimate offspring 'all colours of the rainbow', as Hester accusingly says, suddenly leaps into her mind as a figure of terror, when she recalls the day she saw his false teeth slip, looking 'like long yellow tusks like fangs'.⁸³ The memory comes as she reads a letter telling her that her lover wants to break with her, and the image of the fangs links the exploitative and sexually predatory patriarchies of the metropolitan and colonial worlds. That cruelty, hatred and oppression were part of the Caribbean history is made clear. In her delirium at the end of the novel she remembers carnival, still full of colour, movement and music, but menacing, an opportunity to express the resentment the colonials have earned.

George Lamming has said, as Mary Chamberlain reminds us, that 'every Caribbean carries with him the weight of history'. The pressure

of that history pervades Rhys's writing, nowhere more overtly than in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel whose awareness of the painful guilt and intractability of the legacy of colonial infamy is perhaps only paralleled by J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. As Gayatri Spivak has written, in the novel Rhys shows how 'so intimate and personal thing as human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism'.⁸⁴ Spivak's famous essay has provoked much debate: whilst she praised Rhys for her resistance to Charlotte Brontë's deep individualism, like Brathwaite she raises questions about the role of Christophine, declaring that she 'cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native'.⁸⁵ One knows what she means by 'native' of course, but as Peter Hulme has pointed out, Christophine is scarcely one in the strict sense – a woman of African descent born in Martinique and now in the British West Indies.⁸⁶ While Rhys is undoubtedly contesting the English stereotype of the white creole, she does not make Antoinette representative of creole whiteness; on the contrary she is an outsider even to them, though she shares their inheritance of guilt.⁸⁷ Christophine's nativeness is one thing; Antoinette's whiteness another. As the book begins we are told: 'They say when trouble come close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks.'⁸⁸ They are poor; Antoinette's mother is French; they are despised. Because of their poverty they live more closely with black people, share more with them; but because of their whiteness and their position as former slave-owners they can never be accepted by them either. Christophine emerges as the moral authority in the text; the Rochester figure finds her 'judge's voice' echoing accusingly in his head, the French black woman denouncing the English man, a classic Rhys binary.⁸⁹ As Benita Parry has argued, Christophine is an 'articulate antagonist of patriarchal, settler and imperialist law'.⁹⁰ She exposes the injustice that masquerades as legality in the colonial world: 'No more slavery! She had to laugh! Those new ones have Letter of the Law. Same thing. They got magistrates. They got fine. They got jail house and chain gang. They got tread machine to mash up people's feet. New ones worse than old ones.'⁹¹ Sue Thomas has made clear the historical truth of Christophine's accusations in the immediate aftermath of slavery, but her words also resonate more widely as a condemnation of the hypocrisy of the imperial civilising mission. Christophine has to leave, because the Rochester figure can evoke that immoral but powerful letter of the law, but her words deliver the judgement with which the text concurs.⁹²

Wide Sargasso Sea is Rhys's most Caribbean novel, linguistically as well as in subject matter. Rhys blends the different voices, Caribbean

English, French patois, white creole, English into a polyphonic text that draws together the composite strands of Caribbean life. In 1959 Rhys had written sadly to Francis Wyndham that she had 'no country really now', but possibly she began to feel – late in her life – that in completing the novel she had, in her own imagination, re-established her connections to the Caribbean.⁹³ David Plante informs us that she wondered if her Spanish great-grandmother might have been partly black. Yet she was aware that in Dominica she would always be white. She told Allfrey she couldn't go back because of her fear of cockroaches; perhaps it was more fear of being seen as a 'white cockroach'.⁹⁴ Yet if it had not been for her stigmatisation as the always racially-dubious West Indian when she reached England, her insight into the injustices of metropolitan and colonial society might never have been so acute.

Notes

- 1 Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: an unfinished autobiography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981; first published 1979), p. 135.
- 2 Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 50.
- 3 Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969; first published 1934), p. 47.
- 4 Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 85.
- 5 Evelyn O'Callaghan, 'Jumping into the big ups' quarrels', *Wasafiri*, 28 (1998), p. 35.
- 6 Jean Rhys, *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (New York: Books for Libraries, 1970; first published 1927), p. 24.
- 7 Alec Waugh, 'Typical Dominica', in his *The Sugar Islands: a Caribbean travelogue* (London: Cassell, 1958), pp. 284–5.
- 8 Quoted in Elgin W. Mellow, *Jean Rhys: a descriptive and annotated bibliography of works and criticism* (New York: Garland, 1984), p. 31.
- 9 Wally Look Lai, 'The road to Thornfield Hall: an analysis of *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *New Beacon Reviews*, 1 (1968); Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Heinemann, 1970).
- 10 Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: cultural diversity and integration in the Caribbean* (Mona: Savacou Publishing, 1974), p. 38.
- 11 Peter Hulme, 'The place of *Wide Sargasso Sea*', *Wasafiri*, 20 (1994), pp. 5–11.
- 12 Elaine Savory, 'Jean Rhys, race and Caribbean/English/criticism', *Wasafiri*, 28 (1998), p. 33.
- 13 Edward Kamau Brathwaite, 'A post-cautionary tale of the Helen of our wars', *Wasafiri*, 22 (1995), p. 70.
- 14 Braithwaite, 'Post-cautionary tale', pp. 69 and 78.
- 15 Braithwaite, 'Post-cautionary tale', p. 75.
- 16 Braithwaite, 'Post-cautionary tale', p. 70.
- 17 Quoted in Elaine Savory, *Jean Rhys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 23.
- 18 Braithwaite, 'Post-cautionary tale', p. 74.
- 19 Louis James, who wrote the first book on Rhys, *Jean Rhys* (London: Longman, 1979) was one of the first British critics to recognise this. Teresa O'Connor examined the overtly West Indian texts in her book, *Jean Rhys: the West Indian novels* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1986). Since the 1990s most critics have stressed the necessity of reading Rhys's work in the context of her Caribbean roots.
- 20 Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 81. Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, is not identified as West Indian, but when she hears Martiniquan music she thinks of lying in a

- hammock, thinking 'The hills look like clouds and the clouds like fantastic hills': Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969; first published 1939), p. 77.
- 21 C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 28.
 - 22 George Lamming, 'Western education and the Caribbean intellectual', in his *Coming, Coming Home. Conversations II* (St Martin: House of Nehesi, 2000), p. 24.
 - 23 Stuart Hall, 'The formation of a diasporic intellectual', in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: critical dialogues in cultural studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 501.
 - 24 Hall, 'Diasporic intellectual', p. 490.
 - 25 Rhys, *The Left Bank*, p. 231.
 - 26 Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 135.
 - 27 Al Alvarez, 'The best living novelist', *New York Times Review of Books*, 17 March 1974.
 - 28 David Plante, *Difficult Women: a memoir of three* (London: Gollancz, 1983), p. 45.
 - 29 Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Good morning midnight; good night, modernism', *Boundary*, 2:11 (1982–83).
 - 30 Carole Angier, *Jean Rhys* (London: Deutsch, 1990), p. 218.
 - 31 Diana Athill, *Stet: an editor's life* (London: Granta, 2001), pp. 158–61.
 - 32 Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 106.
 - 33 Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 50.
 - 34 Jean Rhys, *Tigers are Better-Looking* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; first published 1968), p. 81.
 - 35 Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 56.
 - 36 Ramchand, *West Indian Novel*, p. 33.
 - 37 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 1996; first published 1847), p. 345; Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 152.
 - 38 Ramchand, *West Indian Novel*, p. 41. 'Coloured', in the West Indian creole sense that Rhys also uses, here means of mixed race. For a powerful sense of the continuing significance of these conventional projections of white Caribbean creoles in the twentieth century, see the important novel by the white Jamaican, Herbert G. de Lisser, *The White Witch of Rosehall* (London: Ernest Benn, 1929).
 - 39 Jean D'Costa, quoted in Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys's Historical Imagination: reading and writing the creole* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 80.
 - 40 For example, Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 88.
 - 41 Rhys, *Left Bank*, p. 24.
 - 42 Rhys, *Tigers are Better-Looking*, p. 84.
 - 43 Savory, *Rhys*, p. 200.
 - 44 Savory, *Rhys*, p. 203.
 - 45 Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 9.
 - 46 See the frequently cited essay by Sander Gilman on the Hottentot and the prostitute, 'Black bodies, white bodies: towards an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine and literature', *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985), pp. 204–42. Both Savory and Gregg discuss Gilman's work in relation to Rhys.
 - 47 Marya in *Quartet*, who has been a chorus girl in the past, is also conscious of her 'limbo' position: 'She learned, after a 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.' Jean Rhys, *Quartet* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973; first published 1928), p. 16.
 - 48 Rhys, *Quartet*, p. 125.
 - 49 Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971; first published 1930), p. 53.
 - 50 Rhys, *After Leaving*, p. 65. Nothing shocked early reviewers more than Rhys's unblinking account of the economics of sex.
 - 51 Mellown, *Jean Rhys*, p. 43.

- 52 Nancy Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
- 53 Rhys, *After Leaving*, p. 81.
- 54 Rhys, *Left Bank*, p. 201.
- 55 Rhys, *Left Bank*, p. 241.
- 56 Rhys, *After Leaving*, p. 18.
- 57 Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 13.
- 58 Jean Rhys, *Tales of the Wide Caribbean* (London: Heinemann, 1985; '*Temps perdu*' first published 1969), p. 159.
- 59 Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 165.
- 60 Quoted Savory, *Rhys*, p. 27.
- 61 Lamming, 'Western education', p. 23.
- 62 See Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Phyllis Shand Allfrey: a Caribbean life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 13.
- 63 Jean Rhys, *Letters, 1931–1966*, ed. Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly (London: Deutsch, 1984), p. 171.
- 64 Sue Thomas, *The Worlding of Jean Rhys* (Westport: Greenwood, 1999), p. 32.
- 65 Paravisini-Gebert, *Allfrey*, p. 48.
- 66 Rhys, *Letters*, p. 281. See Sue Thomas's discussion of Rhys's attitude to the English in Ann Blake, Leela Gandhi and Sue Thomas, *England Through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) and in 'Jean Rhys, "human ants" and the production of expatriate creole identities', in Andrew Benjamin, Tony Davies and Robbie Goh (eds), *Postcolonial Cultures and Literatures: modernity and the (Un)Commonwealth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). My warm thanks to Sue Thomas for sharing her work with me.
- 67 Savory, *Rhys*, p. 32.
- 68 George Lamming, 'Coming, coming, coming home', in his *Coming. Coming Home*, p. 39.
- 69 Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: hybridity in theory, culture and race* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 2–3.
- 70 See the chapter on 'The return of the native: Jean Rhys and the Caribs, 1936', in Peter Hulme, *Remnants of Conquest: the island Caribs and their visitors, 1877–1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) for a discussion of the situation in Dominica at the time of Rhys's 1936 visit.
- 71 Rhys, *Smile Please*, pp. 50 and 53.
- 72 Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 29; Ramchand, *West Indian Novel*, p. 225.
- 73 Rhys, *Smile Please*, p. 31.
- 74 Savory, *Rhys*, p. 30.
- 75 Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 28.
- 76 Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, p. 27.
- 77 Introduction to Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (Harlow: Longman, 1985), p. 3.
- 78 Quoted in Gregg, *Rhys's Historical Imagination*, p. 44.
- 79 Savory, *Rhys*, p. 23.
- 80 See chapter 5 of Thomas, *Worlding of Rhys*.
- 81 Rhys, *Letters*, p. 45.
- 82 Simon Gikandi, 'Race and the modernist aesthetic', in Tim Youngs (ed.), *Writing and Race* (London: Longman, 1997), p. 155.
- 83 Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark*, pp. 54 and 79.
- 84 Gayatri Spivak, 'Three women's texts and a critique of colonialism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985), p. 250.
- 85 Spivak, 'Women's texts', p. 253.
- 86 Peter Hulme, 'The locked heart: the creole family romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea*', in Francis Barker et al. (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 75.
- 87 Hulme makes a similar point in 'The place of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'.
- 88 Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 15.
- 89 Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 126.

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- 90 Benita Parry, 'Problems in current theories of colonial discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1987), p. 38.
- 91 Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, pp. 22–3.
- 92 See Thomas, *Worlding of Rhys*, pp. 167–71.
- 93 Rhys, *Letters*, p. 172.
- 94 Paravisini-Gebert, *Allfrey*, p. 244.